

What to Do if You're Addicted to Porn:

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What does porn addiction look like? How does the cycle of addiction get started? And what are some things we can do to break the cycle? What are some books I can read? Where can I go for professional help?

Over the years, I've been asked this question countless times. Most of the people who ask me feel like they're all alone in their struggle. But one study revealed that close 88% of men struggle (or have struggled) with pornography at one point or another. So, in some ways, it's a common experience for people.

Of course women struggle with pornography too. According to Covenanteyes.com, 18% of women use the internet for sexual purposes every week. And this number is starting to rise. Obviously, women approach porn and use it differently than men. For women, porn has a much stronger *relational component* rather than visual component.

Remember, porn is a *chemical addiction* as much as it's an emotional addiction. In men, orgasms have a narcotic-like effect. Men who are accustomed to frequent masturbation tend to get addicted to the "mood altering" effect – much like drugs or cigarettes. Anyone who's gone through a full journey of withdrawal knows that there will be a few torturous nights where your physiological cravings may feel excruciating. But, this too, will pass.

Once you employ a few of the coping mechanisms below, you'll find that your power to overcome these emotions will grow stronger and stronger. There will come a day when your self-denial muscles and boundaries will be so strong that resisting temptation feels quite easy. Of course, most of you are reading this because you've found the process of resisting to be excruciating. Perhaps you're failing on a weekly or even daily basis — and you're sick of the shame. But, rest assured: God's not done with you yet!

Why Doesn't God Simply Take this Desire from Me?

Many people have asked God during these moments: *Why can't you just take this desire away from me?* Part of it is because, God wants you to explore a few deeper questions like: *What is this sin your answer to? What pain are you medicating with this behavior? Or, what are some of your lifestyle decisions that could be contributing to this dependency? Or, What alternatives does the Bible offer you instead of this sin?*

In other words, God loves to use the addiction-recovery process to speak to us. He longs to give us profound insights that will bring us long-term joy. Unfortunately, we will never grasp this wisdom if he simply zaps our desires away. But if we listen close, he can speed this process up and make it refreshing (Acts 3:19).

Research has shown pornography to have many terrible side effects: People who use Porn have: significantly higher odds of depression, violence, sexual discontentment, eating disorders, anger, and dissatisfaction with partners. Even worse, research shows that Porn affects our spouses and kids far more than people think. If a woman marries a porn addict, her odds of depression increase by 43%! Her odds of having an eating disorder increases by 22%. And, women who marry an addict generally experience a 40% reduction in self-esteem! Even worse, 20% of internet porn comes from coerced or trafficked children. So the collateral damage of porn is much higher than we think. (For those of you who'd like to see the citations on these stats, see the handout attached to the end of this document). Also see the following link for more citations: <http://www.peterhaas.org/?p=1476>

The Three Ingredients of Addiction

Most people falsely think that pornography is simply pictures or videos of naked people. But it's far more than that: Porn is *any image or sensory stimulation that we use to fuel sexual fantasies*. I.e., a picture on facebook could be used as porn, if we use it to fuel fantasy. A PG-13 movie or romance novel can be porn if we use it to create fantasy. An addiction to lust is fueled by three things: (1). Porn; (2). Fantasy; (3). Masturbation. These three ingredients create a cycle that slowly escalates our addiction with time. For example: In order to have "fantasy" you need imagery to stimulate you. Thus, you look at porn in order to "burn an image" into your brain. Once you have a fresh image, you fantasize. And then, in order to climax your fantasy, you need masturbation. When you eliminate one of these three, it's harder for your addiction to escalate. You're simply missing the critical ingredients. That's why it's important to eliminate all three from your life.

Over the years, people have asked me: "*Is masturbation technically wrong according to scripture?*" Jesus put it this way: **Mt.5:28** "*Anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.*" I.e, Jesus said, if we lust after people we aren't married to, we've already defiled ourselves with the sin – even though we haven't fully "acted it out." As James 1:15 puts it, "*after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full grown, gives birth to death.*" I.e., There is a process of sin that begins by dwelling on certain thoughts and fantasies. Every time "desire is conceived" it's like planting a seed of sin in the ground. The devil will be sure to water that seed until it sprouts out of the ground and ruins your marriage and career. Little seeds of sin can still create a tall crop.

It has been argued that, if a person masturbates and thinks of their spouse, they aren't technically having adulterous thoughts. Thus, in this scenario, masturbation might technically be "O.k." However, here's a question to ponder: "Is the spouse of your fantasies exactly like the spouse of your reality? For eg., Does your fantasy include sin? Are you pretending that your wife is another man's spouse? In your fantasy, does she dress the same as your real wife, talk the same, and look as fit? Or, is she just another fantasy woman that was inspired by lust? If so, you're still creating a contrast that makes your true wife more disappointing. Perhaps a better route would be to talk with your wife about making your *reality* better than your *fantasy*. And if you can't, you've just discovered your ultimate problem. And the good news is this: You can fix that!

However, my point is this: Although thinking about your spouse is better than looking at porn, it's still not healthy. Your mind is bound to walk down paths of lust rather than life. And stopping your cycle of addiction will always feel like you're trying to stop a car from rolling down a hill – you'll chronically lack the power.

Besides: Self-sex tends to short-circuit *real intimacy*. People who chronically masturbate usually avoid having the tough conversations with their *real spouse* that would result in truly fulfilling sex. Even more, sex is intended to be a selfless gift – not some self-centered lust-fest. And the joy of this experience simply cannot be created through self-sex. Indeed, it's easy to allow "self-centered mood alteration" to become the central drive of your sexuality. People become mere tools for your selfish fulfillment. And quite simply: God has far more for you.

So How Do I Start Dealing With this Addiction?

Allow me to give you five ideas that will help you. Some of these weapons will give you a significant advantage in overcoming lust. Many of you feel hopeless because, you've tried to quit before, and failed. But many of you have quit because you simply didn't have a full arsenal of weapons – nor did you use them long enough to win the war.

STEP ONE: Find a Righteous Person & Confess: James 5:16 says, "*Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.*" Many of us lack healing because we've never actually obeyed the Bible. Healing

is preceded by confession of sin (to another righteous human being) and prayer. It seems scary. And if you're considering sharing such a confession with a big-mouth or another legalistic Christian, then you probably *should be* scared. There are a lot of Christians who aren't worthy or mature enough to handle your confession. But it's critical! The mere process of confessing your temptations can cut sin's power in half!

Some of you aren't quite comfortable sharing your addiction with your spouse quite yet. And for some of you, that might be wise. Although your spouse must inevitably find out, many spouses will feel like your transgressions are an earth-shattering betrayal. So, it might be wise to consult a friend on how and when to involve your spouse. But in the meantime, you've got to tell someone, or else the Biblical healing process won't start.

STEP TWO: Create an Accountability Group:

Some of you have an addiction that is intense enough (& dangerous enough) where you need professional help. If you are actually having physical sex with other people (who could have diseases), you probably need to seek professional counseling or a formal addiction-recovery group for sex. Either way, an accountability group can be an effective positive step.

There's a lot of people who are fighting the same battle. If you know a few, ask them if they'd want to form an accountability group (or, as we call them at our church, a "S.P.A.C.E." group). (See my blog on how to create such a group here: <http://www.peterhaas.org/?p=1415> Obviously, this commitment might mean different things to different people. So it's important that you ease into such a group slowly. (In fact, here are a few tips on how to form an [accountability group](#)). Keep in mind, you'll need to include someone who's actually experiencing victory in this area to help coach the rest of you.

But, one of the number one ways to overcome addiction is simply to meet regularly with other people and encourage one another. Many years ago, I'd get together with two other guys. Every week, we'd confess our sins (or mere temptations) and we'd pray for grace. Even more, we'd read books, watch sermon podcasts and encourage each other. At the time all of us had pretty deep sin-struggles, so we made it a goal to meet (at least) once a week and call each other two to three other times a week – to remind each other of our commitment to purity.

After 2 years of this, most of us had sufficiently overcome our addictions and we turned the group into a Bible study and/or exercise group. I.e., the purpose shifted with time to other areas where we needed accountability.

But for most of us: The power of weekly fellowship was a massive step in overcoming our issues. Even to this day, I still have men who check in on me regularly. But up front, it's critical to have a consistent accountability group.

STEP THREE: Read a Book on it with your group:

There are dozens of great books on overcoming porn addiction. Two of my all time favorites (for men) are both by Dr. Douglass Weiss: "[Clean: a Proven Plan for Men committed to sexual integrity](#)" and "Sex, Men and God." – The former book is a great "general overview" of sexual purity for men. The latter deals more specifically with the neurochemistry of porn and masturbation. Both of them have had a profound impact on my understanding of addiction. His website has many more booklets and resources that are incredible: www.drdougweiss.com. Some *other classics* are "[Everyman's Battle](#)" by Stephan Arterburn. He's written [dozens of books](#) on addiction aimed at various other demographics too: young women, young men, married couples, etc.

As for the ladies, there are also many resources. Check out <https://beggarsdaughter.com> or <https://dirtygirlsministries.com> – as both cite dozens of books. <http://www.drdougweiss.com> has resources for [ladies who are addicted](#) at his website as well.

For teenagers, you can utilize the above resources as well; but, check out <https://www.drdougweiss.com/intensives/teen-intensive/> for additional opportunities.

STEP FOUR: Get an Assortment of Apps & Software Weapons:

Ultimately, I don't believe a person can stay sexually pure unless they have high standards for movies, books, music and internet use. As the psalmist said: "*I will set before my eyes no vile thing. The deeds of faithless men I hate; they will not cling to me.*" Psm 101:3. I.e., If we view sinful things, it will "cling" to us more. But the reverse is true when we use discernment. Thankfully, there are various smart-phone apps and porn blockers that can give us an advantage.

For example, I almost never watch movies until I've checked out movie review apps like Focus on the Family's "[PluggedIn](#)" or Common Sense Media's "On" app for "Kids Media" or "Media by Age." Both of these apps usually outline all of the sexual scenes and language in a movie. I have spared my brain from all sorts of terrible images by simply using these apps. Many times, my friends will happily recommend some of the worst movies. (Unfortunately, there are good people who have very low standards). Thankfully, I was able to pre-empt these seeds of lust before they got planted in my lawn.

Another approach to this is subscribing to VidAngel services. For a monthly fee, they can literally edit movies and tv shows on the fly – removing nudity, violence and swear words per your settings! Honestly, it's quite impressive stuff. But, the cost is worth it for families who watch a lot of tv. (See www.VidAngel.com)

Another phone app that I encourage people to use is the RecoveryBox App. It's basically a "shared calendar" app that accountability groups can use to check in on one another. It also helps you to identify your "triggers" – I.e, Were you hungry, angry, or lonely when you messed up? And, if you so choose, your calendar can show up on other selected people's phones. I.e., They can track your daily success without even needing a phone call. And if you need to set recovery goals or journal, the app has these features built right into the app!

Lastly, it's important that people set rules for their internet use. We force all of our kids to plug in their phones & ipads in a public location (outside of their bedrooms) after a certain time. Many families keep their main computer in a public room of the house (where no one in their right mind would use porn). Also, you can set "safe-search" restrictions on your internet browsers – which helps a little.

Truth is, I've yet to find software that effectively filters internet porn. (And if you know about something that actually works, please email me: peter@substancechurch.com). Almost everything I've tried also makes it impossible to even browse the internet. And even then, there's always a way to find porn hidden in places an internet filter can't go... like social media, youtube, etc. (also note that <http://www.drdougweiss.com> has more on this too).

In the end, it's impossible to completely shelter yourself from this porn epidemic. But if you reduce your intake, you'll definitely find it easier to flex the self-denial muscle. If your brain is already 70% filled with bad images, it only takes a single sexy advertisement to push you over. But if you live a lifestyle of purity, you'll find it easy to shake these things off. That's the goal of these technologies – to give you an advantage over temptation.

STEP FIVE: If you're married, Enlist your spouse, carefully. (If not married, see Step Six)

Over the years I've watched hundreds of people confess their porn / sex addictions to their spouses – resulting in many different responses. Some are gracious and sober. Other have screamed their way out of the room and never look back.

Remember, this confession can elicit varying degrees of pain and betrayal. Obviously, if your confession discloses a literal affair, you can understand why it will create a grieving process that might take years to heal. (See www.drdougweiss.com for books on "spouses")

Either way, at some point or another, you need to have your spouse become an ally in your sobriety process. After all, because of their frequency with you, they can become your greatest accountability partner.

In his book, *Intimacy*, Dr. Douglass Weiss unpacks the idea of "scheduling love-making with regular frequency." I realize that the idea may sound strange at first, but it can make a massive difference in overcoming temptation. Here's why.

Imagine you're crossing a desert with no water. You may die if there isn't a water source nearby. So as you travel, this is going to add a tremendous amount of stress. However, if you know that there's an oasis right around the corner, it changes everything. A similar principle applies when it comes to porn and masturbation.

If you know that you're guaranteed to "get lucky" with your spouse in the next 2 days, it takes the edge off of temptation. Amidst a world that constantly sells "sex" it's easy to feel accosted by temptation. This is why many couples "schedule sex."

Allow me to give you an example: The average couple has sex 2-3 times a week. Let's say, you fit well into this average and you agree to prioritize your love life with this same amount of frequency. But who initiates? Many couples tend to spat over this topic anyway (as one person often does most of the initiating... and hates it.) So, here is a possible solution: Sunday through Tues, it's the wife's responsibility to initiate; Wednesday is a "free day" (anyone can initiate); and Thursday through Saturday it's the husband's time to initiate. Either way, you're guaranteed to enjoy loving sex at least twice a week (and if you're really excited, a bonus on Wed!)

At first, the idea seemed awkward. I wondered if sex would become obligatory. But unless you're having a terrible time trying to enjoy sex, this won't be a problem for most people :) Such a system can go a *long way* in helping spouses resist temptation. It enables people to avoid the stressful feeling of a "sexual famine" that often causes people to give into porn.

STEP SIX: If You're Single, Create Extra Escape Plans:

Over the years, I've heard numerous single people lament that, "*People who are married have it easier when it comes to avoiding porn. After all, they have access to sex.*" However, this isn't necessarily true because, *lust is not a circumstantial problem. Rather it's a spiritual problem.*

When single porn addicts finally get married, many of them are shocked to discover that they actually struggle with porn and masturbation even *more*. I.e., Access to sex doesn't *decrease* the temptations of lust. "How could this be?" you ask? Once again: *lust is not a circumstantial problem. Rather it's a spiritual problem.*

Remember, marriage will not change your character; rather, it amplifies and reveals your character. If you struggle with lust before you're married, you are certain to still struggle with it later.

In fact, quite often, it's even *more difficult* to deal with lust later. Most spouses feel that "porn viewing" is a sign of rejection – that they're not good enough – which is why women who marry porn addicts generally go through a 40% reduction in self-esteem (& 22% greater odds of acquiring an eating disorder). Indeed, most people hide their porn viewing – which causes spouses to wonder: *what else are you hiding?* Trust is a difficult thing to build and repair later on. So it's important to deal with your addictions now.

As a single person, you may need to create a few extra boundaries: For example, as a single person, I couldn't handle watching ANY romance or action movies with ANYTHING lusty in it. My standards had to be doubly high in order to keep my thoughts pure. I even went four years without watching any television – which seems extreme; however, it dramatically helped me live free of lust. So be willing to do whatever it takes to be free. It's worth it.

There were certain people of the opposite sex that I had to create extra boundaries around. My friends and I would hold each other accountable for flirting (which is the artform of showing people that we like them – yet keeping it "deniable.") Thus, if we ever felt an "undercurrent of attraction" to someone that we had no interest in dating, we'd tell our accountability group – who in turn would be sure to keep a watchful eye.

It's also important to note that people are waiting longer and longer before they get married. I heard a recent report saying that the average person waits until 28-29 years old before taking the plunge.

If this is true, it's no wonder why people have a lust problem: They're waiting way too long. They're building careers when they should be considering families. Remember, you'll have the rest of your life to build a career. Besides, the more sexual experiences you have outside of marriage, the lower your sexual satisfaction will be. That's just a statistical fact (see more research on this at <http://www.peterhaas.org/?p=1476>)

"*But I want to be married!*" you say. If so, keep working on your character and keep your standards high; God will bring the perfect person along.

On a side-note (towards the single guys) Stop being so doggone picky about choosing a wife: It's O.K. to be a little scared about getting married. It's a big commitment. But don't allow idolatrous idealism to sabotage you.

I regularly meet a lot of guys who are dating beautiful Christian women, yet they're all "commitment shy." At some point, you're going to have to realize: Only God can fulfill you. There is no woman who can do this.

In the end, you're not looking for a body or captivating personality – you're looking for a godly co-adventurer, a best friend who can pursue God's dream with you. Of course, I'm not suggesting that you marry someone you're not even remotely attracted to. But no human can captivate you forever (which is why gorgeous hollywood actors constantly divorce one another.) Remember, she isn't the "adventure" – GOD is the adventure. She's just the co-adventurer.

In the end: Get some advice from happily married men as to what you should be looking for. And equally important, deal with your lust issues asap. Besides, why would God entrust you with his daughter when he knows full well how you'll treat her? Quite simply, he won't. And trust me: You do not want the girl that the devil has in store for you!

Now, before this turns into a dating essay (instead of an essay on porn addiction), I'd like to refer you to my 3 part blog series called "[Dating without Dying](http://www.peterhaas.org/?p=1141)" linked here:

<http://www.peterhaas.org/?p=1141>

But let's face, for many people, it's their lust problem that's causing them to balk at a perfectly good relationship – and sometimes it's the very reason why people are balking at *you*. Nobody wants to marry a person with baggage (unless they've got a ton themselves).

So, in the meantime, deal your porn addiction now. It could be the very reason why you're *not* married. Once again, God is not going to entrust his son or daughter to you if you have no intension of treating their bodies and souls with dignity and respect.

If you're interested in more resources for getting free of porn (or you'd like to take an addiction test), visit the following sites: <http://xxxchurch.com/>

Where Can I Go for Professional Help?

Many of you, as you read through this information, may realize that you might want a little formal help. There are many great Christian counseling firms that we'd be happy to refer you too.

Here are a few local places in the Twin Cities you can contact. They can help you find the right help whether you're seeking simple marriage enrichment or recovery from pornography:

<http://www.faithfulandtrue.com>

There are also many workshops, conferences, and [intensives](#) for those who struggle with pornography and/or sex addiction, both locally, online, and around the U.S.

If you're looking for local, check out Mark Lazaar at <http://www.faithfulandtrue.com>

He has "[couples intensives](#)" + intensives that are exclusively for [Men](#) and exclusively for [Women](#)

If you're willing to fly to Colorado Springs, Co., you can participate in an "[Intensive](#)" 3-5 day counseling

experience (usually 3 private sessions/day with spouse). They offer intensives for teenagers as well.

More therapy options can be found at: <http://www.x3pure.com/mens-workshop.html>

Also check out:

THE STATISTICAL EFFECTS OF PORNOGRAPHY:

The porn industry is one of the most powerful on earth. With an annual profit of over \$13 billion each year, it's almost double the profit of all Hollywood film companies put together,ⁱ and grosses more revenue than the Nfl Football League, Major League Baseball and NBA sports put together.ⁱⁱ An industry this large obviously wants us to believe that porn is a "victimless indulgence." Unfortunately, the research tells a different story:

- **Porn Creates Discontentment:** "Men who use porn report decreased sexual interest in their girlfriends or wives.ⁱⁱⁱ " Premarital sex has long been known to increase sexual dissatisfaction,^{iv} but merely imagining extra-marital sex has a similar effect. 75% of married porn addicts will virtually stop having sex with their spouses.^v
- **Porn is Connected to Depression:** Aside from the discontentment mentioned above, being married to a porn viewer doubles your odds of depression. One study found a 43% increased likelihood of depression for people married to porn addicts.^{vi}
- **Porn increases "Rape-Emotions"** - Men who use porn report "*decreased empathy for rape victims as well as higher levels of anger at women who flirt but then refuse to have sex.*" In addition, Men who use porn report "*increased interest in coercing partners into unwanted sex acts.*"^{vii} In 2014, UNICEF reported that rapes have increased to record numbers.^{viii} 18.3% of American women have already been raped^{ix} -- which shouldn't surprise us when the U.S. is one of the world's top porn producers.^x
- **Porn Creates Aggressive Tendencies and Violence:** According to StopPornCulture.org, 88.2% of "top rated" porn scenes contain aggressive acts: (E.g., Over 41.1% of top rated porn scenes contain open-hand slapping.) Less than 9.9% of the top selling scenes analyzed contained behaviors such as kissing, laughing, caressing, or verbal compliments.^{xi} Thus, men who use porn are more likely to believe that "*a woman who dresses provocatively deserves to be raped.*"^{xii}
- **Porn Lowers Self-Esteem and Creates Eating Disorders:** Women generally experience a forty-percent reduction in self-esteem after marrying a man who views porn.^{xiii} Interestingly, if your spouse views porn, you are twenty-two percent more likely to have a food addiction or eating disorder.

For More Research: See **PeterHaas.org** blog: "*50 Shades of Truth*"

ⁱ 13,000 adult videos are produced annually, amassing over \$13 billion dollars in profit. By comparison, Hollywood released 507 movies and made only 8.8 billion (Bridges and Wosnitzer, 2007).

ⁱⁱ The Porn industry also has larger revenues than the top technology companies (Microsoft, Google, Amazon, eBay, Yahoo, Apple and Netflix) combined (IFR, 2006). If we added the revenues of porn in China, S.Korea, Japan, & US, it would equal 86.4 billion/year! (As quoted from Dr. Douglass Weiss, PhD., Clean: A Proven Plan for Men Committed to Sexual Integrity: Thomas Nelson, 2013; (pg. 7).

ⁱⁱⁱ See Bridges, A., & Wosnitzer, R. (2007). Aggression and sexual behavior in best-selling pornography: A content analysis update. *International Communication Association*.

^{iv} See Linda J. Waite & Maggie Gallagher's book, "Talk" (Oct.2000), p.155

^v See Marriage and Religious Institute - downloads.frc.org/EF/EF13G48.pptx

^{vi} Douglass Weiss, *Partners: Healing from His Addiction* (Discovery Press, 2011).

^{vii} See Bridges, A., & Wosnitzer, R. (2007). Aggression and sexual behavior in best-selling pornography: A content analysis update. *International Communication Association*.

^{viii} There's an unprecedented 120 million girls who've been sexually abused or raped before age twenty - As reported by news anchor, Mike Embley, BBC World News, interviewing Susan Bissell – Global Head of UNICEF; September 4th, 2014.

^{ix} As reported in a 2012 Center For Disease Control study – linked here: <http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/sv-datasheet-a.pdf>

^x The United States is the top producer of pornographic dvds and web material; the second largest is Germany: they each produce in excess of 400 porn films for dvd every week – according to www.StopPornCulture.org (<http://stoppornculture.org/about/about-the-issue/facts-and-figures-2/>)

^{xi} Bridges, A., & Wosnitzer, R. (2007). Aggression and sexual behavior in best-selling pornography: A content analysis update. *International Communication Association*. Also see: Malamuth, N. (1986). Repeated exposure to violent and nonviolent pornography: Likelihood of raping ratings and laboratory aggression against women. *Aggressive Behavior*, 12(2), 129–137.

^{xii} Repeated exposure to violent and nonviolent pornography: Likelihood of raping ratings and laboratory aggression against women. *Aggressive Behavior*, 12(2), 129–137.

^{xiii} Douglas Weiss, PhD. "Clean: A Proven Plan for Men Committed to Sexual Integrity" (Thomas Nelson, 2013) pp. 69-74.