

Pornography

- ⇒ In the 2019 Pornhub annual report, they said there were more than 42,000,000,000 site visits to Pornhub—nearly 6 visits to the site per person on Earth—which is 8.5 billion more visits than the previous year.
- ⇒ 9 out of 10 boys and 6 out of 10 girls are exposed to pornography online before the age of 18.
- ⇒ The first exposure to pornography among boys is 12 years old, on average.
- ⇒ 83% of boys and 57% of girls are exposed to group sex online.
- ⇒ 69% of boys and 55% of girls are exposed to same-sex intercourse online.
- ⇒ 32% of boys and 18% of girls are exposed to bestiality online.
- ⇒ 15% of boys and 9% of girls have seen child pornography online.
- ⇒ 71% of teens have done something to hide their online activity from their parents.
- ⇒ 28% of 16-17-year-olds have unintentionally been exposed to pornography online.
- ⇒ 20% of 16-year-olds and 30% of 17-year-olds have received a sext.
- ⇒ 39% of boys and 23% of girls have seen sexual bondage online.

What Is Porn Addiction?

Although porn addiction has yet to be recognized as a diagnosable condition, this behavior has been described as “problematic pornographic use.”

People may be addicted to pornographic material if they constantly crave erotic displays despite attempts to reduce their urges. This person may also find other areas of life like work, academics, and social interactions limited by the constant need to consume porn. Watching porn may also take over any other interests.

A person with an addiction can be so overtaken with the need to consume porn, and they may begin to watch it in public spaces.

Signs of Porn Addiction

To determine whether a person has an unhealthy relationship with porn, excessive consumption is usually found to take up a lot of time, which can lead to a loss of control.

Porn addiction may also cause a strain in relationships with others. This behavior may manifest in the following ways:

- Excessive spending on pornographic material, sometimes at the expense of necessities

- Engagement in risky sexual behavior
- The use of porn to cope with difficult emotions like pain, anxiety, and sadness
- Consuming porn at risky times and moments
- Feeling anger at being advised to reduce porn consumption
- An inability to quit porn despite efforts
- Experiencing shame following porn use, but being unable to stop the habit
- Progressing to more extreme forms of pornography to find pleasure
- Finding sexual intercourse to be less satisfying
- Hiding porn habits from sexual partners and others

Effects of Porn Addiction

3 Ways Porn Affects Our Brain

Your brain is different when it's on porn. The chemicals at work in your brain have at least 3 measurable effects that researchers have noted.

1. The brain is "tattooed" with porn.

Your brain is designed to remember important situations and events. When you see porn, your brain gets the signal that something important has happened. Consequently, porn can leave an imprint of the image on the brain long after is viewed. Many people who have quit looking at porn still have minds full of pornographic images—images that won't leave. One of our readers recently commented, "Even though I haven't viewed porn in quite a while, I still have very vivid images in my mind that make me want to go back to it." This kind of experience with porn is *extremely* common.

Why is that? It's because of the chemicals at work: norepinephrine, oxytocin, and vasopressin, which work together to form lasting memories. The effect on the brain is that looking at porn, even briefly, can leave your mind with a built-in library of images that you can't erase. Neuroscientist Dr. William Struthers, the author of *Wired for Intimacy*, compares this to a "neurological tattoo, which is difficult to 'unremember' or to wipe away."

2. The brain bonds to porn, not a person.

Sex is designed to bond you to a person. With porn, instead of forming a deep connection to a person, your brain ends up **"bonding" to a pornographic experience**. Your brain remembers where the sexual high was experienced, and each time you desire sexual stimulation, you feel a sharp sense of focus: I've got to go back to the porn.

In addition to this bonding, pornography gives the brain an unnatural high. The brain eventually fatigues, stopping the production of dopamine, leaving the viewer wanting more but unable to reach a level of satisfaction.

As a result, **everyday pleasures stop causing excitement and the viewer seeks out more novel, more intense pornography** to get the same high as before. This imbalance in the brain leads to many problems: impotence with your spouse, frequent masturbation with very little satisfaction, anxiety, fatigue, lack of motivation, inability to concentrate, and escalating tastes for more bizarre or novel porn.

3. Porn shrinks your brain.

Porn users' brains are smaller than normal. Viewing pornography and masturbating actually weakens the region of our brain known as the **cingulate cortex**—the region that is responsible for moral and ethical decision making and willpower. This means feeling the compulsive "need" to look at porn.

It may lead someone to engage in increasingly risky behavior, such as looking at porn at work, consuming more extreme or even illegal porn, or acting out sexually in other ways—such as visiting strip clubs or soliciting prostitutes.

The Psychological Effects of Porn on the Brain

Porn may increase anxiety or depression.

Research has found a correlation between watching porn and anxiety and depression, particularly those who want to stop watching porn but can't. One study of university students indicated a strong connection between compulsive porn use and anxiety.

Porn can change sexual beliefs.

We start to desire what we see in porn. We start to need more novel types of porn to get the same high we got with our first porn encounter. The more porn is consumed, the more it changes how we see people. It can even lead us to think violence is sexy. Looking at these images and videos can "pornify" a person's outlook on life, and how they see the world.

Research shows that people who watched porn were desensitized to violent sex and rape. People who watched porn had a lower view of traditional institutions like marriage and family.

Porn often intensifies shame.

People trying to quit porn often feel a deep sense of shame that can drive them into relapse and further emotional bondage. The negative feelings associated with porn, rather than giving them the motivation to quit, often contribute to feelings of hopelessness and helplessness.

Porn can lead to memory loss.

In some cases, porn may lead to memory loss. Sound crazy? One study concluded, "[T]hat pornography addiction may be associated with impaired recent verbal memory in juveniles." Another study looked more broadly at short-term memory with a group of 28 healthy individuals and came up with similar results.

If you're hooked on porn, you may have the experience of looking up at the clock and realizing you've burned through a couple of hours looking at porn when you have other things you should be doing. The bottom line is, there's reason to believe that looking at porn may make it more difficult to retain the information you need for important tasks, whether you're in school or working.

Withdrawal Symptoms

The effects of porn are so powerful they can feel paralyzing for some people. On top of this, when trying to quit porn, many people also report withdrawal symptoms. These can include mood swings, anxiety, and depression. Some have even reported headaches.

Can I rewire my brain from porn's effects?

It can feel overwhelming, but change is possible. You can rewire your brain. Tens of thousands of men and women have broken free from the grip of pornography.

While porn has a tremendous impact on the brain, your brain has an incredible capacity to change and adapt. Even if your neural pathways are "deep canyons," it's never too late to start the process of rewiring.

Treatment for Porn Addiction

Counseling

Speaking to a mental health professional is one of the most effective ways to get negative behaviors under control. In addition, using techniques such as family therapy and relationship counseling can help navigate this condition's intricacies.

Professional guidance can help with wading through the feelings of guilt and compulsion with porn consumption. It can also help to manage the emotional and intimacy challenges caused by the habit.

Treatment Centers

In certain situations, it is necessary to pursue residential centers where a person can isolate from triggers while working with professionals over a period of time to detox and begin healing from their addiction.

Need help getting connected to a professional? Email counseling@breakdownstl.org for assistance.

Sources:

* Fight the New Drug - <https://fightthenewdrug.org>

* Covenant Eyes - <https://www.covenanteyes.com>