

Staying Away from the First Edge

An expression commonly heard in SPAA: “If you don’t edge, you won’t act out.”

AA members have a saying that’s just as true for many of us Sex and Porn Addicts: “If you hang around the barbershop long enough, sooner or later, you’re going to get your hair cut.” Many of us tell ourselves that we can control our edging behavior. Sure, we say, we can stare at that attractive person on the street; one sexual fantasy in bed at night; one sex scene in an R-rated movie; one social media photo; and so on.

Maybe we got away with one look, now and then, for a while. We tried to limit ourselves to the occasional edge like an alcoholic pushing away a second drink. But the time always came when we wanted that second drink. And because the first edge didn’t do serious damage, we thought a second couldn’t hurt. We found ourselves edging more and more, hungry for another high—a longer look, a racier photo, a more explicit video, until we reached the end of the road and broke our sobriety.

Some of us repeated this cycle, again and again, despite promises to ourselves and our partners that we’d stop for good this time. Anything could trigger our desire to edge. A breakup, losing a job, or even some great news, like getting a first date—or no reason at all. The causes might’ve been different but the result was always the same. We couldn’t stop edging even if we wanted to.

Fortunately, our experience brought us to one simple solution: if we don’t give in to the first edge, we’ll never act out.

Sounds almost too simple, doesn’t it? We shake our heads now when we think about the effort we wasted trying to resist the second “drink.” The mental backflips we performed to convince ourselves that another edge wouldn’t hurt, the shame and demoralization when we were proven wrong—it was all so draining.

Don’t give in to that first edge. Simple, but not easy. The bar is there in our mind, open for business, ready to serve up a sexual image or a fantasy for us to drink in at any time. Drying out isn’t a cakewalk, either. After all, we relied on edging for years to numb our pain, soothe our wounds, and escape from reality.

During the difficult “drying out” phase, we had to face sober living. Sometimes we felt the sun on us like never before; other times, we struggled to get out of bed. We paced, pulled our hair, and wrestled with anxiety. Resentments reared up from the past. Some of us felt we couldn’t make it through another day without a bit of relief brought by edging. We feared we might be missing out on something if we didn’t edge, didn’t grab that extra look. Just one, of course.

So, how do we avoid edging? First, we stop fighting it, because our experience has taught us that we are just as powerless over edging as we were over sex and pornography. Fighting it doesn’t work for us. Instead, we admit our powerlessness over edging and ask our higher power to take it from us.

We nip the problem in the bud by immediately picking up the tools of the program when we feel the desire to edge. We pray to our higher power, call a fellow member, attend a meeting, work our Steps, or go somewhere we can’t act out. Each time we choose a contrary action, it’s easier the next time to give our desire to edge up to our higher power. It becomes our way of life.

We found that one day of edging sobriety leads to another. The more edging sobriety we have, the less we feel the desire to edge. Meaning we can now connect with our loved ones and embrace reality. We grocery shop without giving ourselves whiplash from staring at attractive shoppers. We fall asleep without fantasies keeping us awake. We breathe more freely and think more clearly and give ourselves a chance to live our best lives.

Hang in there, and don’t give in to the first edge. Many of us now have months and years of edging sobriety. We are all amazed that our higher power is doing for us what we could not do for ourselves.