

# Physical Effects of Masturbation

BY THE RECLAIM TEAM MEMBER—Dr. Bernell Christensen, PhD. - #R006



With repetition, your brain can learn to prefer sexual fantasy and masturbation to real sexual intimacy with a real person. In fact, your brain's "arousal circuitry" can become so dominantly wired for "self-sex" that physical intimacy with a real person— your spouse— can become increasingly difficult and eventually virtually impossible.

## Sexual Fantasy & Masturbation = Impotence

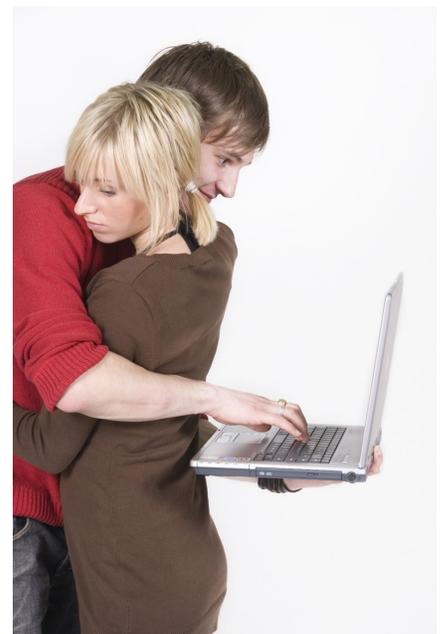
In my clinic, I often work with individuals, both men and women, who suffer from sexual impotence. A common situation among men who engage in compulsive masturbation and sexual fantasy, is they have increasing difficulty becoming aroused by their partner.

Some time back, a struggling individual left a message on one of our blogs. Masturbation and sexual fantasy were creating a major barrier to having healthy, fulfilling relationships. See if you can relate—

*This has been my reality for as long as I can remember. I was wondering if anyone else has had/does have the same problem. My masturbation addiction has progressed since the age of 10, I am now 23. Without going into all the details of my life, by the time I hit my 20's my addiction had completely taken over all aspects of my being, taking me away from enjoying almost everything else. This can also be said for my love life. It got to the stage where I'd quickly become bored sexually with new partners. Even for women that I was in love with, when it came to sex, I ended up choosing porn, fantasy and masturbation over them.*

*I'm single at the moment as you'd probably expect, stuck in a position where my addiction has resulted in me conditioning myself to only respond/get some form of sexual gratification from fantasy and masturbation, despite how empty and unfulfilling it really is. It's a sad state of affairs and I know that along side my desire to break free from my addiction, I also want to find love. I have no troubles attracting women, but I have stopped being with any because despite how much I may like them, I just no longer desire sex with a real person. I will add that having a high sex drive makes no difference if it's only directed towards fantasy and masturbation, as is my problem. Like many others out there, I'm living proof of how destructive this addiction really is. Thank you for reading and letting me share my story with you.*

You might be wondering, "How in the world can this guy be so caught up in fantasy and masturbation that he can no longer have a relationship with a real person?" If you've spent much time on the RECLAIM website, you know that we focus heavily on brain science. This individual's story is a perfect example of the power of a neuroscience principle called, "Context-Based Reinforcement."



This simply means that when we consistently repeat a specific behavior in the same environment or set of circumstances, over time that behavior becomes deeply reinforced in the brain and becomes an automatic habit. Put a "high reward" into the mix (sexual climax), and the habit can quickly turn into an addiction (a destructive behavior we keep repeating in spite of the negative consequences).

Back to our example—for 13 years, the individual turned to fantasy and masturbation (self-sex) as his primary sexual outlet. His ritual always culminated with the high reward of sexual climax. In previous articles, I've talked about the powerful brain chemical-release triggered by climax. When a certain activity is repeatedly linked to climax, that activity becomes deeply rutted and dominant in the brain—Context-Based Reinforcement. Over time, this individual built a sexual circuitry in his brain that linked sexual climax to fantasy and self-sex instead of a real human being in a long-term committed relationship. **He literally "re-wired" his brain, making healthy sexual intimacy with a partner nearly impossible.**

It's very telling when Internet porn sites that promote masturbation are filled with ads for Viagra-type drugs to treat impotence, or "erectile dysfunction." This misleading term implies that these men have a problem with their genitals, but in reality the problem is with a brain and nervous system which have learned through repeated experience that sexual arousal and climax are achieved solo—by oneself—through the use of fantasy and self-stimulation.



But erectile dysfunction is only one small part of the "male impotence" brought on by fantasy and masturbation. Far more debilitating is "intimacy impotence"—the increasing inability of the man to connect, bond, and truly be "one" with his partner—to enjoy full intimacy which is physical, emotional, and spiritual. Instead, he opts for "self-sex" in the company of cold, imaginary, fantasy images.

### Rapid surge in rates of sexual dysfunction in men under 40 years old

Nearly 6 out of 10 of 3,962 visitors seeking help on the prominent "MedHelp.org ED Forum", who mentioned their ages, were younger than 25. In that analysis of 8 years of posts and comments, among words commonly linked with erectile dysfunction, ED, "porn" appeared most frequently. (Online Doctor. A Semantic Analysis of an Erectile Dysfunction)

### Good News

The good news in all of this is that the brain is neuroplastic—it's moldable, shapeable, and changeable. Just because you have used Context-Based Reinforcement to build specific brain circuitry over time, that doesn't mean you're forever stuck or trapped. You CAN change your own brain—you can shrink unwanted sexual behavior circuitry while building new healthy sexuality circuitry. Using the right knowledge, tools, and skills, the individual in our example can get to the place where he is able to enjoy healthy sexual intimacy in a long-term committed marriage relationship. The amazing thing is, the same type of brain process that got him into this mess in the first place—Context-Based Reinforcement— can be used to get him out!

This is what the RECLAIM program is all about—helping people harness and direct the amazing powers for positive change that already exist within the remarkable human brain. The [RECLAIM Online Recovery Program](#) will guide you in the process of literally "rewiring" your brain's sexual arousal circuitry so you can regain healthy sexual intimacy with your spouse.

**SIGN UP FOR THE RECLAIM SEXUAL HEALTH ONLINE RECOVERY PROGRAM! [www.ReclaimSexualHealth.com](http://www.ReclaimSexualHealth.com)**