



Porn does Not Harm Our Sex Lives

No. For over a decade, pundits, legislators and campaigners have argued that viewing porn leads to erectile dysfunction (ED), relationship issues or difficulty achieving orgasm.

Associations between porn use and sexual desire, erection and ejaculation are inconsistent and limited.¹ Anxiety and other mental health issues, not porn, are the biggest indicator of medically unrelated erectile dysfunction. (And porn viewership does not appear to increase the anxiety or depression associated with erectile dysfunction.²) In women, more frequent pornography use during masturbation predicted more easily feeling arousal and less difficulty experiencing orgasm, resulting in greater pleasure.³ Romantic relationships have also shown to be neutrally or positively impacted by porn use. While masturbation frequency can negatively impact relationships, porn alone can actually increase sexual satisfaction in a relationship.⁴

- While anecdotal reports and some studies purport to show a link between rising ED rates and increased porn consumption, they fail to establish actual causation. Anxiety, not porn, is the biggest predictor of erectile dysfunction.
- Other studies, which purport to show a link between pornography viewing and disinterest in real-world partners fail to account for pre-existing relationship dissatisfaction — in other words, those in unhappy relationships may be more likely to watch porn. In fact, when couples watch porn together or use porn to expand their sexual variety, it can have a beneficial effect on their relationship.

¹ Landripet & Stulhofer, 2015

² Prause & Binnie, 2022

³ McNabey et al, 2020

⁴ Miller et al, 2019

Myth #1: Watching Porn Leads to Erectile Dysfunction

Scores of young men are seeking prescriptions for Viagra because of a mysterious plague of early onset “erectile dysfunction.” It’s no mystery. They are not able to get excited about normal, in person sex because they are numb and desensitized from all the porn. — Matt Walsh, The Daily Wire

Does porn impede sexual function?

No, porn viewership alone is not associated with sexual function.

Research shows that organically occurring physical disorders and psychological issues, such as anxiety, stress, or depression, are the primary causes of erectile dysfunction.^{5 6 7} Men with anxiety disorders are at higher risk of developing erectile dysfunction⁸ — and anxiety has significantly increased in the last 15 years,^{9 10} which may explain the reported increase in rates of erectile dysfunction. In particular, there has been a rapid increase of anxiety rates in men under fifty¹¹, which is the same demographic most likely to experience erectile dysfunction due to an underlying psychological issue.¹²

Studies and anti-porn agencies frequently cite research that draws a correlation between pornography use and erectile dysfunction or difficulty orgasming. These studies provide little evidence as to whether viewing pornography causes erectile dysfunction.

⁵ Prause & Binnie, 2022;

⁶ Velurajah et al., 2022

⁷ Sooriyamoorth & Leslie, 2023

⁸ Velurajah et al., 2022

⁹ Goodwin et al, 2020

¹⁰ KFF, 2023

¹¹ Goodwin et al, 2020

¹² Sooriyamoorth & Leslie, 2023

Myth #2: Watching porn leads to divorce or real world sexual dissatisfaction

“Statistics have shown that married couples who start watching pornography double their chances of divorcing within two years following the pornography use.” — Karolyn Webster, Liberty University

Does porn minimize desire to have sex with partners?

No, porn viewership alone is not associated with desire to sexually connect with partners.

In fact, research has shown that more time viewing sexual content was associated with greater desire for a partner.¹³ It can also contribute to expansion of sexual variety within the relationship, which increases sexual satisfaction.¹⁴ In women specifically, frequency of pornography use did not predict overall relationship satisfaction or sexual relationship satisfaction.¹⁵

Most research overlooks the likelihood that porn viewership would organically increase with relationship dissatisfaction, conflict or sexual disconnect has already occurred. Perry & Schleifer¹⁶ report association between increased pornography viewership and divorce but acknowledge their study does not account for sexual satisfaction in the marriage before pornography use increased. In other words, people who are already having relationship difficulties may watch more porn. Additionally, research often fails to separate pornography from masturbation, conflating the impact of solo masturbation with pornography viewership. When studies distinguish between masturbation and pornography, they find that more masturbation (not pornography) is related to poor relational satisfaction.¹⁷

¹³ Prause & Pfaus, 2015

¹⁴ Miller et al., 2019

¹⁵ McNabey et al., 2020

¹⁶ Perry & Schleifer, 2018

¹⁷ Perry, 2020

See also:

- [Is There a Link Between Porn Use and Relationship Satisfaction? Actually, No \(Sex & Psychology\)](#)
- [Don't blame porn for erectile dysfunction. The truth is complex \(The Guardian\)](#)
- [Four Truths About 'Porn Addiction' Myths \(The Body\)](#)

Policy suggestions:

- Increased access to therapy to help people struggling with sex-related anxiety^{18 19}
- Sex positive education that centers self-awareness, consent, and pleasure
- Support agencies and programs that center de-stigmatizing and normalizing sexual health & expression^{20 21 22}

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¹⁸ Lafortune et al., 2023

¹⁹ Sever & Vowels, 2023

²⁰ Pitts & Greene, 2020

²¹ Singh & Philpott, 2019

²² Zaneva et al., 2022

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