

CYBERSEX

ELAINE BRADY, Ph.D., M.F.T.

If you have lost control of how much time or money you are spending online in sex-related activities you are not alone. A recent survey of 9,000 Internet users reported that 17% admitted that their online sexual behavior had gotten out of control. Like any other addiction, the need for online sexual stimulation seems to become greater and greater. More and more time is spent online- you may stay up later and later, spend more and more work time online, and become more and more isolated. Your home and work life may suffer as a result of preoccupation with your cybersex "habit," loss of sleep and an unhealthy diet. You may suffer increasing financial distress as your cybersex spending escalates.

The kind of pornography you watch may become more and more extreme, making it more difficult for you to enjoy less stimulating sexual experiences. If you are in a relationship you may begin demanding more from your partner than s/he is able or willing to provide. You may lose interest in being sexual with your partner and/or become involved in an affair. You may begin frequenting massage parlors or prostitutes. You may become promiscuous and/or have unsafe sex with strangers in unsafe places and situations. You may find yourself doing things you feel bad about but can't stop.

Getting into online pornography may get you into jail! Some links may take you into child pornography and if you download the material for any reason, you can be arrested. Police set up sting operations in some "chat rooms" to entrap people seeking underage partners. You may make plans to meet with an underage "chat friend" without even realizing it- people lie about their age!

Cybersex Addiction has even become an issue in child custody battles when one spouse fears the other is a "pervert" and will harm their child or bring home sex partners that might molest him/her. They may also be afraid a child will be exposed to and influenced by pornographic material. Other spouses are afraid the ex-partner is simply unable to provide for the child's basic needs because of excessive online activity. Parents have lost custody of their children due to these problems!

Like any other addiction, we tend to fool ourselves about the seriousness of our problem. We minimize and rationalize our behavior, but the reality is we are hurting ourselves and those around us. We have lost control and don't know how to stop. To self-assess or learn more about this problem:

Tests

[Internet Sex Screening Test \(ISST\)](#)

[Cybersex Addiction Screening Test](#)

Books:

Caught in the Net: How to Recognize the Signs of Internet Addiction and a Winning Strategy for Recovery.
Dr. Kimberly Young, John Wiley & Sons, 1998.

Hidden Dangers of the Internet: Using It Without Abusing It.
Gregory Jantz & Ann McMurray. Harold Shaw Pub., 1998.

Virtual Addiction: Help for Netheads, Cyberfreaks, and Those Who Love Them.
Dr. David Greenfield, New Harbinger Press, 1999.