

HOW CAN I MANAGE COMPULSIVE SHOPPING and SPENDING ADDICTION (SHOPOHOLISM)

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What is compulsive shopping and spending?

People who "shop 'till they drop" and run their credit cards up to the limit often have a shopping addiction. They believe that if they shop they will feel better. Compulsive shopping and spending generally makes a person feel worse. It is similar to other addictive behaviors and has some of the same characteristics as problem drinking (alcoholism), gambling and overeating addictions.

Compulsive shopping or spending can be a seasonal balm for the depression, anxiety and loneliness during the December holiday season. It also can occur when a person feels depressed, lonely and angry. Shopping and spending will not assure more love, bolster self-esteem, or heal the hurts, regrets, stress, and the problems of daily living. It generally makes these feelings worse because of the increased financial debt the person has obtained from compulsive shopping.

How can you tell if you are a compulsive shopper?

Shopoholics, when they are feeling "out of sorts, shop for a " pick-me-up." They go out and buy, to get a high, or get a "rush" just like a drug or alcohol addict. Shopping addiction tends to affect more women than men. They often buy things they do not need. Holiday seasons can trigger shopping binges among those who are not compulsive the rest of the year. Many shopping addicts go on binges all year long and may be compulsive about buying certain items, such as shoes, kitchen items or clothing; some will buy anything.

Women with this compulsive disorder often have racks of clothes and possessions with the price tags still attached which have never been used. They will go to a shopping mall with the intention of buying one or two items and come home with bags and bags of purchases. In some cases Shopoholics have an emotional "black out" and do not remember even buying the articles. If their family or friends begin to complain about their purchases, they will often hide the things they buy. They are often in denial about the problem. Because they can not pay their bills their credit rating suffers, they have collection agencies attempting to get what is owed, may have legal, social and relationship problems. They sometimes attempt to hide their problem by taking on an extra job to pay for bills.

How do you control and treat this condition?

It is recommended that spending addicts seek professional counseling or a self-help group to deal with this problem. Addictive behaviors tend to come in clusters, so if you have an eating disorder, a problem with drugs or alcohol, or gambling, you may be a candidate for shopping addiction. Many communities have credit counseling centers that will also help with shopoholism.

How do I prevent shopping binges?

- Pay for purchases by cash, check, debit card.
- Make a shopping list and only buy what is on the list.
- Destroy all credit cards except one to be used for emergency only.
- Avoid discount warehouses. Allocate only a certain amount of cash to be spent if you do visit one.
- "Window shop" only after stores have closed. If you do "look" during the day, leave your wallet at home.
- Avoid phoning in catalog orders and don't watch TV shopping channels.
- If you're traveling to visit friends or relatives, have your gifts wrapped and call the project finished; people tend to make more extraneous purchases when they shop outside their own communities.
- Take a walk or exercise when the urge to shop comes on.
- If you feel out of control, you probably are. Seek counseling or a support group such as Debtors Anonymous.