

How can I tell if I'm addicted to Pornography?

Bill Perkins, text excerpted from his book
When Good Men are Tempted.

How to Know If You're Hooked

It's important to understand that sexual addictions don't happen overnight. They take time to develop. But when they're full-blown, a man won't be able to resist the repeated urge to enter into a love relationship with a sexual object or experience that gives him pleasure and the illusion of intimacy.

That last sentence defines an addict:

1. He's hooked and can't say no.
2. The object of his addiction gives him two things: pleasure and an illusion of intimacy.

Not everyone who struggles with sexual compulsions is an addict. Some men abuse their sexuality for a period of time and then grow out of it. Many men with a regrettable sexual experience in the past put it behind them and move on.

But not everyone is so fortunate. Some men block emotional pain with sexual pleasure. Over time they have to try increasingly risky forms of sexual behavior in order to deaden the pain. Eventually their world revolves around sex. Their obsession has taken over their life.

The Sexual Addiction Test

Patrick Carnes suggests a series of four questions aimed at helping us discover if we have a sexual addiction and if so, how far it's progressed. While asking yourself these questions, it's crucial that you are brutally honest. The first step in dealing with a problem is admitting we have one.

ONE - Is Your Behavior Secret?

Are you doing things you refuse to tell others about? Do you feel that if those closest to you knew what you were doing, they would reject you or strongly disapprove of your actions? Are you telling lies to cover your behavior? If so, you're isolating yourself from those you love and entering into a potentially addictive relationship with an object or event.

TWO - Is Your Behavior Abusive?

Does your sexual behavior create pain (emotional or physical) for you or others? Is it degrading or exploitative of others? Do you find yourself performing increasingly abusive acts? Do you derive pleasure from watching others being abused in some way?

THREE - Is Your Behavior Used to Deaden Painful Feelings?

Are your sexual actions an effort to change your mood rather than express affections? Do you masturbate or search for some other sexual outlet when you're depressed, bored, or angry? If your sexual behavior is used to erase pain, it's part of an addictive process.

FOUR - Is Your Behavior Empty of Genuine Commitment and Caring?

Are you substituting the illusion of intimacy provided by an object or event for the genuine intimacy found in a healthy relationship? If you answered yes to even one of the four questions, your sexual behavior is either compulsive or addictive.

Addictive Stages

While the four questions help determine if we have a problem, they don't tell us the extent of the problem. In order to determine that, we need to familiarize ourselves with the levels of addictions.

Pre-addiction

Pre-addiction describes people who begin to find themselves sexually stimulated through impersonal objects, like pornography, or events, like strip clubs.

If you're at this level, your life is probably under control. You're holding down a job, and your relationship with your wife or girlfriend is intact. However, you realize that while your fascination with pornography, strip shows, or erotic talk lines isn't compulsive, it is dangerous. You may be troubled by the feeling that your slumbering lust could awaken and take over at any moment.

Level 1

At level 1 a man's lust has begun to exert its control. He's compulsively involved in such things as masturbation, pornography, homosexuality, or demeaning heterosexual relationships.

When a man reaches level 1, something significant has happened. While before he always struggled to keep his lust under control, now it's running wild. In his book *The Addictive Personality*, Craig Nakken notes that the single most important aspect of level 1 addictions is the emergence of the addictive personality. A man's lust, like a great dragon, has awakened from its slumber and threatens to take over his life.

I experienced this the night I looked through my neighbor's window. It reminded me of the first time I got high on marijuana. I entered a new world and wanted to return to that world. There's something about that first high that people want to recreate. Similarly, a man who enters level 1 awakens his lust in a powerful way. And that initial experience is one he wants to recreate. When we enter level 1, the addictive part of our personality has been stirred. And make no mistake about it; the beast has an insatiable appetite that can slowly take over our life.

Level 2

When a man reaches level 2, he's taken a bigger and more dangerous step. Now his behavior involves victims and violations of the law. His activities include prostitution, exhibitionism, voyeurism, obscene phone calls, and touching a person intimately without consent. Most of the time he's considered more of a nuisance than a criminal, but unfortunately his behavior can inflict deep emotional pain on his victims.

Men who are exhibitionists or voyeurs will carry out their secret behavior for years. Living double lives, they're in constant fear of being caught. All kinds of "good" people reach level 2. Hardly a week passes without a news story about a politician, teacher, or Hollywood star picking up a prostitute or making an unwanted sexual advance.

Level 3

By the time a man reaches level 3, his behavior involves serious crimes in which severe damage is done to the victim. Rape, incest, and child molestation occur at this level.

The Moment of Truth

By now you should know if you're hooked. You should also have a feel for how far your sexual compulsion has progressed. While most of us would prefer avoiding the truth for as long as we can, eventually the moment of truth will arrive. Something will happen to force you to admit that your life is out of control.

- You'll accidentally leave a pornographic image on your computer monitor, and someone at work will report it to your boss.
- One of your kids will find your stash of X-rated videos.
- A policeman will arrive at your place of work because a neighbor has identified you as a Peeping Tom.
- Your wife will leave because you've had another affair.
- The school counselor will call because you've been reported to the child care agency for improperly touching a neighbor child.

For Samson, the moment of truth arrived near the end of his life. Blinded by lust, he slept in Delilah's lap while a Philistine barber cut his hair. A moment after the last strand fell, his enemies burst into his presence. Isolated from God, he was powerless to resist. Israel's champion became a bald-headed clown who entertained the Philistines. Samson had fallen. He would never gaze at another Philistine woman. His enemies had made sure of that when they gouged out his eyes (Judges 16:20-21).

Many people believe that Samson's story ends on a tragic note. I don't. Although he was blind and imprisoned, his hair began to grow, and so did his relationship with God. The Lord forgave Samson and used him one last time. The hero of Judah pulled down a Philistine temple, destroying himself and his enemies. Samson learned firsthand what every man must know. God is the God of a second and third and fourth chance. He never gives up on us.

References

1. Patrick Carnes, *Out of the Shadows*, (Minneapolis: CompCare, 1983).
2. Craig Nakken, *The Addictive Personality* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988).