



## Addicted to Sex

### **What is a Sex Addict?**

Sex addiction is defined as a lack of control over sexual thoughts, urges, and impulses. While sexual impulses are natural, sex addiction only refers to behaviours that are done in excess and significantly impact one's life in a negative way.

Although sex addiction isn't listed as a diagnosable condition in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5), research indicates that excess sexual behaviour can develop, like a chemical addiction.

A person with sex addiction may have a compulsive need to be sexually stimulated. This desire often interferes with their ability to live their daily life. Sexual addictions can come in many different forms, including addiction to:

- Sexual acts
- Prostitution
- Watching or consuming pornography
- Masturbation or sexual fantasy
- Exhibition or voyeurism

Sex addicts may alter their activities to perform sexual acts persistently, unable to control their behaviour despite any consequences.

This compulsive sexual behaviour can have serious personal consequences. Like drug or alcohol addiction, sex addiction can impact physical health, mental health, personal relationships, and quality of life.

### **Signs of a Sex Addict**

Sexual addiction can manifest itself in many different ways, both physical and emotional. It takes a healthcare professional to make a clear diagnosis, but here are some signs that can point to a potential sex addiction:

#### **Obsessive Sexual Thoughts**

Someone dealing with sex addiction may find themselves thinking persistently about sex. These chronic thoughts of sex or sexual fantasies may become obsessive or interfere with other responsibilities.

#### **Spending Excessive Time on Sex**

While seeking out sexual partners isn't necessarily a sign of sexual addiction, if someone is spending excessive amounts of time and energy on sex, it might be a red flag. This can include



spending time attempting to acquire sex, having sex, being sexual, or recovering from sexual experiences.

### **Feeling Shame or Depression**

If a need for sex crosses over into an addiction, someone's sexual feelings might also be interspersed with feelings of anxiety, shame, depression, or regret. The individual may feel shame about their sexual urges and their difficulty controlling those urges.

They may even show signs of clinical depression or suicide ideation. Research shows that it isn't uncommon for people who are sexually compulsive to also show signs of depression, anxiety, and social anxiety. One study found that, among sexually compulsive men, 28% showed signs of depression, compared to 12% of the general population.

### **Excluding Other Activities**

A sex addict may fixate on sex to the point where they have difficulty engaging in their other activities. They may fall behind on responsibilities in school, work, or their personal lives or become socially withdrawn. They may also prioritize sexual behaviour over other forms of relaxation or hobbies. Relationships with friends, families, and partners may suffer because of this.

### **Masturbating Excessively**

While masturbation can be a healthy way to explore sexuality and express sexual drive, excessive masturbation can be a sign of sexual addiction. This might look like compulsive masturbation, masturbation during inappropriate times, or even masturbation to the point of causing physical discomfort or pain.

### **Engaging in Risky or Inappropriate Behaviours**

In some cases, sexual addiction can lead to inappropriate and/or risky sexual behaviours. This can include exhibitionism, public sex, sex without protection, and sex with prostitutes.

In some cases, this can lead someone to develop sexually transmitted diseases. Studies have shown that those who identify as sexually compulsive are more likely to develop sexually transmitted diseases like HIV.

### **Cheating on Partners**

Someone with a sexual addiction may feel compelled to seek out sex with new partners, even if this means cheating on a partner or having an extramarital affair. They may seek out one-night stands on a regular basis or even cheat multiple times with different partners.



### **Committing Criminal Sex Offenses**

In some extreme cases, people may engage in criminal activities like stalking, rape, or child molestation. While some sexual offenders may also be sex addicts, there is no evidence that sexual addiction can lead someone to commit sexual offenses.

### **Treating Sexual Addiction**

Can a sex addict change? Yes, although it may require treatment from a medical professional like a psychologist, psychiatrist, or sex therapist.

Depending on the underlying cause and how it manifests in someone's personal life, treatment may vary. If the sex addiction presents alongside another underlying anxiety disorder or mood disorder, the treatment plan may also include medications.