

A MANTALKS GUIDE ON

How (And Why) To Quit Porn

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INTRODUCTION

This guide aims to uncover the hidden, subtle, and direct ways in which porn might be impacting your masculine core, intimate relationships, and overall well-being. Additionally, it offers proven steps to help you quit watching porn, if that's what you want.

It's important to clarify that this guide isn't intended to dictate whether you should or shouldn't watch porn. This isn't about engaging in a moral debate, as individual preferences and viewpoints on porn vary greatly.

My purpose here is to provide support by shedding light on the reasons behind your porn use and assisting those who are interested in taking a break from or quitting pornography altogether.

This guide equips you with tools not only to comprehend how porn affects the brain and body but also to facilitate the process of quitting. The information presented is essential for breaking free from the grip of porn, as many of us lack an understanding of our arousal system and how porn truly affects us.

With that foundation, let's delve into the formation of porn habits, the science behind porn's effects, and explore strategies for quitting.

After high school and into university, my porn usage continued to grow. It didn't matter if I was single, dating, or in a relationship. I couldn't get enough, and I was watching porn most days of the week.

Regardless of the scenario, most boys find porn when they're facing a lot of stress, transition, anxiety, or uncertainty in their lives, families, or school—not to mention, they're horny AF thanks to simple biology, and raging with hormones and fantasies.

This means they don't know how to deal with all those feelings. Suddenly they find pornography, and pornography becomes a kind of 'reset' button. A simple way to de-stress, get some dopamine, and feel good (temporarily).

HOW PORN HABITS GET FORMED

In my experience working with thousands of men, I've observed that almost all have established routines or rituals when it comes to pornography consumption. Some watch it first thing in the morning, others at night before bed, and various other patterns emerge. These routines are often established at a young age and may have roots in times of transition, stress, anxiety, or uncertainty.

This was the case for me. I found porn in the good ol' days of dial-up internet, watching pictures of women loading line by line, painstakingly awaiting the exciting moment when everything was revealed.

As I got older, took on more responsibility, and was having challenges at home, I turned to porn more and more. The computer was in the basement where my room was, so I had unfettered access to it pretty much whenever I wanted.

THE NERVOUS SYSTEM AND YOUR AROUSAL

Ok, so what do you need to know about your nervous system, and why should it matter when it comes to pornography or having a satisfying sex life?

Your nervous system plays a significant role in your sexual arousal, including getting and maintaining an erection, ejaculating, and more.

What many people don't realize or discuss regarding a man's sexual arousal is this: performance anxiety, non-medical erectile dysfunction, and non-medical premature ejaculation can all be byproducts of a man stuck in the stressed-out, fight-or-flight mode of his nervous system.

So, what do we need to understand? First, when discussing the nervous system, we are specifically referring to the Autonomic Nervous System (ANS) and its two main branches: the sympathetic and parasympathetic systems.

These two components are not entirely separate; they function more like a scale or seesaw, shifting from one side to the other. You can be sympathetic dominant (also known as stressed, alert, or in a fight-or-flight state) or parasympathetic dominant (calm, relaxed, or in "rest and digest" mode). Both play important roles in our day-to-day lives, and one isn't necessarily better than the other.

When you're more aroused, your sympathetic nervous system becomes more dominant, elevating your heart rate, releasing stress hormones, and even speeding up your breaths per minute.

When your parasympathetic is dominant, your heart rate returns to a normal rate, breath rate slows, and less stress chemicals are released.

Now here's the interesting part: what actually happens when you get turned on as a man, and how does your nervous system and porn enter the equation?

Well, when you get turned on and sexually aroused, what happens in your body (optimally) is that you move into a more parasympathetic dominant state. While you might be sexually excited, your body – more specifically your nervous system – is in a relaxed state. This is important because it allows for blood flow to move freely throughout your body (specifically to your penis), your mind quiets down and focuses more on sensation, your breath rate stabilizes, and your body can function properly.

The more excited or aroused you get, the more your nervous system shifts closer and closer into a sympathetic dominant state (stress state), and when you ejaculate, it tilts heavily into a sympathetic dominant state, moving back into a heavy parasympathetic dominant state after ejaculation.

Why is any of this important?

Two big reasons:

1. Most of the challenges a man has in the bedroom are a result of an overly stressed, overly taxed nervous system—that he likely doesn't know how to stabilize.
2. Porn can act as a low risk, low effort “reset” button for the nervous system—but not in a good way.

For some men, porn isn't an issue. They don't need it, want it, or use it regularly.

For other men, it's what they turn to after an argument with their girlfriend, wife, or boss, the thing they watch before bed to relax, the thing they watch when they're bored, lonely, anxious, frustrated, or sad, and don't want to feel that way any more.

For a moment, think about when you're using porn...what were you feeling just before that?

Of course the obvious answer is aroused or horny, but is that always the case? Probably not.

But is it really a big deal?

Here's the last thing I want you to know about porn before talking about how to stop watching it: porn is a supranormal experience.

What does that mean?

It means above normal. Think about eating a big Thanksgiving or holiday meal. Most people consume way more than they normally would. Doing this occasionally isn't an issue because your body is built to adapt, but doing it on a regular basis is going to cause some adverse side effects.

The same is true for porn. It's a banquet for the sexual side of your brain, especially if you're taking in multiple videos or compilation videos. Each can get registered as a "new" partner as far as your limbic system—aka the oldest, most primal part of the brain—is aware.

If your sexual diet consists exclusively or predominantly of this supranormal consumption, it can create unwanted and adverse side-effects.

In my experience, this can ultimately cause a few challenges:

1. We can become dependent on porn as a means of "downregulating" our nervous system, or just feeling more calm, relaxed, and less stressed.
2. We start needing porn to get aroused or feel sexually satisfied.
3. Because porn is low risk, we think that our normal sex lives should be just as easy, and stop putting effort into the depth, quality and quantity of sex we want in our relationship.
4. Porn can amplify your sexual performance problems.
5. It can create a dopamine dependency (aka you need that hit of porn to "feel good" or better).

How do we know this? Well there is some preliminary research and data to back it up. Lets take a look.

THE EFFECTS OF PORN

Pornography has several side effects for any man and his intimate partner.

Research has documented countless numbers of ways porn watching can affect the quality of a man's life. But for the purpose of brevity and scope of this guide, we'll focus on three of porn's biggest effects in the context of men and their relationships:

1. WEAKENED COMMITMENT TO ONE'S PARTNER

A lack of commitment to one's partner and dissatisfaction in their marriage are two ways men's porn watching and addiction impact their personal connections.

In 2013, Cosmo examined 68 leading sex therapists in the United Kingdom. Eighty-six percent thought that porn harmed their relationships, and ninety percent had observed an increase in relationship problems due to porn consumption.

In addition, most sex therapists agree that porn elevates men's expectations of sex with their spouses while diminishing women's sexual confidence. Both men and women may experience performance anxiety and dissatisfaction due to these impacts.

To further demonstrate how porn watching and addiction seriously affect romantic relationships, let's refer to a scientific publication in Guildford Journals. The study examined how higher levels of porn watching correspond to weakened relational commitment.

The results were startling!

According to that publication:

“Study 1 (n = 367) found that higher pornography consumption was related to lower commitment, and Study 2 (n = 34) replicated this finding using observational data.

In study 3 (n = 20), participants were randomly assigned to either refrain from viewing pornography or to a self-control task. Those who continued using pornography reported lower levels of commitment than control participants.

In Study 4 (n = 67), participants consuming higher levels of pornography flirted more with an extradyadic partner during an online chat. Study 5 (n = 240) found that pornography consumption was positively related to infidelity, and this association was mediated by commitment.

Overall, a consistent pattern of results was found using a variety of approaches, including cross-sectional (Study 1), observational (Study 2), experimental (Study 3), and behavioral (Studies 4 and 5) data.”

Besides being less committed to their spouses, those who use porn quickly find that they prioritize the habit over their life goals. Some claim to have become numb to most aspects of their lives and have become more concerned with getting their next “hit” than pursuing their goals.

2. MENTAL AND PHYSICAL HEALTH DEGRADATION

A sample of 559 Seattle–Tacoma Internet-using adults, was surveyed in 2006, with 78% identifying as men.

After adjusting for demographics, sexually explicit media use behavior (aka porn consumption), compared to non-users, reported greater depressive symptoms, poorer quality of life, more mental and physical-health diminished days, and lower health status.

Long story short: heavy porn use negatively impacts the overall quality of life.

3. ERECTILE AND SEXUAL DYSFUNCTION

For many men, the ramifications of pornography on erectile dysfunction and other sexual dysfunctions, including delayed ejaculation or impotence, are probably the most worrisome.

A recent study relates increased pornography consumption to an increase in erectile dysfunction and the likelihood that men may have difficulty achieving and sustaining an erection. A study of 3,267 men found that 30-40% of men who viewed 40 minutes of porn daily had erectile dysfunction, compared to 10% of men who viewed less than half an hour per week.

Seeing how destructive porn is to men's health, relationships and lives, the logical question is:

How do we move from using porn as that stress and anxiety release and move towards where we can let go of porn but still get that 'feel-good hit' we get from using pornography?

Let's explore that in the next chapter.

AN EFFECTIVE WAY TO WATCH LESS PORN OR QUIT ALTOGETHER

The first step to quitting porn is the simplest yet the hardest:

1. A DOPAMINE DETOX

Here's the deal, when you watch porn (whether you ejaculate or not) your brain releases an above average and above normal amount of dopamine. This is because (as I mentioned), porn is supranormal. To sum up what many neuroscientists have said, "dopamine is the chemical of more," which can lead us down a path of craving more porn, more stimulation, and more entertainment in order to get that hit of dopamine.

So, in order to let go of porn, going on a dopamine detox is one of the fastest ways to not only reset the nervous system, but reset your internal craving of dopamine.

You may have heard of No Fap, or No Nut which are forms of this dopamine reset. Essentially no masturbating or orgasming with the outcome of resetting your internal system.

But what does this look like? Well, it looks like making the commitment to not watch porn for 30-60 days, reducing or eliminating your social media use, and focusing your energy and attention on other activities (working out, writing, reading, or picking up a new hobby).

Now, this dopamine detox might require a few things from you.

- You might need to have an accountability partner to go through this with. Sometimes our goals are best achieved with others, and you will likely need someone to call when you're feeling the urge to watch, regardless of the commitment.
- Make a list of your top dopamine distractions (video games, social media, netflix, et) and see which ones you're going to let go of while you go through this challenge.
- Make a list of what you want to replace porn with (working out, yoga, meditation, breathwork, riding your bike, hiking, writing, hanging out with friends, working on your business, etc).
- Keep that list somewhere easily accessible so you can turn to it when you want to watch.
- Have some grace, patience and compassion for yourself.

The truth is, this detox is f*cking hard.

I know, I've done it a number of times, and failed more times than I've succeeded!

The second part to quitting porn...

2. WRITE OUT YOUR PORN RITUAL

Almost all of the men that I have worked with over the years I've had some kind of porn ritual or routine. They watch it at certain times of day, in certain rooms of the house, in certain positions, and watch certain types of pornography.

Take some time to journal about when you watch porn, what you're typically watching, where you're watching it, and dig into the ritual that you've created around pornography.

What most men don't realize is that this ritual is something that allows them to feel grounded, relaxed, calm, or is something that is potentially there to none of them out from with they're already feeling.

3. GET CLEAR ON WHAT YOU'RE EXPERIENCING BEFORE PORN

One of the main things you need to understand become aware of is what you are Feeling or experiencing before you watch porn.

As I said before, after working with hundreds and thousands of men around their pornography usage, the majority of men are almost always feeling something that they don't want to feel before they turn to pornography. Sadness, boredom, disconnection, loneliness, anger, depression, anxiety, or the general overwhelm of the pressure they feel from their lives.

Here's one of the best things that I can recommend that is both challenging but has worked wonders for many men, myself included.

Every time you want to watch pornography or feel the urge to watch porn, set a timer for 4-5 minutes, Sit with your eyes closed, tune into your breath and the sensations in your body, and ask yourself: what am I actually feeling?

Then, see what comes up. Are you really turned on? Or is your nervous system aroused (aka stressed)? Are you actually horny, or just bored and can't think of anything better to do? Maybe you're numb and want to feel something?

Regardless of what you find (and it might take a few tries to figure it out), you now have a deeper understanding of why you might want to watch porn and the purpose it is serving in your life.

4. FIND A SUBSTITUTE NERVOUS SYSTEM REGULATION TOOL

The final step is to move from medicating to meditating. To move from numbing out what you're experiencing to using tools that can more effectively help you make healthier decisions, feel calm and centered, and ultimately feel more in control of your inner world.

Grounding exercises, meditation, breathwork, cold showers, working out, Thai Chi, Martial Arts, and countless other resources are all sources of regulating your nervous system.

Again, what that porn consumption is often doing is attempting to help you to regulate your system.

So, to sustainably quit porn watching or addiction, you'll want to replace the climax you get from indulgence with something like breath work, cold showers, going for a workout, lacing up for a one-mile run, or anything else physically intensive.

Doing something that will help you decrease the stress response you probably feel in your body is what I'm pushing for here. Allowing yourself to do any of these will do a few things...

One, if you choose something like breathwork (breathwork specifically is the one that I recommend to most clients and the one that I use), what happens (depending on the breath work that you're doing) is that it takes you out of that sympathetic nervous system which is responsible for your fight, flight or freeze response (aka stress, anxiety, or anger) and it moves you into the parasympathetic nervous system.

The parasympathetic nervous system is like a brake. It's responsible for bringing us back into homeostasis. In this case, a feeling of peace, calm, evenness, balance, groundedness, etc.

So, we can use that breathwork to give us the same kind of relaxation that we would normally get from the dopamine dump of ejaculation.

These are the simple steps, but note that you're going to have to do this repeatedly. It's not going to be like, "I did this once, and I'm totally good."

I hope that by implementing the techniques outlined in this guide, you can reduce your reliance on porn as a means of regulating your nervous system and instead experience the numerous benefits it offers, such as increased self-confidence, improved relationships, sexual fulfillment, reduced stress and anxiety, and heightened overall happiness.

So, in some ways, we're shifting our ritual of allowing ourselves to regulate our body from being dependent on pornography to being independent of pornography.

Down the road, if we want to choose to watch porn, it doesn't have to have a stranglehold over us. It's not something we rely on to calm ourselves down or regulate our nervous system.

Nor is it getting in the way of our sex life and our relationships. It's something that we have authority, sovereignty, and control over.

And that's the ultimate destination I had in mind for you while writing this guide.

I hope that by applying some of the techniques in this guide, you'll be able to move away from relying on porn as a nervous system regulation tool and start enjoying the immense benefits (increased self-confidence, improved relational and sexual fulfillment/satisfaction, lower levels of stress and anxiety, increased happiness, etc.) that come when you're not using it.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR - CONNOR BEATON

Connor Beaton is the founder of ManTalks, an international men's movement focused on health, wellness, success, and fulfillment.

For almost a decade, Connor has helped men and women from all over the world grow in the realms of mental clarity, relational communication, life purpose and sexual intimacy.

After apprenticing with a pupil of Carl Jung, Connor developed a revolutionary approach to healing the Shadow – the part of our psyche that causes us to self-sabotage – by drawing from experiential and training-based methodologies like Jungian psychology, somatic therapy, along with transformative breathwork and meditative practices.

Known for his no-BS attitude and compassionate understanding of our own human limitations, Connor has organized and facilitated many transformational workshops and retreats and has shared the stage with world class speakers like Gary Vaynberchuk, Lewis Howes, Mark Groves (of @CreateTheLove), Gabrielle Bernstein, Mastin Kipp and Danielle LaPorte.

He has also spoken on stage at TEDx, taken ManTalks to over a dozen cities internationally and has been featured on platforms like Forbes, Influencive, HeForShe, The Good Men Project, UN Women, CBC, CBS, and the National Post.