

From: <http://www.covenanteyes.com>

7 Questions Wives of Porn Addicts Often Ask (Part 1 of 3)

by Ella Hutchinson, MA, LPC



Sexual addiction, an umbrella term which includes pornography addiction, is likely **the most harmful addiction when it comes to marriages**. The reasons for this are numerous and include the shame associated with this addiction for both the addict and the spouse, the sense of betrayal, and stereotypes linked to the addiction.

I specialize in counseling wives of sex addicts, and I often see women who haven't told anyone about their husband's addiction, sometimes for months or even years. The lack of support available to spouses, and often inaccurate information being put out about partners of sexual addicts, can cause a wife to suffer additional trauma and feel like she is partially responsible for her husband's behavior.

Since this is a "process addiction", versus a chemical addiction, it is so hard for wives to understand. This lack of understanding can cause numerous misconceptions to be held as truths and can postpone healing.

#1: How can my husband love me and look at porn when he knows it hurts me?

It is possible for your husband to love you, even though he is looking at pornography. In fact, the two are completely unrelated. **Men are better than women at compartmentalization**. A man's brain can be compared to a waffle. There are many different compartments so that he can divide his life up into separate components that don't touch each other. His marriage and family can be in one compartment, his job in another...you get the point. This is a benefit when a man is fighting in a war and able to focus on the task at hand without worrying about his family back home. But it also makes a man able to look at pornography without thinking about how it may hurt you or his marriage. Women's brains are more like spaghetti where everything is connected. We are more likely to be worrying about our kids when we are at work and thinking about work when we are at home.

When a man becomes addicted to pornography, it can become a perceived need rather than a choice for him until he becomes willing to reach out for help. His use of porn causes a release of the same chemicals involved when a drug is ingested. At the height of his addiction, nothing, not even the risk of losing his job or his marriage, is enough to stop him. This explains how a politician or celebrity can make such risky, career-destroying moves without stopping to consider the consequences.

Later I will discuss the kinds of consequences that can catapult an addict into reality.

#2: Why does my husband prefer porn and masturbation to sex with me?

Norman Doidge, psychiatrist and author of the acclaimed book, *The Brain That Changes Itself*, studied porn addicts. He stated,

They reported increasing difficulty in being turned on by their actual sexual partners, spouses, or girlfriends, though they still considered them objectively attractive. When I asked if this phenomenon had any relationship to viewing pornography, they answered that it initially helped them get more excited during sex but over time had the opposite effect. Your husband had this addiction, or the proclivity toward it, before he ever met you, regardless of what he says. **In spite of what you think or even what he might have said, nothing you could do could be enough to sexually satisfy your porn addicted spouse.** Pornography presents an unrealistic reality that damages a person's brain. They become engrossed in this fantasy world where they don't have to worry about pleasing anyone but themselves and no emotional connection is required.

While a porn addict desperately craves love and intimacy (something he is probably unaware of), he seeks it out in the exact place that will cause him to become less and less able to experience it. As I hear sexual addicts talk about their past, it becomes apparent why they are so uncomfortable with the idea of intimacy. This topic is beyond our scope here, but it is important for a wife to be aware that **there is a reason her husband became addicted to porn, and that reason is not her.**

#3: Why am I not enough if I am sexually available to him?



Beyond the intimacy issue, **pornography offers the thrill of what is forbidden**. The more taboo, the more exciting. This is why a porn addict may progress to looking at more hardcore porn and even pornography involving aspects that a healthy person would consider offensive and grotesque.

Gary Wilson, human sciences instructor, and Marnia Robinson, author of *Cupid's Poisoned*

Arrow: From Habit to Harmony in Sexual Relationships, state,

The uniqueness of Internet porn can goad a user relentlessly, as it possesses all the elements that keep dopamine surging. The excitement of the hunt for the perfect image releases dopamine. Moreover, there's always something new, always something kinkier. Dopamine is released when something is more arousing than anticipated, causing nerve cells to fire like crazy. In contrast, sex with your spouse is not always better than expected. Nor does it offer endless variety. This can cause problems because a primitive part of your brain assumes quantity of dopamine equals value of activity, even when it doesn't. Indeed, porn's dopamine fireworks can produce a drug-like high that is more compelling than sex with a familiar mate.

#4: He says he looks at porn because I don't have sex with him enough, am not pretty enough, am too fat, etc. What can I do?

I hear this a lot and **it is called justification**. Your husband doesn't want to believe he is sick. If he is not ready to admit he is an addict and take responsibility for his own behavior, he will say anything to convince you, and even himself, that he does not have a problem. Blaming you is an easy way to save face.

As I said earlier, there is nothing you could do to be appealing enough to make your husband stop looking at porn. I see very beautiful women whose husbands no longer desire them. I am currently working with a couple where the wife looks like she belongs on the cover of *Cosmopolitan* magazine or on a model runway. Her husband has finally admitted to her that he is physically repulsed by her. I have another couple who has sex every day, yet she still catches him looking at porn and frequenting adult bookstores. There is simply no credibility to the argument that a wife causes or contributes to her husband's use of pornography.

#5: My husband says all men do it. Am I making too big a deal out of this?

It is unfortunate, but true, that pornography use is overwhelmingly common. **This does not make it okay or mean you should turn a blind eye.** I often hear women say that their husband's porn use makes them feel cheated on. This makes sense. When a man uses porn he is finding sexual satisfaction from someone other than his wife. So the betrayal a woman feels is natural. God created sex to be between a man and his wife. Jesus said that looking at a woman with lust is the same as committing adultery with her in his heart. Looking at porn is purposely choosing to lust.

#6: My husband refuses to get help or admit this is a problem. How can I make him stop? What are the risks if he doesn't stop?

In short, you cannot make him stop. **It usually takes something significant to get a man to the point where he is ready to admit his porn addiction.** This is what they call "hitting rock bottom". Sometimes, for a man who has hidden his porn use for years, just getting caught is enough. But more often, it takes losing his job, his wife leaving him, or another monumental event to shake him to the core and wake him up to reality. It may be his porn use progressing to acting out with another person or other people and facing the multiple possible consequences of this, to cause him to recognize his need for help. You can insist your husband stop his porn use and you have every right to do so. The compulsive use of porn will, without exception, do damage to your marriage and your family. It affects a person's sense of right and wrong. It can cause your husband to lose respect for you. You will likely feel him pulling further away from you and your family as he gets more entrenched in this sinful lifestyle. **If he refuses help, it will only get worse.** Your pleading that he stop will fall on deaf ears if he isn't ready to hear it. This is a harsh reality, but one too many women just do not get. Some women beg and plead for decades until they grow cold and bitter. Then they tell me that they wish they had left years ago and feel they have wasted most of their life.

When porn is an issue, it is likely that extramarital affairs are or will become an issue. This means you are at risk of more than the heartache of discovering your husband has been sexual with another person. You are also at risk of STDs or your husband fathering another woman's child (something I have seen happen several times). Additionally, your children are almost guaranteed early exposure to porn, something that was likely a contributing factor in your husband's addiction.

#7: Is there hope? Can a man like this change?



Recovery from sexual addiction is very much possible. Men who get out feel a sense of freedom, as if a huge boulder has been lifted off their chest. It is such a liberating feeling that many men forget that their wives are still grieving from his actions and likely will be for some time.

For some men, simply the threat of their wife leaving is enough to cause them to get help. But for many others, they need something more. This can cause

you, as the wife, to feel helpless. You are not helpless. You can't control your husband's recovery, but as the injured spouse, you can control your own. The fact that *you* need recovery does not mean you are sick or that something is wrong with you, but that you have likely been traumatized by your husband's behavior. Your recovery includes building up a support system for yourself. *Don't keep silent*. Reach out to a trusted friend, your pastor, or a therapist. Keeping this secret will cause feelings of shame, loneliness and isolation. Finding a support group for wives of sex/porn addicts can be very helpful. If there is not one in your area, there are phone support groups available, led by trained life coaches and therapists who have been in your shoes. Finally, learn to recognize your unmet needs and what it will take to meet them. A skilled therapist can help you with this. The absolute best book written for wives is *Your Sexually Addicted Spouse* by Barbara Steffens and Marsha Means. I strongly encourage you to find a therapist (individual and marriage) who is familiar with this book and subscribes to the treatment model described in it. If your therapist isn't familiar, ask if they'd be willing to read it.

Beyond self-care, I recommend that you take some time to come up with some clear, firm boundaries for your marriage. While this may not result in the desired outcome, it is worth it to put in the effort. At the very least, this is a first step toward helping you get to a place where you can make an informed decision about the direction for your relationship. This means bottom line behaviors that you will not tolerate and actions you need to see happening in order for you to feel safe in your marriage. Your list of unacceptable behaviors may include viewing pornography in the home, inappropriate conversations or relationships with other people, and other possible abusive behaviors toward you that are often present in a sexual addict. The actions you need to see your husband take might be installing a filter on computers and phones, open discussions about where all the money is going with you having access to all accounts, attending sexual purity or sexual addiction support groups, counseling, and talking to a pastor.

Before you present this to your husband, make sure you are prepared to follow through with consequences if he refuses or does not stick to what he agreed to do. Consequences can be anything from insisting one of you move to a separate bedroom (an in-house separation) to one of you moving out of the home. Your husband will likely be resistant to you setting these boundaries and may accuse you of being demanding and giving him an ultimatum. Do not engage in any kind of manipulative or accusatory conversations with your husband. Learn to recognize this behavior and refuse to participate. It is important that you wait to address your new boundaries until you are able to do so in a calm manner. A therapist's presence (and guidance beforehand) is a good idea. A good book on this topic is *The Gaslight Effect* by Dr. Robin Stern.

If your husband does not follow the boundaries you set, you now have a choice to make. You can choose to accept that your husband is simply not ready to stop his porn use. This means letting go of the nagging, criticism, and efforts to control (which should have stopped already by this point since you have learned they don't work). If you choose to not follow through with the consequences, even though he has made it clear through his words or actions that he is not willing to stop, you are choosing to accept his behavior. This will probably require a good deal of emotional detachment on your part. It may be a marriage that looks more like you are roommates. I have not yet met a woman who has chosen this arrangement and found any kind of long-term life satisfaction in it, but it is an option. Your choices may need to include making the necessary preparations in case you need to leave. This may mean getting a job if you don't work and starting to put money aside. Separation does not mean divorce, but it can be a prelude to it. Ideally, that should *not* be the goal for separation. The purpose is to show your husband that you are unwilling to share him with pornography. Once he sees you are serious and can no longer be placated with words and half-hearted attempts that don't last, he is also more likely to take his addiction seriously. Also, getting physical space between you and him can make it easier for you to clear your mind, spend more time in prayer and God's Word, and make objective decisions about your future. A good Christian counselor can guide you through a therapeutic separation where rules are put in place for you both to follow during this time. Many men have escaped the chains of sexual addiction. Here is an important truth to be aware of. Your husband has probably tried to stop more times than he can count. He is not deriving pleasure from his lifestyle. He keeps going back, trying to fill a void that porn will never fill. Willpower is not enough. Recovery from sexual addiction is multifaceted, but includes reaching out to other men who have been there, and often requires professional help as well.

God must be the central focus in recovery. However, many men have learned the hard way, in the words of author, speaker, therapist and recovering addict, Dr. Mark Laaser, "You can't pray it away." If prayer was all we needed then we wouldn't have to have jobs or pay bills. We could just pray about it and our bank account would never run out and the bills would get paid. If prayer was enough we could eat and drink whatever we want and every check-up would reveal a clean bill of health. But God wants us to do the work, and keep doing it.

Once a man has decided to become serious about recovery from sexual addiction, there are more steps to take to help the marriage heal. After all, just because the behavior has stopped, it doesn't mean the damage that has been done will go away. Marriage counseling with a skilled sex addiction therapist is important. Couple's Intensives are a great way to get a jump start on recovery for the couple. I recommend the book *Hope and Freedom* by Milton Magness to learn more about recovery for you, your husband, and your marriage and to learn about intensives. You can also read about intensives and other issues surrounding marriage and sexual addiction on my website, [Comfort Christian Counseling](#).