

Addicted to the computer? You're not alone!

David Goldfoot, PhD

More and more individuals are talking about being "addicted" to the computer these days. Can a person actually have an addictive behavior? Well, if it walks like a duck... Actually the use of the term "addiction" when applied to behavior is still controversial, since other terms such as "obsessed" seem to cover the same territory. Nonetheless, if you find the hours passing by while you are absorbed in web surfing, programming, or in other ways hanging out on your terminal, then precisely what it's called isn't really too important. Lets consider the main addictive activities:

- porn sites
- chat rooms
- simple games such as solitaire
- complex interactive games including alternative realities
- Programming, including web-site construction

Actually, the list can be longer. Porn sites, however, present the biggest problem, since they frequently cost lots of money, cause stress, and frequently result in serious relationship difficulties. When pursued in the workplace, the activity frequently leads to being fired and humiliated.

Porn addiction is the hardest of the computer addictions to stop. Most of my clients who have this problem recognize that they are really dealing with *two* addictions when they succumb to this activity; the computer aspect and the masturbatory aspect. Treatment is rather straightforward. If a person wants to stop, then he (and this *is* a male problem 95% of the time) needs to take several of the following steps:

- Stop using the web altogether
- Stop using the web late at night when alone
- Purchase a program or service that filters out porn sites (We recommend [8e6 Home](#), a combined content and site proxy server service.
- Join a 12-step support group such as [Sex Addicts Anonymous \(SAA\)](#)
- Get professional help in learning "Relapse Prevention" concepts
- Challenge your rationalization when you give yourself permission to look at the porn after you've sworn to yourself that it would never happen again (this is called a thinking error or cognitive distortion)

I have now helped 100s of men break out of an addictive cycle of pornography obtained by looking at websites. Some have bonafide sexual obsessions and many other sexual problems. Others don't appear to be seriously disordered, but are upset with themselves for viewing these sites to excess and either seek help directly for this problem or identify it as a problem during the course of treatment for another issue. In my practice, while I can't prove cause versus effect, about 75% of my "addicted" clients report serious deficits in their sex lives with their partners. It is my impression that while the addiction might get started sometimes because of sexual frustration in a relationship, it is usually the other way around, namely, the addiction results in a deteriorating sexual relationship.

If you've been curious and have checked out some sites occasionally, you probably don't have a "condition." If you are spending long periods of time, masturbating compulsively, looking at the

sites at work or coming home to look at them, then you're very likely in trouble. If sexual opportunities with a willing partner leave you fantasizing about how quickly you can get to a porn site, you'd better see somebody asap.