

WHAT IS COMPULSIVE SEXUAL AVOIDANCE (SEXUAL ANOREXIA)? - FROM SAA

Sexual anorexia is another way of describing compulsive sexual avoidance. It refers to starving oneself of sexual nurturing and affection as a means of controlling a situation, another person, or one's own sexual addiction. For some of us, acting out sexually was a symptom of our sexual anorexia. We could use our sexuality like a drug, but we were powerless over our inability to allow emotional and spiritual closeness with our sexual partner. Others of us alternated between acting out and compulsively avoiding all sexual thoughts, feelings, and behaviors.

“Some of us have experienced the avoidance of sex as addictive, in some cases choosing to identify as ‘sexual anorexics.’ In the same way that compulsive starving of oneself, or anorexia, is considered an eating disorder, avoidance of sex can be seen as an addictive sexual behavior. Some of us have found ourselves ‘shut down’ sexually in recovery, afraid of sex because of its association in our minds with our addiction or with past sexual trauma, or because of a fear of intimacy and vulnerability. Trying to control our sexuality in this way is just another symptom of our disease. The solution lies in turning our will and lives over to the care of our Higher Power, knowing that however unfamiliar we are with the challenges of healthier sexuality, we can put our trust in the God of our understanding.” (Sex Addicts Anonymous, page 72)

Upon further examination, many of us realized we were also avoidant (or anorexic) in social, emotional, and spiritual ways. We may have had difficulty leaving the house or doing other activities besides work. We deprived ourselves of nurture and care. We may have denied, repressed, suppressed, or medicated uncomfortable feelings.

Even for those of us who didn't act out with others sexually, the shame and isolation of our avoidant lifestyle became so painful that we sought help through the Twelve Steps of SAA. In recovery, we focused on getting to know and love ourselves and cultivating a closer relationship with our Higher Power. With this healing came the courage to venture out and begin connecting with others in safe and healthy ways.