

Addiction: Not Just Drugs and Alcohol. Beware of Gambling, Sex, the Internet, Even Exercise!

When we think about addiction, we usually think of alcohol, cigarettes and drugs, but people can become addicted to activities too; these are called non-substance addictions or process addictions. They include gambling, sex, the internet and, yes, even work and exercise.

What is Addiction?

Addiction can be physical, psychological or both. Addiction means a person doesn't have control over whether he or she does something.

Addiction to activities, also called non-substance addiction, is psychological. The addicted person feels overcome by the desire to do the activity. He or she feels

like there is no choice about doing the activity; and his or her life centers on this need.

Like addiction to drugs or alcohol, addiction to activities includes symptoms of increasing tolerance, withdrawal, mood changes and neglect of social relationships.

Current research suggests that the area of the brain involved and brain chemistry changes are similar in substance addictions and non-substance addictions.¹ We also know that addiction tends to run in families.

How to Recognize Non-Substance Addiction

Sex. Addicts repeatedly act out sexual behaviors that have negative consequences. This can include unsafe sexual activity, cybersex or pornography. These people may have to address past sexual abuse or past sexual relationships, and must address the possibility of HIV infection and other sexually transmitted diseases.

Gambling. This addiction usually becomes apparent when a person spends too much money or time on gambling activities.

Work. Being a hard worker doesn't mean you don't have balance in your life. People addicted to work, also known as workaholics, have trouble maintaining outside interests or healthy relationships. They may avoid vacations, work while they're on vacation and regularly miss their children's school events.

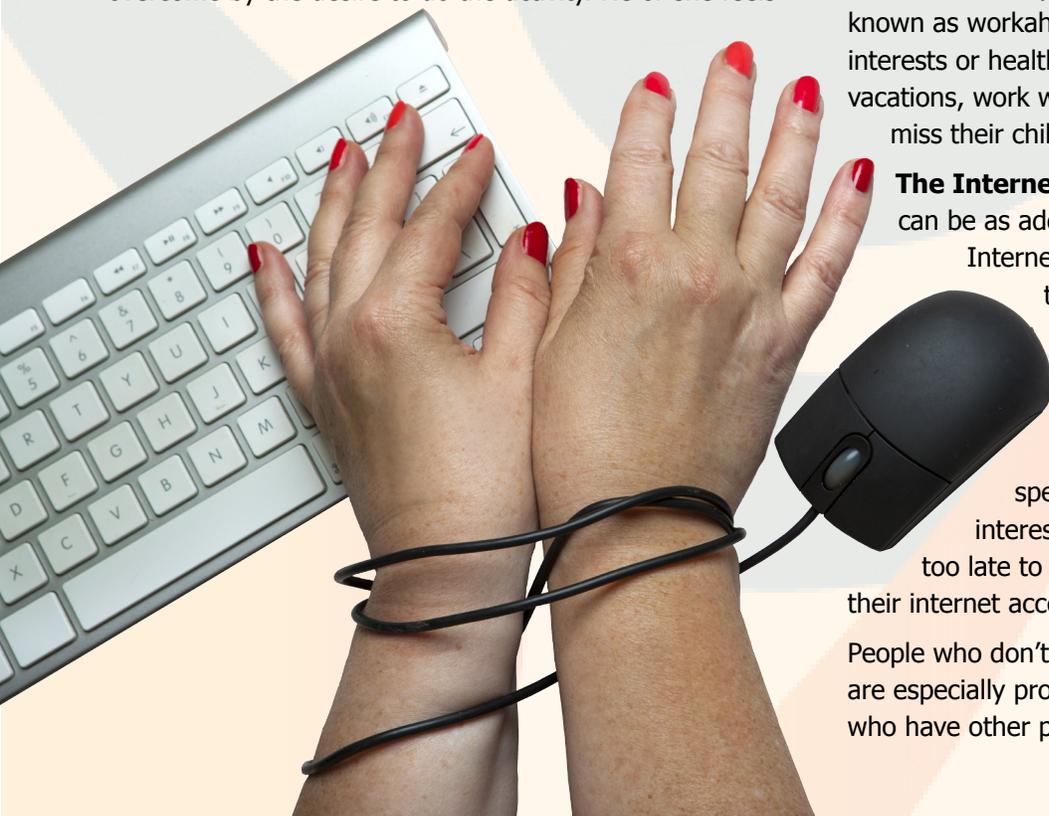
The Internet. Studies have shown that the internet can be as addictive as alcohol, drugs and gambling.²

Internet addicts spend too much time surfing the web, cannot control their internet use and become depressed or anxious when they can't go online.

Internet addiction can happen to children and teens too. Watch for them spending too much time alone, losing interest in activities they enjoy, staying up too late to stay online and becoming hostile when their internet access is removed.

People who don't have strong connections with others are especially prone to internet addiction, as are people who have other psychological difficulties or addictions.

continued on Page 2



Exercise. Most of us feel pressure to keep our weight down and stay fit. That's okay because we all should exercise enough to benefit our bodies and our minds. But exercising can become a compulsive habit. If someone neglects responsibilities due to exercise, does several workouts a day, exercises even when not feeling well or gets very upset when missing a workout, he or she may be an exercise addict.

Watch for Symptoms of Addiction

Regardless of the substance or activity, symptoms of addiction are predictable and become more intense over time. Watch for these symptoms in yourself or a loved one who you think might have a non-substance addiction.

- Emotional distance from loved ones, sometimes with loss of friends and family relationships;
- Anxiety and stress because of the constant fear of discovery;



- Financial debt and legal problems;
- Shame and guilt as the individual's lifestyle becomes inconsistent with his or her values and beliefs;
- Loneliness, resentment, self-pity and self-blame;
- Problems at work; and
- Lying to cover up the extent of addiction.

Recovering from a Non-Substance Addiction

An individual needs to make recovery a top priority and recognize that it will be a challenge, with the first few months the most stressful. The exact process may vary, based on the addiction, but many steps are the same. Counseling and support groups are invaluable, and a therapist trained in addiction can help significantly as well.

The first steps in the recovery process are³:

- Acceptance of the addiction and its consequences;
- Commitment to change;
- Surrender of the need to control the compulsion; and
- Willingness to learn from others in recovery and from therapists.

In the early recovery stages, a person will experience relief after admitting the secret, then anger and hope. The individual may have an initial worsening of self-esteem, then an improvement and grief about the loss of a "best friend," the addiction.

These tips can make the road to recovery easier⁴:

- Telling friends and family about the addiction;
- Asking friends and family to be available to talk – especially when feeling a compulsion;
- Asking a therapist or others who have overcome the addiction to suggest ways to make recovery smoother;
- Not participating in activities where one may be tempted by the addiction; and
- When having a relapse, admitting it quickly and asking for help.

Coping with a non-substance addiction isn't easy. But you don't have to go it alone. Help is available. Contact the Ohio Employee Assistance Program at 800-221-6327. On liveandworkwell.com, use the search phrase "Addiction" for more information about non-substance addictions.

Sources:

¹ Martin, P.R. and Petry, N.M. (2005). Are Non-substance-related Addictions Really Addictions? *The American Journal of Addictions*, 14(1), 1-7.

² Young, Kimberly S. (2001). Caught in the Net: How to Recognize the Signs of Internet Addiction — and a Winning Strategy for Recovery.

³ Society for the Advancement of Sexual Health. "Concurrent Addictions." Accessed August 1, 2010.

⁴ Kids Health. "Dealing with Addiction." Accessed August 1, 2010.

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Are You Addicted to Shopping? If You Cannot Stop, You Are.

Americans love to spend. And while there are a few prudent folks who save for a rainy day, for the most part, spending is our nation's favorite pastime. Recent statistics from the (U.S.) Department of Commerce indicate that whether our disposable personal income increases or decreases, our personal consumption expenditures increase.¹ In other words, regardless of how much money we make, we spend more.

No doubt this is cause for stress and distress in households around the country. The mortgage crisis and the global economy are certainly to blame for much of

continued on Page 3



it. However, if you consistently overspend only to worry about your financial situation, there may be a more deep-rooted problem you need to address.

Overspending is addictive

Overspending has nothing to do with money. It is a behavior and it works like an addiction. For some adults, shopping is a leisure activity, a way to fill a void, manage emotions, reinforce self-worth and express self-identity.²

A study that appeared in the American Journal of Psychiatry a few years ago concluded that one in 20 individuals in the U.S. is a compulsive buyer (over spender). It then went on to shed some light on this problem. It demonstrated that while most people see buying as utilitarian, others are preoccupied with it. They go on shopping binges and buy things they do not need and can't afford. They agonize over their actions, feel shame and guilt and experience adverse consequences such as financial problems and inability to cope with their work and social life.³

The study also shattered a few stereotypes, showing that most compulsive shoppers were younger individuals (in their 20's), both male and female, in the lower income scale. These individuals did not have more credit cards than the other respondents, but their credit limit was frequently maxed out and they tended to make only minimum payments.⁴

Findings showed that compulsive buyers also were more likely to suffer from other addictive behaviors such as substance abuse, eating disorders, etc. and experience depression and anxiety⁵ either as a result of or the cause of the compulsive behavior.

What can you do if you see yourself in the description above?

Find the urge to splurge

In order to restrain your addictive behavior, you need to find out what triggers it. Understandably, this may prove more difficult than just dealing with the late fee notices from the mortgage or credit card companies. However, these triggers are not going to go away unless you face them. Find some quiet time to have a real heart-to-heart with yourself. You may find your urge to splurge comes from lack of love as a child, the need to seek excitement or approval, an inability to deal with your negative emotions or a need to feel in control.⁶

Talk to professionals

While the last thing you want to do right now is spend more money, hiring professionals to help you find solutions to your overspending may very well be your saving grace.

A behavioral therapist can help you identify and deal with the emotions that trigger your compulsive behavior and help you change the way you relate to money.

A financial or money manager can help you analyze your financial situation, set priorities and get you on the road to financial freedom.

Make the best of today

Resolving your financial situation will take time. But that does not mean you must continue to stress over it. Stress only amplifies problems and makes them seem worse. It also will make you more anxious and trigger other compulsive behavior. So, what should you do instead?

HAVE SOME FUN!

- Get together with family and friends for a few laughs, a movie, a bike ride or a picnic. Try not to overeat or drink, as this will only increase stress.
- Engage in physical activities such as Yoga, walking, hiking, swimming or team sports like basketball, baseball or soccer.
- Indulge your passions without spending. Whether it is reading, painting, singing or gardening, taking time to do what you love on a regular basis helps stave off stress, and makes you feel good about yourself.

Talk to people who will understand you

12-step programs where guidance and support are

continued on Page 4

provided by those who have overcome compulsive buying themselves include:

- Spenders Anonymous spenders.org/home.html
- Debtors Anonymous debtorsanonymous.org
- ShopAholics Anonymous shopaholicsanonymous.org

Small Steps/Huge Strides Toward Financial Wellness

Organize your life.

You spend time looking for things, waste money buying things to replace what you cannot find and stress over it all at bedtime.

Spring clean your surroundings. File your important papers. Make a list of your expenditures and income. Include all the shopping sprees and highlight them to identify them as unwanted, unneeded expenses. Compare costs vs. income for a clear picture of your situation. An honest recording of your expenses will help you visualize the depth of the problem. This is an important starting step.

Don't think too far ahead

Focus on what you need to do to manage your debt. A financial specialist can help you plan how to pay off your debt, trim your expenses, and develop a budget. A financial planner also will want you to think ahead about saving for the future, but do not think too far ahead. Researchers found that those who plan their savings a month at a time are more likely to continuously save in the future.⁷

Shackle your credit cards

It has been proven scientifically that people who shop with credit cards spend more than those who use cash because cash reinforces the pain of paying.⁸

If possible, close all your open credit accounts. If your credit cards are maxed out, put them away in an inconvenient place until you've paid them off. Better yet, give them to a trusted family member until you have worked through your issues and feel ready to take control of them again. The best approach is to close them as soon as their balances are paid.



Pay cash

Whenever possible, pay with cash. This will prevent you from overspending and keep you living within your means. If you must have one credit card for emergencies, choose one with the lowest interest rate and leave it at home, or with a trusted person, or locked up in a safety security box at a bank. Do not carry it in your wallet.

Avoid temptation

Online shopping and TV shopping networks may also be a factor in spending patterns. These services can be very enticing with their sales pitches and thus you may want to completely avoid these shopping avenues. Make a list of your triggers and situations that may lead to temptation. Put this list in your wallet.

Do not go it alone

The right kind of support will allow you to understand and resolve this problem as you take charge of your life. A therapist can provide the tools and emotional know-how to keep you on a path to recovery. Call your Employee Assistance Program for a referral to a therapist in your area if you have the benefit.

Sources:

- ¹ bea.gov/newsreleases/national/pi/2013/pi0113.htm
- ² ajp.psychiatryonline.org/article.aspx?articleID=97146#Abstract
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When Gambling Gets Out of Control



Problem gambling is often thought of as an addiction, not unlike having an alcohol or drug problem. When a gambler spends too much money, time or emotional energy on gambling-related activities, problems like debt, lying and relationship issues often follow. If gambling continues despite personal, family, work or legal problems, it has reached a point where intervention is needed.

Tackling Problem Gambling

There are four items needed for problem gambling to continue, and steps you can do for each:

- No matter the motivation, a **DECISION** must be made to gamble before it happens. This decision can be influenced by strong urges and rigid beliefs about gambling.
 - What to do: If you have the urge to gamble, stop and call someone. Think about the consequences of your actions, and then find something else to do right away.
- By definition, it takes **MONEY** to gamble.
 - What to do: Get rid of your credit cards. Let someone else handle your money. Only have a limited amount of cash on you at any given time. Think of better ways to spend your money.
- Gambling requires **TIME**.
 - What to do: Fill your schedule with non-gambling activities. Spend more time with your family or start a fix-it project.
- Without a **GAME** or activity to bet on, there is no opportunity to gamble.
 - What to do: Have yourself barred from gambling establishments. If you must compete, do so without gambling, by running a marathon or trying to be the best father or electrician.



Help for Family Members

It is difficult trying to avoid the painful effects of problem gambling while maintaining a relationship with a problem gambler. Remember these key points:

- Don't expect that you'll be able to force the gambler to change. Instead encourage the gambler to seek help and be supportive when he or she does;
- You are not to blame for the gambler's behavior. Don't lie or cover up problem gambling. Be honest with yourself, the gambler and your family;
- You must protect your physical, emotional and financial security;
- Sometimes the gambler may resort to abusive behavior and violence to continue gambling. If this happens, get help from the appropriate authorities; and
- Limit the gambler's access to cash and credit. Avoid inheriting the gambler's debt. Remove your name from joint financial arrangements.

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**OHIO EMPLOYEE
ASSISTANCE PROGRAM**

Your employee assistance program offers confidential help for personal problems and concerns. Concerned

about a troubled family member who won't get help? Feel tired and exhausted, but don't know if it's burnout, loss of motivation, depression or all three? Late for work too often? Has the use of alcohol or drugs created a crisis you are facing right now? The bottom line, never wonder if your concern is appropriate to contact OEAP. So, if you've been putting off taking action to solve a serious issue that is weighing on you, give OEAP a call today.

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