Internet Addiction

Caught in the Web

Surfing the internet is convenient, fast and efficient when you're looking for information. The possibilities seem endless but the time you spend on the Internet can become unlimited and eventually addictive. This is called Internet Addiction Disorder (IAD).

Take the following quiz to find out if your use of the Internet is interfering with your social or occupational functioning. "Yes" answers indicate a need to seek an assessment of the possibility of IAD.

- Do you go on the Internet for one purpose and end up spending far more time than you'd planned?
- Does your family feel that they don't see enough of you because of your Internet use?
- Are Internet friendships more important to you than other friendships?
- Have you tried limiting your Internet use, only to fail in doing so?
- Do you use the Internet as a form of escape - to avoid responsibilities or a problem in your life?

High Stakes of IAD

Those suffering from IAD encounter family, legal, financial, and work problems. Family members may feel second to your use of the Internet. If visiting chat rooms is part of your IAD pattern - even though your presence may be innocent at first - you risk developing online relationships that can threaten the stability of your home life.

Occupational Hazards

Employees surfing the Web is the leading cause of lost work time according to a 2007 survey by Salary.com. And for employees with sexual addiction patterns, uncontrollable visits to pornographic Web sites can lead to your loss of a job, even legal entanglements or arrest. You cannot count on "Scrubber" programs erasing your history of Internet use, no matter what the slick advertising says.

First Steps, then Seek Help

- Have you thought "Should I cut back on my Internet use?" Seriously asking yourself this question indicates that you may likely suffer with IAD.

- Try tapering off and setting limits. "I will spend only ten hours a week online." Gauge your success. Count the hours and the minutes and then reduce it.

- Disrupt your routine. If you mostly use the Internet on weekends, shift to only going online during the week. Is your computer in a quiet room in the basement? Move it to another room where you will not be isolated. Does this help change your use patterns?

- Create an alternate activity. Make a conscious decision to involve yourself in another activity you enjoy. See if it interrupts your IAD patterns.

Internet Addiction Behaviors

Increased Tolerance - As time passes, you need more and more time on the Internet to maintain your initial level of excitement.

Withdrawal Symptoms - If you attempt to limit your time on the Internet, you become anxious or irritated. You may obsess and wonder what's happening on the Internet and fantasize about it. To counter these symptoms, you go online for a while and find temporary relief.

Internet Expert - The Internet replaces your hobbies. Where you once studied golf, woodworking, gardening or fishing - browsers, speakers or computer software is obsession.

Social Isolation - Less involvement with family, job or friends to use the computer.

Risk of Loss - Time on the Internet causes loss of a relationship, educational plans, and other goals.

Financial Losses

Shopping can be dangerous on the Internet if you've had compulsive shopping problems in your life, and gambling sites are especially risky. Compulsive gambling is a devastating illness and it is only a click away from your retirement or education funds, often tapped by gambling addicts to pay gambling debts.

What the EAP Can Do

If you struggled with the five tips above, the EAP can help to assess the extent of your addiction to the Internet and determine what steps you can take to stop it. The EAP will help you get to the right source of help.

EAP Tools