

# SEX ADDICTION

*A Mental Health Educational Series brought to you by:  
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## Description

Sexual addiction is not a formal diagnosis, but rather a term that has become popular because like other behavioral addictions, it shares commonalities with other addictions. Sex addiction is sometimes referred to as sexually compulsive behavior. It can be described as a progressive intimacy disorder characterized by compulsive sexual acts and thoughts. Like other addictions there tends to be a progressive nature to it where people need to increase frequency or quantity to achieve desired results and like other addictions there is an increasing accumulation of consequences. It should also be noted that sex addicts do not necessarily become sex offenders, and not all sex offenders are sex addicts. It is estimated that about 55% of sex offenders can be considered sex addicts. Like chemical addictions can have many outlets (alcohol, marijuana, cocaine, heroin, etc.), sex addiction can occur in many venues such as compulsive masturbation, pornography, anonymous partners, sequential affairs, phone sex, strip clubs, prostitutes, exhibition, voyeurism, molestation or rape to name a few.

## Symptoms & Features

As noted, at this point there is no such diagnosis as sex addiction. The medical community generally will assign a diagnosis of sexual disorder not otherwise specified, which is defined by distress about a pattern of repeated sexual relationships involving a succession of lovers who are experienced by the individual only as things to be used. It can also involve compulsive searching for multiple partners, compulsive masturbation, or compulsive love relationship. Some literature would suggest that if a person identifies three or more of the following criteria they likely have a sexual compulsivity disorder: 1) frequently engaging in more sex and with more partners than intended, 2) mental preoccupation with sex, 3) unsuccessful efforts to cut down or limit sexual activity, 4) spending large amounts of time in activities related to sex, 5) neglects obligations (work, school, family) in the pursuit of sex, 6) continually engaging in sexual behavior despite negative consequences, 7) an increase in frequency, quantity, or time of sexual behavior to achieve desired results, 8) feeling irritable when unable to engage in sexual behavior.

Sex addiction resembles other addictions in that it is progressive, displays similar brain chemistry changes, often have a family history of addiction, and experience consequences in the following areas: social, emotional, physical, legal, spiritual, occupational, and financial. Unlike other addictions, there is a lot of shame associated with sexually compulsive behavior and people are reluctant to talk about it. Research has also found a high percentage of sex addicts have experienced some type of abuse, with sexual abuse being the most common.

## Treatment

Because sex addiction is not a recognized diagnosis and many insurance plans will cover it, there are very few treatment centers available and those that are available are quite expensive. Unlike chemical or gambling addiction, the goal is not abstinence, but the elimination of unhealthy sexual behavior. Often 2-3 months of abstinence is recommended while people are learning the difference between healthy and unhealthy sexual behavior. Many people work with specialized therapists knowledgeable in treating sex addiction. They will learn cognitive behavioral tools to change think around sex and address underlying mental health issues. Due to damage to relationships and violation of trust, relationship therapy is often encouraged as well.

## What Can I Do To Help Myself

If you think you may have a sex addiction consider an assessment by a specialist who performs sexual compulsivity assessments. In addition, you can read about sex addiction and its treatment. You can also check out community resources such Sex Addicts Anonymous (SAA), which is a 12 step based program of social support.