

Common Questions Regarding Sex Addiction

Definition of sexual addiction or hypersexuality

Sexual Addiction and Hypersexuality are often used interchangeably to refer to a dysfunctional preoccupation with sexual fantasy, often combined with sexual behaviours such as watching porn, compulsive masturbation, obsessive pursuit of objectified sex, for a period of at least six months. It is a form of self-medicating, used to numb out uncomfortable emotions, where the brain produces its own drug, by releasing neurochemicals in response to sexual fantasy or stimulation. As such, some refer to sex addiction as a “pathological relationship with a mood-altering experience”, which isn’t a part of mental disorders that include hypersexuality as a symptom, such as, bipolar disorder, obsessive compulsive disorder, adult attention deficit disorder, dementia, head injury, or a side-effect of certain medications.

What is Hypersexuality?

Hypersexuality is an excessive preoccupation with sexual fantasy, often accompanied by sexual urges and behaviours that are difficult to control, despite one’s desire to do so, even when they’ve become harmful and impacting other areas of one’s life. Most notably, it involves any of the following – watching porn, compulsive masturbation, cyber sex, or obsessive pursuit of objectified or casual sex, for a period of at least six months, that isn’t a result of other mental disorders. Some see it as a pathological relationship with a mood-altering experience, where the brain is making its own drug in response to sexual stimuli, as a way of escaping.

Are Hypersexuality and Sex addictions the same thing?

Hypersexuality and Sex Addiction are the same thing, but some people prefer the use of one term over the other.

Is sex addiction a disease?

Sex addiction is a disease like any other addiction, where the person cannot control their behaviour despite wanting to, even when it’s become harmful, distressful, or impacting other areas of their life.

Is Hypersexuality a disorder?

While some may not recognize hypersexuality as a mental disorder, it is being recognized as a neuro-psychobiological disorder.

What causes hypersexuality?

Hypersexuality occurs due to changes in the brain, when one repeatedly uses sexual stimuli to escape uncomfortable feelings. It normally lays its roots in childhood, if a child experiences abuse, trauma, or emotional neglect, leading to extremely painful feelings which overwhelm them, because nobody is there to teach them coping skills. So they develop unhealthy coping mechanisms that soothe them in the moment, but cause neuropsychological damage, which impairs their ability to regulate their emotions, or control their impulses (by impacting the reward systems of the brain).

Sex addiction therapy/Hypersexuality treatment

Sex Addiction and Hypersexuality are generally symptoms of other issues secondary to trauma, so the treatment needs to treat both the initial cause as well as the symptoms. A trained professional can help identify triggers, develop healthy coping skills, address the causes, implement protocols designed to re-wire pathways in the brain, and come up with a good relapse prevention plan with specific tools and skill set.

What is hypersexual behaviour?

Hypersexual behaviour is the obsessive pursuit of sexual fantasy or behaviours, to alter one's mood. It can include use of pornography, compulsive masturbation, cyber sex, pursuit of casual sex, disconnected sex with sex workers, multiple sexual partners, and a preoccupation with lining up sexual activity.

What triggers hypersexuality?

When one can't control their unpleasant feelings, they may self-medicate, by the use of substances, or engaging in behaviours that cause the brain to make its own drugs. With hypersexuality, those behaviours involve excessive sexual stimulation, used as a coping mechanism.

How do you control hypersexuality?

You can control hypersexuality by seeking highly specialized treatment that allows you to manage unhealthy behaviours, learn healthy coping skills, and address the root causes.

What are hypersexuality causes?

Hypersexuality occurs due to changes in the brain, when one repeatedly uses sexual stimuli to escape uncomfortable feelings. It normally lays its roots in childhood, if a child experiences abuse, trauma, or emotional neglect, leading to overwhelmingly painful feelings, without anyone there to teach them coping skills. So they try to self-soothe in ways that cause neuropsychological damage, which impairs their ability to regulate their emotions, behaviours, or impulses.

How do I stop sexual urges?

You can't stop sexual urges, but you can certainly control them with proper treatment, so they are contained within the spectrum of healthy sexuality.

Hypersexuality and trauma

When a child is traumatized, with no ways of coping, they try to self-soothe as a way of controlling their unpleasant feelings. A common way to do so is via sexual stimuli that help the child escape those feelings. A child may discover that accidentally, be exposed to it via sexual encounters or abuse, or their brain may simply hijack them when they can't manage extreme emotions.

How do you know if someone is hyper sexual?

You know someone is hypersexual if their sexual fantasies, urges, or behaviours have become a preoccupation that's getting out of control. What that means is, they're needing a bigger and bigger fix, they're taking risks and crossing lines they never thought they'd cross, their obsession is starting to impact other areas of their life, they're distressed but they can't stop even when they want to – i.e. their sexual activity is out of their control. If you or someone you know might be facing any of these symptoms, you can take a free online test at www.recoveryzonecanada.com.

Can a sex addict be faithful?

Absolutely, if they seek out proper treatment, which will also allow them learn how to identify their triggers and have a protocol in place if they feel they might be headed into trouble. Sex addiction isn't a moral or a characterological disorder with a predisposition to cheating! Some sex addicts never get past sexual fantasy or masturbation, as a way of staying technically faithful.

Can sex addicts have a normal relationship?

Once sex addiction is treated properly, both parties have healed and are willing to work together to do whatever it takes (including pursuing healthy sexuality), they can indeed have a normal relationship, that's possibly better than anything they every expected.

Sex addiction recovery

Sex addiction recovery involves therapeutic practices which help identify triggers, learning to address those triggers in healthy ways, developing healthy coping mechanisms, addressing the trauma that started it all, and support group work. It's a long process, with many steps, but well worth it. However, the person has to admit they have a problem and commit to doing whatever it takes to treat it, for their own sake, not just to appease their partner.

Sex addiction test / quiz

A standard sex addiction quiz, referred to as the SAST – Sex Addiction Screening Test – can be found at www.recoveryzonecanada.com

Compulsive sexual behaviour symptoms

Compulsive sexual behaviour symptoms can include the use of pornography, compulsive masturbation, pursuit of sex outside one's relationship (cybersex, sexting, casual sex, sex for money, affairs), taking over other areas of one's life, which one can't stop even when they want to, due to distress and/or promises to the self or others.

Hypersexuality checklist

Preoccupation with sex

Seeking disengaged or objectified sex

Needing a bigger and bigger fix

Taking risks to pursue sexual activity

Sexual obsession impacting other areas of life and day to day activities

Inability to stop the pursuit of sex even when one wants to, because they're distressed

Dr. Patrick Carnes Diagnostic Criteria for Sexual Addiction / Hypersexuality

Three or more of the following symptoms:

1. Recurrent failure to resist impulses to engage in specific sexual behavior
2. Frequent engaging in sexual behaviors to a greater extent or over a longer period of time than intended
3. Persistent desire or unsuccessful efforts to stop, reduce, or control sexual behaviors
4. Inordinate amount of time spent in obtaining sex, being sexual, or recovering from sexual experience
5. Preoccupation with sexual behavior or preparatory activities
6. Frequent engaging in sexual behavior when expected to fulfill occupational, academic, domestic, or social obligations
7. Continuation of sexual behavior despite knowledge of having a persistent or recurrent social, financial, psychological, or physical problem that is caused or exacerbated by the behavior
8. Need to increase the intensity, frequency, number, or risk of sexual behaviors to achieve the desired effect, or diminished effect with continued sexual behaviors at the same level of intensity, frequency, number, or risk
9. Giving up or limiting social, occupational, or recreational activities because of sexual behavior
10. Distress, anxiety, restlessness, or irritability if unable to engage in sexual behavior

What Do I Need To Know/Do

Has sex become an obsession with you? Has it caused problems in other areas of your life – work, marriage, family, finances? Have you tried to stop but you're unable to do so?

Wouldn't it be nice to have a professional who understands your condition guide you in getting your life back on track, compassionately and nonjudgmentally? In seeking information/help, you've taken the first and hardest step; allow us to help you do the rest.

We take a three-pronged approach:

- ***addressing the symptoms*** (addictive behaviours and the harm they've caused)
- ***getting to the root cause*** (anything else is just a temporary fix)
- ***relapse prevention*** (managing triggers)

We handle addict's recovery, partner's recovery, and couple's recovery.

If you're struggling with a loss of control due to your obsession with sex, whether it's being caught up in sexual fantasy, porn and masturbation, or seeking out cyber-sex, random sexual encounters, or sex workers, things will continue to escalate, with a predisposition towards riskier behaviours and bigger fixes. It can sneak up on you, since those sexual behaviours are being used to escape uncomfortable feelings – loneliness, negative thoughts, feeling unworthy, insignificant, invisible, unlovable. And escape by its very nature makes us become disengaged and zone out – that's the whole point – so you are unlikely to make good decisions, where you consider the consequences. As you can see, how easily it can land you in a place that you never imagined – a place of shame, confusion, unmanageable situations, dark cycles, and inescapable damage.

Allow us to help you. Connect with us today!