

The Good, the Bad and the Ugly (Habits)

It has been said, “We are what we repeatedly do.” No one achieves recovery in a single leap, but rather many tiny steps. Daily habits, in other words. Good habits are the foundation of strong recovery. Bad habits, on the other hand, are like termites, threatening to devour the entire house a nibble at a time.

For many of us, sleep was an afterthought. Something we wouldn’t dare let stand in the way of an all-night porn-a-thon. No matter how much we needed sleep, or wanted it, we couldn’t stop acting out, sometimes until the sun came up. Our sex and porn addiction doesn’t go to bed with the rest of the world; our favorite internet sites or acting out partners are always there, ready to keep us up to all hours.

Of course, we paid a steep price for our disease the next day. We lurched to the shower or the breakfast table like the living dead, craving another hit of our favorite drug—to numb the shame, or simply because we cannot stop acting out. On the cycle went. Another night of sleep sacrificed, another day lost in a murk of exhaustion, too tired to even put up a fight.

That is until we stopped sexually acting out and started sleeping better. Sleep is one of the greatest contributing factors in our recovery. A rested mind is a strong mind, ready to wrestle the urge to sexually act out to the mat.

Sexual fantasies might pop up as we lie awake in bed. When this happens, we ask our higher power to remove the unwanted sexual thought or feeling. Many of us find it helpful to pray for the health, happiness, and prosperity of the people in our fantasies. As we pray, we relax and take it easy.

If the urge is still there, we turn our attention to anything that helps put us at ease—get up and read, journal, or brew a cup of tea. Need a friend to talk to? Call a fellow member.

For many of us, the best course of action is to have no devices in bed. Five minutes can easily become one hour of mindless scrolling on the phone. We put our phone in a drawer or, better yet, another room—and bought an old-school alarm clock, if we needed one.

We also watch out for other habits that might cause us to lose sleep and leave us too drained to take action against our disease. We try to limit coffee, cigarettes, and other stimulants that keep us up to those quiet, lonely hours when nothing and no one might stop us from jumping on a porn site.

Too much booze doesn't exactly inspire clean and sober living, either. On occasion, one drink too many has led us into pressuring our committed partner for sex or a sexual encounter with an acting out partner. For many of us, there's nothing wrong with a drink here and there, but as a general rule, we addicts can't afford to lose our inhibitions—or we may find ourselves on a porn site or in a stranger's bed.

Regular exercise may help, too. In the past, many of us told ourselves we didn't have time to work out. In some cases, we were right. It was a little tough to fit in a run when we were masturbating all day.

Now that we're sober, and clawed those lost hours back, we may try to squeeze a bit of exercise into each day. A bike ride or run before or after work. Or a 15-minute workout during a break. A long walk works, too. It might be tough to stick to our workout routine at first, but we've found that it gets easier over time.

During the day, we try to limit any "empty" hours we might want to fill with sex and porn. For instance: mornings stuck in bed, video gaming, or mindlessly scrolling on our devices. We probably don't need to tell you, but falling down the "scroll hole" often leads to anxiety, discontent, and worse.

The temptations are literally at our fingertips. We might have hopped online with the honest intention to keep up with friends and family, maybe watch that one viral video, only to find ourselves swiping through sexually suggestive images, photos of ex-partners, models, and celebrities... and it was only downhill from there.

So, how do we tell if a seemingly harmless activity or hobby—say, playing video games or browsing social media—is actually fueling our disease? We might ask ourselves the following questions: How do I feel emotionally after I engage in that activity? Am I numbed out? Does it lead to edging? Have I acted out afterward? Once I start, is it difficult to stop? And if so, is this activity really worth my serenity?

We also run these questions by our sponsor or fellow sober SPAA members. It may be difficult for us to see our destructive patterns. Or we may have forgotten the cost of our harmful behavior. By reaching out and listening to the experiences of others, we may receive helpful suggestions and clarity in navigating this hazy territory.

Gradually, we regained the countless hours we threw away to bad habits and acting out. With our newly won freedom, we picked up healthier hobbies—ones that recharge our batteries and benefit our recovery. Cooking, carpentry, reading, birding, sourdough making, learning guitar, walks with loved ones—the stuff of a well-rounded, well-lived life. We almost don't recognize the vibrant people we are today.

That said, we don't need to be productive every second of the day. As they say in AA: easy does it. Burnout from juggling family, work, and paying the bills led many of us to look for a bit of relief by sexually acting out. It might mean setting those work emails aside, taking a warm bath, or catching up with friends and family. Our goal is to find balance in life and in sobriety.

Once we decided to clean up our act, develop healthier habits and step away from our devices, the challenge was to stick with our plan. We might have had the wind at our backs for the first few weeks of our new and improved routine. But eventually life got in the way—an argument with a friend or partner, a setback at work—and we fell back on our old, self-destructive behavior.

One way to stay the course is to repeat the same positive actions for our recovery day after day. We found it helpful to build a daily routine, leaving room of course for the spur-of-the-moment trip, party, brunch—to “take it easy” and enjoy the freedom and joys a sober life offers. By ditching habits that don't work for us, and sticking with helpful ones, we give ourselves our best chance at a life that is richer, fuller, and more rewarding than we could have ever imagined.