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Is It Sexual Addiction?

You may wonder if you or someone you know has a sexual addiction. You may say something like one of the following—

- I think about sex all the time. Am I a sex addict?
- I just couldn't stop myself from having an affair.
- Anytime I see a massage parlor, I have to stop in for sex.
- I spend a lot of time in strip clubs.
- I spend a lot of time looking for one-night stands.
- I look at pornography online. Am I addicted to pornography?
- I spend a lot of time in chat rooms, looking for online sex.
- I masturbate six times a day. It hurts and I'd like to stop but I can't.
- I engage in dangerous sexual activities like unprotected sex with strangers or peeping in windows.
- I worry about sex a lot.
- I want sex much more than my partner.

If any of these seem to fit, you may fall into one of these categories—

- Sexual Obsession
- Sexual Obsession/Compulsion
- Sexual Addiction

• Healthy Sexuality

Let's consider each one of these in turn.

Sexual Obsession

A person with a sexual obsession may find themselves having unpleasant thoughts about sex frequently and repeatedly. These thoughts are unwanted, intrusive and disturbing. The intrusive thoughts involve acts that you find repugnant, distasteful or worrisome. You may never have acted on these thoughts and in fact you may know that the thoughts are unrealistic, but the thoughts intrude anyway. Examples include—

- Rape, child abuse or bestiality
- Getting someone pregnant by shaking their hand
- Fear that your partner is unfaithful, despite evidence to the contrary
- Extreme and unreasonable fear that you are homosexual (beyond normal coming out concerns)
- Extreme fear of AIDS
- Profane thoughts combining religion and sex
- Any other disturbing and unwanted thoughts involving sex



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Even though you do not want these thoughts, the thoughts intrude anyway. In common speech someone might say that if you think about sex all the time you are "obsessed with sex." But if you are experiencing pleasurable thoughts and fantasies about sex, these do not fit the definition of a sexual obsession. With a sexual obsession, the intrusive sexual thoughts are not experienced as pleasant.

A person with a sexual obsession is generally under a great deal of stress and distress. They may find it difficult to enjoy a normal life with healthy sexuality, due to the intrusive thoughts.

Sexual Obsession/Compulsion

A person with a sexual compulsion may attempt to deflect their unwanted thoughts through a repetitive behavior such as—

- Not looking at women or men
- Avoiding locker rooms, showers, and beaches
- Not hugging children or avoiding friends with children
- Excessive washing of the genitals
- Repeating certain thoughts a certain number of times to ward off the "bad" thoughts
- Ritualistic and rigid patterns of behavior, such as always, without exception, eat dinner, then get on the

computer, download pornography and masturbate

Sexual compulsions can cause physical harm, health issues, relationship issues, financial problems and legal problems. Most people with a sexual compulsion want to stop but feel they cannot or must not.

Sexual Addiction

Originally, addiction was used in medicine to refer to a condition where over time a patient needed more and more of a drug in order to get the same effect (tolerance) and would suffer physical symptoms if they quit taking the drug (withdrawal). Recently, people have begun to realize that engaging in some activities can have some of the same characteristics that a drug addiction does, both in terms of tolerance, withdrawal and some of the secondary characteristics of addiction. Some of the characteristics of a sexual addiction are—

- Need more and more sex
- Need more and more kinds of sex
- Unable to tolerate not having sex
- Unable to stop despite having tried
- Think about sex all the time—planning how to obtain sex, reminiscing about past sex, fantasizing about future sex
- Commit illegal or dangerous acts to obtain sex



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- Spend large sums of money that you cannot afford on sex
- Unable to pass up a possible opportunity for sex

Sexual addictions can cause all the same problems as a sexual compulsion including physical harm, health issues, relationship issues, financial problems and legal problems. A person with a sexual addiction may or may not see themselves as having a problem.

Healthy Sexuality

If you have a sexual obsession, a sexual compulsion or a sexual addiction, a good goal is to modify the way you think and act so that you have a healthy sexuality. Here are some of the characteristics of healthy sexuality—

- You enjoy your sex life
- Sex does not cause you physical, health, relationship, financial or legal harm

- You are comfortable with your sexual practices, sexual orientation and gender identity
- It is healthy to be concerned with some aspects of sexuality, as long as such concerns are reasonable and appropriate—
 - It is healthy to have a reasonable concern about catching a sexually transmitted disease
 - Healthy people occasionally have thoughts about sexual practices that they do not want to act on
 - Healthy people may occasionally wonder if their partner is faithful or is right for them

Summary

Not everyone that is concerned about their sexual practices is a sex addict. However, if your sexual practices or your thoughts about sex are causing you distress, then you may want to seek out a professional who can guide you back onto the path to healthy sexuality.

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The original of this article can be found online at
<http://deerval.com/Articles/IsItSexualAddiction.htm>.

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