

Breaking Free from Pornography



A recent study from The Journal of Sex Research found that over 90% of men and 60% of women ages 18-73 reported having consumed pornography in the past month, based on an online sample. Many who struggle with pornography use find it challenging to stop due to its highly addictive nature. Luckily, researchers and therapists have found effective strategies for those working to escape pornography use. Consider the following research-based and clinically tested strategies, which are most effective when focusing on one or two at a time.

- Seek out research-based information about the addictive influence of pornography use. This can help you understand how your body responds to pornography and why quitting can be difficult. To find credible information, search for books or articles written by researchers or clinicians. Some include: Dopamine Nation, by Anna

Lembke, The Porn Trap: The Essential Guide to Overcoming Problems Caused by Pornography by Wendy & Larry Maltz, Effects of Pornography on Relationships, and How Can Couples Manage Issues Caused by Pornography?

- List your goals and envision how you see your ideal future self. Thinking about your desired future can help counteract the natural human tendency to sacrifice what you want in the future for what you want now. For example, ask yourself, “If I don’t want to be viewing pornography in 5 years, do I want to be viewing it now?”
- Incorporate technology filters and other tools to limit access. Creating barriers can reduce impulsive pornography use. Apps such as Fortify provide education, tools, and resources to help you reduce pornography use. Search online for the most relevant tools for your situation.
- Identify how and when pornography fits into your days, then modify your routines. For example, if viewing pornography often follows scrolling through Instagram at night while home alone, consider replacing that time with hobbies or activities with people in another location.
- Identify underlying emotions that lead to pornography use and develop alternative coping skills. For example, if you view pornography to avoid or cope with difficult emotions such as sadness or loneliness, consider how to meet those emotional needs more directly, such as seeking support or spending time with friends or family.

- Develop healthy habits that promote self-care. Adequate sleep, diet, and exercise, among other things, can help you reduce and manage emotional distress and pornography use.
- Identify thought patterns that lead to pornography use. When you notice these thoughts, acknowledge them, then redirect your attention.
- Develop the habit of practicing mindfulness. Daily meditations can improve your mental health and help you respond mindfully when experiencing the desire to view pornography.
- Form and strengthen relationships with supportive people. For many, viewing pornography is a way to cope with a lack of meaningful connection, so spending quality time with friends and family can help meet this emotional need.
- Seek out therapy professionals who have experience with those working to reduce/quit pornography use. Experienced therapists can support and help you identify and meet your core emotional needs. To start, ask people you trust for referrals, search Psychology Today by topic (e.g., sexual addiction, Internet addiction, etc.), or find an AASECT Certified Sex Therapist. Many therapists offer free consultations, where you can ask about their level of experience helping clients reduce pornography use. Don't be afraid to keep searching if they are not a good fit for you.
- Attend support groups. Many find it helpful to join a

supportive and understanding community, check in with an accountability partner, and learn about and implement the addiction recovery 12-step program.

- Increase self-compassion. Many people cope with shame by viewing pornography, so give yourself the grace to stop the shame cycle. If you feel hesitant to give yourself grace, remember that self-compassion does not mean you are making excuses, but it does give you the space to learn and improve.
- Practice a growth mindset rather than an all-or-nothing mentality. Some feel they're starting over if they have "slipped up." In reality, any time away from pornography is positive. Celebrate the small wins.
- Focus on the present. Trying to succeed one moment at a time can empower you to make positive choices, especially if the prospect of trying to avoid pornography for the rest of your life feels daunting.

Reducing/quitting pornography use can be challenging, and it can be easy to feel discouraged. However, it is possible with committed action and adequate social support. Choose to have hope. Remember that avoiding pornography will get easier with less exposure, more social support, and each positive habit you develop.

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