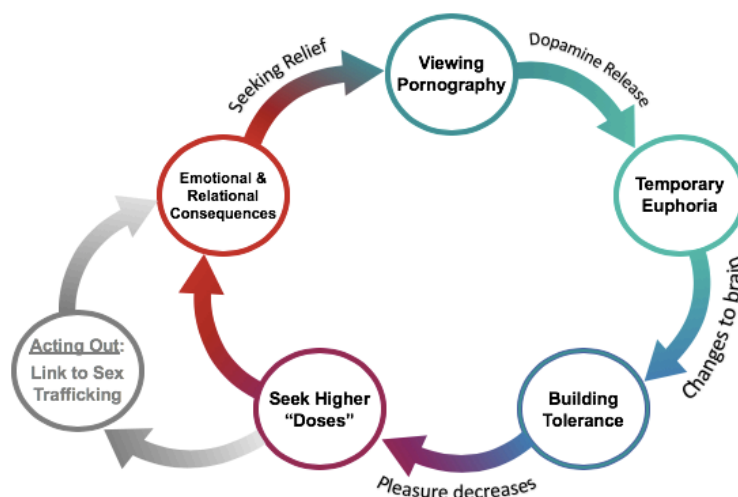


ADDICTION CYCLE of PORNOGRAPHY



Watching pornography can be **dangerous and addictive**. There are countless men and women both inside and outside the church who struggle with pornography. This article explains how pornography can create an addiction and also provides resources for anyone seeking help with pornography recovery.

1. Viewing Pornography

In today's internet age, pornography is always lurking just a click or two away. Porn is so ubiquitous that the average age of first exposure to pornography is around 11 to 13 years of age^{1,2,3}. This is deeply troubling due to the effects that viewing pornography has on the brain. Recent studies are beginning to shed light on how viewing pornography creates significant changes in our brains that have the potential to lead to compulsive or addictive behavior⁴.

2. Dopamine: The Reward Chemical & the "High" It Creates

The key to the addictive power of pornography lies inside our brains in the form of a neurochemical called Dopamine. This neurochemical is responsible for triggering the reward circuitry in our brains. Dopamine tells the brain that what you are experiencing is important for survival (such as food, sex, relationships, etc.)⁵ It helps rewire the brain to crave more of whatever is creating the response.⁶ Dopamine conditions your brain to want more, more, more.

If you combine pornography with masturbation, it stimulates a higher dopamine release in our brains than any other natural stimulus.⁷ Likewise, other powerful neurochemicals, called endogenous opioids, are released and create a surge of physical and emotional euphoria.⁸ This creates a feeling of pleasure, or a "high". This high is very powerful. Porn stimulates the same reward and pleasure centers of the brain that drugs such as cocaine and heroin do.⁹

3. How Porn Changes Your Brain

Regular high levels of dopamine and opioids in the brain also begin to change the way it functions. The prefrontal cortex (PFC) is the 'executive control' or willpower center of our brain. It is responsible for our behavioral judgment, attention, risk assessment, and decision making.¹⁰ Unfortunately, the PFC shrinks and does not function properly in regular porn users.¹¹ This has the effect of making porn cravings stronger while simultaneously making it harder to resist giving in to them.¹²

4. Tolerance Building and the Decrease of the Pleasure Effect

In addition to changes in the prefrontal cortex, the brain's receptivity to dopamine decreases in response to the regularly high levels of dopamine experienced with viewing pornography.¹³ This means that it takes much higher levels and/or longer exposure of dopamine to get the same pleasure affects over time.¹⁴ This decrease in the pleasure effect of porn is called tolerance, and it is a key component of the addictive cycle.

As tolerance to dopamine increases and the pleasure effect decreases, porn will become less and less effective. However, when the brain experiences novelty, a significant jump in dopamine response occurs.¹⁵ Thus, a regular porn viewer may begin to seek out new or more extreme forms of pornography (e.g. gay or trans porn, kink & fetish porn, increasingly violent porn, etc.) in an attempt to generate a higher dopamine response in the brain. This can lead to a compulsive need to seek porn more frequently, displacing other important daily activities such as work.¹⁶

5. Acting Out

Unfortunately, as the decision-making area of the brain changes and the need to satiate cravings for a dopamine “fix” increases, some men decide to act out their porn-driven desires and fantasies by purchasing sex from prostituted persons.¹⁷ This is one of the chief ways that pornography directly fuels the demand for sex trafficking. This does not mean that all porn viewers will eventually seek out prostituted persons for sex. However, there are several other cultural consequences to viewing pornography. Studies show that people who view pornography regularly have greater support of sexist beliefs and of adversarial sexual beliefs, greater tolerance of sexual violence toward women, and a diminished view of women’s competence, morality, and humanity.¹⁸

6. Emotional & Relational Consequences

Watching porn regularly is associated with a multitude of emotional and relational consequences such as sexual dysfunction (e.g. Erectile Dysfunction), loss of attraction to real partners, inability to create new relationships, isolation, social anxiety, low self-esteem, inability to concentrate, depression,¹⁹ desensitization towards violence,²⁰ dissatisfaction with one’s own body, irritability, and feelings of shame.²¹

7. The Downward Spiral: Escaping Emotional & Relational Difficulties

With mounting emotional and relational difficulties, increasing isolation and inability to connect with others, and the constant, tempting call of pornography just a click away, it becomes easier and easier to fall into the downward spiral of the porn cycle. Porn promises relief and escape from the growing worries and struggles a porn user faces. But in the end, it is fool’s gold. As one author said, “This is pornography’s seduction to men: Bring me your weary and defeated heart, and I will give you a world where it will all go away. In the end, pornography confiscates not only your purpose but also your heart.”²²

8. Breaking the Cycle and Getting Help

Hope is not lost for those who are struggling with compulsive porn behavior. There are ways to end this porn cycle, and many porn users have found freedom through various resources or support programs. Although it is not easy, God invites us to renew our minds and to leave behind the corruptions of this world (Rom. 12:2).

Below are some resources that can help you, or someone you know, begin the road to recovery. One of the most effective ways to achieve recovery is through counseling and/or small group settings. Please check out these resources to start down the road to porn recovery:

- **Book:** *Unwanted: How Sexual Brokenness Reveals Our Way to Healing*, Jay Stringer (2018)
- **Book:** *Healing the Wounds of Sexual Addiction*, Mark Laaser (2004)
- **Accountability, Support & Articles:** CovenantEyes Website: <https://www.covenanteyes.com/support/>
- **Support Groups:** The Naked Truth Website: <https://www.nakedtruthrecovery.com/support-groups>

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