

# Your Brain and Masturbation

By the RECLAIM Team - #R015

In the midst of the battle with masturbation, struggling individuals don't usually stop to consider the brain science—why is masturbation so powerful, addictive, and hard to stop?

Masturbation triggers the brain into releasing a flood of internal chemicals like dopamine, endorphins, and serotonin. These natural "drugs" can give a quick, temporary escape and relief from stress, insomnia, difficult emotions, and other struggles. Masturbation rapidly evolves into a "drug of choice" for instant pleasure, self-medication, and escape.

Contrary to the false claims of popular culture, masturbation is not a healthy outlet. RECLAIM will teach you the truth about masturbation—the brain science, underlying causes, and how to break free.



## Masturbation Addiction

Our culture gives the impression that masturbation is a "healthy release," but the Catholic Church teaches that masturbation is a disordered act. If you've found yourself struggling to be rid of the habit, you know the negative impact masturbation can have on your life. People all over the world ask our RECLAIM team all kinds of questions in their struggle to understand the negative effects of masturbation.

"Is there some amount of masturbation that's OK?"

"If I don't masturbate, what can I do for relief?"

"If my spouse won't or can't have sex,  
is masturbation an acceptable alternative?"

Recent brain science research gives us new insight into this complex topic. From your brain's perspective, masturbation is literally "self-sex" which can create challenges. Here are just three of them to consider:

1. The neurochemical rush triggered by sexual experiences can turn masturbation into a convenient drug of choice for pleasure, escape, and self-medication from loneliness, boredom, insomnia, negative emotions, and the stresses of life. Over time, the brain's highly efficient powers of habit-formation turn masturbation into a chemical dependency that can become an addiction.
2. Masturbation interferes with healthy sexuality in a marriage. The same neurochemicals that enhance a relationship during marital intimacy by directing desire for a spouse create a self centered focus during masturbation. Instead of being bonded to your spouse, you are bonding yourself to yourself! Arousal templates are quickly established and over time, "self-sex" becomes your brain's preferred method for achieving sexual gratification.

3. Masturbation is contrary to God's plan for sexuality. Created in the image of God, humans are to be self-giving with love. Masturbation as an act of self-gratification, focused on lust, cheats both the individual and the spouse out of the powerful potential God built into human sexuality. Habitual masturbation can lead a person to look at all of life from a selfish and lustful point of view. It becomes isolating and causes a deep loneliness.

If you are reading this article there is a good chance you have realized that masturbation isn't bringing you the peace, happiness, fulfillment, and connection you are craving in life. The reason is probably the same as it is for many people who finally reach the place where alcohol and drugs don't bring the kind of "richness" to their lives they're longing to experience. We can compare masturbation to drugs and alcohol because the latest neuroscience and psychology research shows that it has similar effects on the brain as it releases its own powerful internal chemicals, like dopamine, norepinephrine, serotonin, and endorphins—the same "neurochemicals" triggered by substance abuse.

Just as struggling individuals can turn to drugs and alcohol to soothe feelings of anger, stress, fear, boredom, and loneliness, they can also get into the habit of using masturbation as their "drug-of-choice" to escape and self-medicate. Many people begin combining masturbation with other activities like taking a shower, laying down to sleep, sexual fantasizing, porn viewing, strip clubs, getting a massage and many more. The brain begins to "link" these activities to the tidal wave of neurochemicals released by masturbation.

This is what is known as "masturbatory conditioning." In other words, whatever you're doing while you're masturbating will become a powerful part of your masturbation ritual and over time an inseparable piece of your masturbation addiction. Think about it—when you tie a specific activity, image, emotion, thought, place or practice to sexual climax, you're forming an addiction at the highest level imaginable.

Are you interested in stopping this habit and these negative effects impacting you? Do you depend on masturbation to get to sleep, achieve climax with your spouse, or relieve stress? Have you tried to stop masturbating but can't? Has masturbation caused problems in your marriage?

Avoidance and will power may bring temporary relief from masturbation, but that approach often fails - this failure is not because the person struggling with masturbation is weak or bad. Through repetition over time, the pleasure center of your brain has learned to escape to masturbation as one of its favorite outlets for self-medication. Success can be found in working with your brain rather than fighting against it. All of the tools you need to change are already built into the very structure of your brain—what got you into this masturbating behavior can help get you out.

Learn the truth about masturbation—the brain science, underlying causes, and how to break free. The RECLAIM online recovery program can teach you how to implement the Brain Science of Change. The included faith practices and information about the Theology of the Body will help you to break free from habitual masturbation! Through the RECLAIM Online Recovery Program, you can learn how to recognize your "triggers" early—the people, situations, and emotions that drive you to seek escape through masturbation. You can use the tools provided to choose healthy pleasure outlets and literally "retrain" your brain so that masturbation ceases to be a problem in your life. You will be able to engage in healthy relationships!



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