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DEALING WITH PORN AND SEXUAL BROKENNESS

By Geordy Murphy MA, R.Psych

Disclaimer: This is not meant as a substitute for therapy but is educational

I want you to come with me on a journey to understanding your behavior, your history and working together to overcoming sexual brokenness.

There are a few things that you need to understand:

1. All behavior is conditioned and there is usually a reason for why you have engaged in using pornography.
2. Just because there may be a legitimate reason or need that has been missing and you turned to pornography does not give you an excuse to engaging in a destructive behavior.
3. Your brain has been conditioned naturally by God to respond to sexual stimuli; however, porn has put it on overdrive.
4. There is a neurobiological reason it is difficult to stop.
5. You can Change your Brain!

A few things this workbook will go through:

PART 1 Education: Understanding What is Happening in the Brain

- **Why I choose it when I don't want to?**
- **Δ FosB (DELTA FOSB) and CREB.**
- **CHART OF BRAIN AREAS ON PAGE 5**

PART 2 What to Expect when Quitting

- a. **Flatline**
- b. **Recovery**

Part 3 Action Steps:

Understanding Your Brain & What to Expect When You Quit Porn

A Client Handout (Credit to your Brain on Porn by Gary Wilson)

Part 1: What's Happening in the Brain

This Is Not a Moral Issue

Struggling with porn is **not about willpower, weakness, or character**.

It's about how the brain learns from repeated, high-stimulation experiences.

Two brain mechanisms help explain this: **ΔFosB** (DELTA FOSB) and **CREB**.

On the next page is a chart that explains what these two things do in brain areas so you can understand what is going on. Understanding can be helpful.

ΔFosB: The Habit Reinforcer

ΔFosB is a protein that builds up in the brain when a behavior is:

- highly rewarding
- repeated often
- linked to strong dopamine release

Its job is to help the brain remember:

“This is important. Make this easier to repeat.”

When ΔFosB builds up:

- urges feel automatic
- cues (stress, boredom, being alone) trigger cravings
- the behavior feels “sticky,” even when you want to stop

This is **learning**, not damage.

CREB: The Pleasure-Dimming System

CREB is another brain mechanism that **helps regulate**

balance. When dopamine spikes happen too often, CREB:

- turns down dopamine sensitivity- It is as if the Brain is saying “ we have too much here so we need to tone it down”

- An interesting fact is the dopamine is involved in many disorders such as ADHD which involves lack of concentration, impulsivity and hyperactivity, irritability.
- reduces pleasure
- increases stress and irritability

This can feel like:

Reflection : Where have you seen this in your life?

- emotional flatness
- low motivation
- “I don’t enjoy things like I used to”
- needing more stimulation to feel okay

CREB is the brain trying to **protect itself**, not punish you.

How They Work Together

- **ΔFosB** strengthens the habit and cravings
- **CREB** dulls pleasure and increases stress causing

-Desensitization

-Tolerance- You need more to get the same effect

Together, they explain why:

- urges can be strong
- satisfaction decreases
- stopping feels harder than expected

Where have you noticed desensitization?
Have you noticed frustration in your sexual relationship with your partner?

The key point: **these changes are reversible.**

SUMMARY:

ΔFosB helps the brain remember and repeat behaviors that feel rewarding, especially in habit-building areas like the basal ganglia. CREB steps in when stimulation is frequent and intense, turning down pleasure and increasing stress. Together, they explain why porn can feel hard to stop *and* less enjoyable over time and why stopping allows the brain to rebalance.

Brain Area	What It Does	How Porn Relates	
Basal Ganglia	Turns repeated behaviors into habits and routines	Repeated porn use can train this system so urges feel automatic and hard to stop.	ΔFosB builds up here , strengthening porn habits over time
Ventral Striatum	Reward & desire	Stronger activation to porn cues	ΔFosB increases sensitivity to porn cues , driving desire
Prefrontal Cortex	Self-control & decision-making	Weaker influence over urges	CREB reduces pleasure and motivation , making control harder
Dorsolateral Prefrontal cortex (DLPFC)	Focus & self-control	Weaker connection with reward systems	CREB-related stress and low motivation reduce top-down control
Caudate(part of basal ganglia)	Habits & learning	Smaller volume with high use	ΔFosB reinforces habit learning , making patterns stick
Putamen (part of basal ganglia)	Habit response	Less activation to sexual cues	ΔFosB strengthens automatic responses tied to porn
Reward Circuit	Feel pleasure & motivation	Porn activates like addictive rewards	CREB turns down dopamine sensitivity , leading to numbness
Amygdala	Processes emotion and emotional learning	Porn cues trigger strong emotional reactions	ΔFosB links emotion to cues , strengthening cravings

The reason why you find your self opening porn without dividing too is because the part of the brain called the Basal ganglia with these areas the striatum, caudate and the putamen learn to make these repeated habits into automatic responses.

This means it does not matter what your logical thinking brain is telling you, the repeated habits almost become automatic, which is why afterwards your brain lights up and your logical thinking kicks in to tell you to then feel shame.

Reflection

- **What stood out to you about how habits form?**
- **How does understanding the brain reduce shame?**
- **What surprised you most?**

Part 2: What to Expect When You Quit Porn

Quitting porn is not just a behavior change it's a **brain recalibration**.

Experiences vary, but many men notice common phases.

Phase 1: Early Withdrawal (Days–Weeks)

You may experience:

- increased urges
- irritability or restlessness
- anxiety
- trouble concentrating
- strong mental pull toward porn

This does **not** mean something is wrong.

It means Δ FosB is still active and the brain is adjusting.

Urges rise and fall like waves they peak, then pass.

Phase 2: Emotional Fluctuations (Weeks)

Some men notice:

- mood swings
- low motivation
- emotional sensitivity
- fatigue
- a sense of “flatness”

This is often CREB activity normalizing and dopamine sensitivity slowly returning.

This phase can feel discouraging, but it is **temporary**.

Phase 3: The “Flatline” (Sometimes)

Some men experience:

- low libido
- reduced sexual interest
- worry that desire is “gone”

This is called a *flatline* and is a **common, temporary reset period**.

It does **not** mean permanent sexual problems.

Phase 4: Gradual Recovery (Weeks–Months)

Over time, many men report:

- fewer and weaker urges
- clearer thinking
- improved mood
- return of sexual interest
- greater desire for real connection
- improved presence in relationships

This happens as:

- Δ FosB fades
- CREB settles
- dopamine responsiveness improves

Important Things to Remember

- Recovery is **not linear**
- Having urges does not mean failure
- Slips do not erase progress
- The brain heals through **time and consistency**
- Stress, fatigue, and loneliness increase vulnerability

This process is about **retraining**, not punishment.

- Which phase feels most intimidating?
- How does knowing withdrawal is normal change your expectations?
- What fears come up when thinking about stopping?
- How can you prepare your self for feelings of low mood, irritability, flatline sexually, lack of motivation? Have you seen this show up before? How can you respond to it differently now?

Action Steps: How to Begin Recovery

This section is about **practical change**, not perfection.

Step 1: Move From Secrecy to Structure

Porn thrives in secrecy. Recovery requires structure.

Action:

- Decide *who* knows (pastor, mentor, counselor, trusted brother)
- Decide *how* you will check in (weekly, not emotionally reactive)
- Decide *what* happens after a slip (response plan, not panic)

Accountability is not surveillance it is support.

Reflection: Who knows the full truth about my struggle?

Step 2: Identify Your Triggers (Not Just the Behavior)

Porn use is rarely about sex alone.

Common triggers/cues include:

- Stress (emotional trigger)
- loneliness
- exhaustion
- boredom
- feeling rejected or inadequate
- Door Closed in Office
- Alone in the house (situational trigger)

Action:

Ask: * What trigger shows up most often for me?

- *What was I feeling before the urge?*
- *What did porn provide in that moment—relief, escape, comfort, control?*

Recovery means meeting real needs in healthier ways.

Step 3: Reduce Access During Vulnerable States

Willpower is unreliable when the brain is stressed.

Action:

- Remove devices from private spaces at night
- Use filters or accountability software
- Create *clear boundaries* during fatigue or stress

This is wisdom, not weakness.

What is a vulnerability you could reduce access too? Create a Barrier to use

Step 4: Replace, Don't Just Remove The brain does not

like empty space.

Action:

- Replace porn with:
- physical movement
 - real connection
 - rest and sleep
 - prayer that includes honesty, not just resistance
 - purposeful engagement (service, creativity, work)

Recovery requires **new pathways**, not just restraint.

Reflection: What replacement behaviors feel realistic?

Step 5: Expect Urges and Practice Riding Them

Urges rise and fall like waves.

Action:

- Delay: wait 10 minutes
- Breathe slowly
- Remind yourself: “*This will pass.*”
- Choose a pre-planned alternative

Urges weaken when they are not fed.

Step 6: Address the Deeper Story

For many men, porn connects to:

- early exposure
- attachment wounds
- trauma
- unmet emotional needs
- shame-based identity

Action:

If porn use feels compulsive or deeply rooted, professional help matters.

Therapy is not a failure of faith; it is often a tool God uses for healing.

- truth without shame
- responsibility without condemnation
- structure without fear
- hope grounded in reality

This workbook is not a replacement for pastoral care or therapy it is a **starting point**.

Healing is possible.

The brain can change.

And no one has to walk this alone.

Reflection:

What support do I need that I've been avoiding?

What is my Deeper Story that leads me to porn use?

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