



HYPERSEXUALITY (AKA SEX ADDICTION)

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Sexologists are not in complete agreement as to what sex addiction is—or if it even exists. Many who adopt a diagnosis of “sex addiction” will state that, physiologically, the brain of a sex addict generates the same neurochemicals that drug and alcohol addiction produces—leading people to engage in excessive behavior. The effect of this is an inability to contain or control the addictive behavior, resulting in the destruction of normal life functioning. However, there are other sexologists who feel the term “addiction” is misleading. They believe that, unlike alcohol or drugs, sex is a normal biological function—it does not produce physical withdrawal symptoms when the behavior is curtailed—and norms for sexual activity are standardized by the particular culture and society and are not universal.

Psychiatrists and sexologists face a considerable challenge in agreeing on set criteria for Hypersexual Disorder. What does seem to be agreed upon is that hypersexuality exists as a disorder if there is significant personal distress or impairment to life functioning as a result of compulsive sexual thoughts and/or activity.

Without agreed-upon criteria, however, it is important for sexologists and therapists to avoid labeling any repetitive sexual behaviors or fantasies based on their own personal ideas of what is considered “normal” sexual activity or desire. For example, a man having sex twice a day with different sexual partners through the week is frequently considered sex addicted, but a man having sex with his partner twice a day is not. The conclusion is that frequency, in and of itself, is a flawed diagnostic criterion.

Most sexologists agree that it is essential to focus on how repetitive sexual thoughts or activity actually impact a man’s life and his possible reasons for acting out sexually. Multiple factors are likely to be at play when sexual obsession and compulsion adversely affect a man’s relationships, work and other life activities. Sexually compulsive men may use sex to reduce anxiety-laden thoughts; to avoid conflict and confrontation; to avoid emotional pain, hurt and fear; or to distract from life’s disappointments. The underlying etiology is best diagnosed and explored in psychotherapy. Psychotherapeutic intervention, then, is a critical first step if you want to reestablish a good sexual connection with your partner when there is repetitive sexual behavior happening, which is either resulting in the disruption of daily life activities or negatively impacting relational intimacy.

A most significant point, however, is that if both partners in a relationship want and enjoy sex together—but one wants more sex than the other—that is not in-and-of-itself sexual addiction, compulsion or hypersexual disorder. If one or both partners want to experience sex outside the relationship, that is also not in-and-of-itself sexual addiction, compulsion or hypersexual disorder. We refer to addiction, compulsion or hypersexual disorder only when there is disruption and/or unmanageability of daily life, leading to more pain than pleasure. However, if disparity in sexual desire is the problem, the couple needs to consider professional counseling.

Having challenges in your relationship? Consider [Communication for Intimate Couples](#).