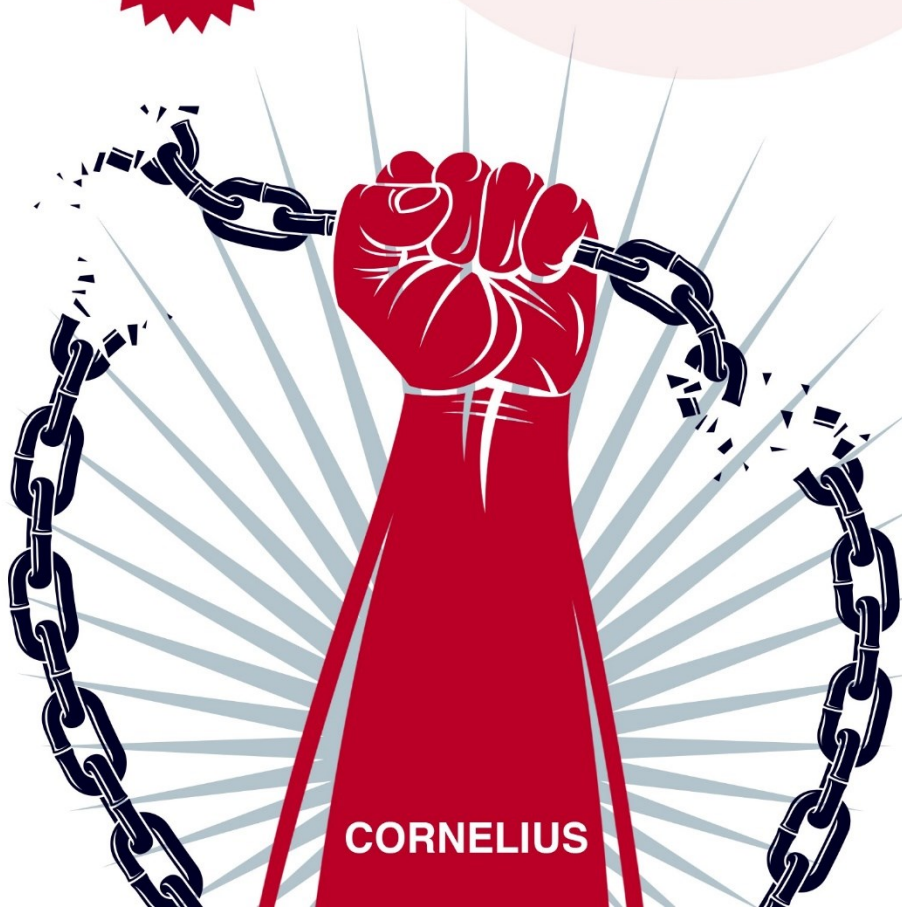


THE **NoTOPORN**

→ **Guide**

25+
Collated
Articles!

**Strategies & Tools To
Break Free**



CORNELIUS

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INTRODUCTION

Pornography is within arm's reach at all times for the vast majority of the world's population. Anonymous, on-demand, and increasingly complex, pornography has given rise to a silent pandemic of users who suffer its dire effects with no accountability. Many in the mainstream do not acknowledge the problem. Those who do are often ill-equipped to help due to ignorance of its mechanics and that which is required to live free.

Meanwhile, in recent years the world has also witnessed a momentous increase in the number of people who do not subscribe to mainstream acceptance of pornography. They have seen and experienced the damage that pornography can wreak on hearts, minds, relationships, careers, and families. And they have opted to pursue a different path in life. I believe that knowledge is power, and I trust that this guide will educate, inspire, and equip people to make healthy, informed choices about the moral direction of their lives. While temptation in the modern world is unprecedented, so are the resources to overcome it.

Pornography entangles people of all ages, worldviews, and walks of life. While my background is Christian, this guide draws from both spiritual and rational approaches. The first book lays out a case for why pornography is a problem. Only those with strong convictions are willing to forgo instant gratification. The second book, which takes up the lion's share of space, elaborates strategies and tools that empower people to live free from pornography. While it is helpful to know what works for others, the reader can tailor the content to meet their individual needs. The final section consists of an appendix of articles on emotional healing. Only those who regularly tend to their mental health can achieve lasting success.

I originally published the articles of this guide as periodic editorials on <https://noto-porn.com> and have collated and revised them for this publication. At the end of each chapter, I have included a link to the live article on the website, which contains any relevant quotes and references.ⁱ My greatest joy comes from seeing people change their lives for the better. Like all other material originating on <https://noto-porn.com>, this guide is free to download as a PDF file and is intended to be circulated at will with proper attribution. I have also published

Kindle and paperback editions at the minimum prices allowed by [Amazon](#) for those who prefer those media.

Finally, I believe that repetition is the key to mastery. It is by design that the ideas in this guide are repackaged in different ways. Once head knowledge has been acquired, the focus can shift to execution.

Until you become the kind of person who doesn't need pornography, you will never be free from it.

Book I

Reasons to Look the Other Way

Desire makes slaves out of kings, while patience makes kings out of slaves. (Al-Ghazali)



Article I

My Name Is Pornography

You can catch me on demand,
an ever-faithful friend.
Here when you need me,
anonymous and easy.
People take me on the go wherever they head,
handier am I than a *Playboy* under the bed.
I lure in children and do untold damage to
their hearts and minds,
adults and the aged I equally despise.
I deaden the human heart to the things of God,
to depression, loneliness, and misery I nod.
I prey on the vulnerable and the tired,
and leave users feeling empty and beguiled.
I make great men small,
and destroy all trace of nobility.
Inner gold and character, to me, are pure
futility.
Forget about love, romance, and family,
patience and sacrifice I count as a blasphemy.
They say the best things in life are free,

but so are the worst.
Choose wisely,
for I am a curse.
Like drugs and cancer,
I lead you to a slow death.
All who avoid me are blessed.ⁱⁱ

Article II

7 Reasons to Quit Pornography

“Pornography is heroin; it’s drugs. We got kids loose in the pharmacy. We got kids running around grabbing whatever, taking all kinds of stuff, man. And you can be damaged severely.”
(Terry Crews)

If you asked a hundred people on the street to give a reason why pornography is bad for you, you'd be met with a lot of blank stares or people who outright disagreed with the premise. Mainstream culture conditions people from a young age to think that pornography is a harmless activity, like changing one's socks or using the bathroom. (Many people harmed by pornography in their youth have grown resentful!) In addition, to see the effect of behavior on one's life requires the skill of introspection and observation, which is increasingly rare in this busy, overstimulated world. Finally, the subject of pornography is taboo, which makes open and honest conversations about it a rarity.

On the flip side, pornography supplies on-demand instant gratification. While it increases

stress in the medium- and long-term, in the short-term it reduces it. If anyone is to cease consumption, they must be persuaded of the benefits. Indeed, no one can experience the benefits of both viewing and abstaining from pornography, so everyone must choose one or the other.

This chapter elaborates seven personal detriments of pornography, to say little of the industry in general. It is my answer to the question *Why is pornography bad for you?* and *What are the benefits of quitting?* which are two sides to the same coin.

1. Pornography trains you to be self-centered and selfish

Giving and receiving is the essence of mature relationships. People get their needs and wants met and help others to do the same. Relationships, romantic and otherwise, where people think only of themselves typically have a short lifespan. That said, the sole aim of pornography is self-gratification. Whereas sexuality is relational and reciprocal, pornography is lonesome and unilateral.

Pornography is a wholly selfish act that eclipses the concerns, needs, and well-being of everyone around you. (Heath Lambert)

Almost the main work of life is to come out of ourselves, out of the little dark prison we are all born in. Masturbation is to be avoided as all things are to be avoided which retard this prison. (C.S. Lewis)

2. Pornography desensitizes you to natural beauty

Pornographic actors are chosen for their enlarged sexual features. And it is common for them to have undergone numerous operations and treatments to enhance their sexual appeal. This creates an artificial standard of beauty that is far removed from its natural counterpart. People who watch pornography consciously and unconsciously compare their current and prospective partners to what they see on screen. As a result, pornography users are harder to please and less likely to be satisfied in their relationships. Their baseline for attraction is unrealistically high, which has a detrimental effect on their love lives. It follows that when people quit porn, their appreciation of natural beauty increases.

Pornography gives us unrealistic expectations of what life is supposed to be, and certainly

what love or sex is supposed to be. (Gordon-Levitt)

Many people who regularly indulge in pornography experience challenges in real world romantic interactions. (Andrew Huberman)

3. Pornography makes it harder for you to love one man or woman

Monogamy is the global norm for relationships. Cultures around the world generally agree that relationships work best when they involve two committed people. For people in such relationships or those who have monogamous aspirations, it pays to keep in mind the relevant detriments of pornography.

Lusting over a different person on a screen every night will not prepare you to love one person the rest of your life. (Popular Wisdom)

Pornography affords access to a never-ending catalog of people doubling as sexual objects; in one viewing session, a user can see more naked people than their ancestors did in a lifetime. As soon as the user can be slightly more stimulated by someone else, they discard the subject in front of them. Pornography, it follows, is train-

ing in promiscuity. It foils the patience, contentment, and self-sacrifice inherent to monogamous relationships.

The harem [of lust] is always accessible, always subservient, calls for no sacrifices or adjustments, and can be endowed with erotic and psychological attractions, which no woman can rival. (C.S. Lewis)

4. Pornography increases your feelings of shame and isolation

Many people attest to feeling lonely and depressed after watching pornography. Indeed, this is a common side effect of turning sexuality, a naturally reciprocal act, into a solo mission. Neuroscientists say that a chemical called oxytocin is released after sexual activity.ⁱⁱⁱ Known as "the love hormone" or "cuddle chemical," oxytocin is associated with "trust, sexual arousal, and relationship building"—which are not possible in isolation.

When you escape onto the screen, you're teaching your brain that isolation is safe and that connection and socialization are not safe. (Trish Leigh)

In addition, the psychological pain of pornography is compounded by knowledge of its harms. Most people instinctively know that pornography is bad for them, and those who have been educated on the issue experience a double dose of negative emotion. It doesn't feel good to have participated in an exploitative, often criminal industry, that thrives off human trafficking. And it doesn't feel good to have incentivized free adults to make decisions that harm their lives, even if those decisions are perfectly legal.

As I like to say, *every time we act inconsistent with our values, we lose respect for ourselves, and our self-esteem decreases. Conversely, every time we act consistent with our values, we gain respect for ourselves, and our self-esteem increases.* The brain, as it were, is always keeping score. It makes us feel weak when we do things we know are bad for us, things we know we shouldn't do. And it makes us feel strong when we do things we know are good for us, things we know we should do.

It follows from this discussion that while pornography fosters mental illness, quitting it is a recipe for mental health.

*Pardon the vulgarity, but there's an expression in English, "Don't sh*t where you eat." The idea is that we should not make a mess in a place*

where we spend a lot of time because we will have to deal with that mess on an ongoing basis. Pornography, as it involves the mind, is a prime example. (NoToPorn)

5. Pornography wastes your time and energy

Time and energy are finite resources. Time and energy spent doing one thing are necessarily time and energy that can't be spent doing anything else. After using pornography, people feel less motivated to take dynamic action; normal daily activities no longer have the same appeal. Post-nut clarity in the form of shame and regret has a demoralizing effect; few people can honestly say they believe that watching pornography is good for them.

Masturbation can turn a roaring lion into a dead dog in a few seconds. (Stephen Chang)

One of the most salient effects of quitting pornography is increased productivity in other areas. Quitting frees up time and energy to do better in school or at work, learn a new skill, practice a favorite hobby—or simply to be in a more wholesome manner with no progressive agenda. Habit replacement is both a *strategy* to beat porn and an *opportunity* of quitting it. In

sum, pornography diverts resources and has no redemptive value to offset any of its downsides.

The entire time you're watching porn, you're bombarding your brain with dopamine levels equivalent to those caused by some hardcore drugs. And when presented with levels that are not natural, your brain reacts by decreasing your overall number of receptors. This is a big reason why so many men out there have mental disorders, such as social anxiety, depression, and lack of motivation. (Richard Riliy)

Oftentimes, what will happen is the [addict] only has excitement and can achieve dopamine release to the same extent doing that behavior and not other behaviors. And so they start losing interest in school. They start losing interest in relationships. They start losing interest in fitness and well-being. It depletes their life. (Andrew Huberman)

6. Pornography keeps you from evolving relationally

On July 21, 2021, I wrote the following, which hasn't aged at all:

Absent pornography and masturbation, a man's sexual urges motivate him to go out and interact

with women. Through these interactions, a man receives feedback on the qualities that women find attractive in a partner. The end result is typically a more sexually attractive man and a stronger person overall. Pornography and masturbation severely hamstring this process. Unlike women, they demand nothing and communicate nothing of value. It follows that pornography and masturbation are an enemy of personal growth.

The most loving women are the women who will test you the most. She wants you to be your fullest, most magnificent self. She won't settle for anything less. (David Deida)

One of the absolutely pathologic situations for any animal or human is to be able to access repeated dopamine surges without effort or any sort of adaptive action pursuit. (Andrew Huberman)

7. Pornography is a violation of the Second Great Commandment

You shall love your neighbor as yourself. (Jesus Christ)

To love is to will the good of the other. (St. Aquinas)

Love is silence. Lust is a roar. Love is a sacrifice. Lust always wants more. Love is giving. Lust only takes. Love is a mending of hearts. Lust only breaks. (Sebastian Temple)

We sense that the human body is a precious thing, worthy of our reverence. It is not a tool, not an object of consumption like a steak or a keg of beer, not an animate provider of pleasure. It is the outward expression of a profound mystery, that of another human being. (Anthony Esolen)

But my issue was and is with pornography is that it changes the way you think about people. People become body parts—things to be used, rather than people to be loved. (Terry Crews)

In Christian theology, lust has been classified as one of the seven deadly sins, which are "abuses or excessive versions of one's natural faculties or passions."^{iv} (*The other six are pride, greed, wrath, envy, gluttony, and sloth.*) Lust is antithetical to love and the divine nature; it fosters spiritual alienation and leads to the forfeiture of spiritual blessings.

Those who pay regard to vain idols forsake their hope of steadfast love. (Jonah 2:8)^v

For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. (1 John 2:16)

The Second Law of Pornodynamics

To cap this chapter off, I leave you with an insightful excerpt from Mary Harrington, who authored a provocative article entitled “Three Laws of Pornodynamics.”^{vi} The First Law, the “law of the conservation of libido,” asserts that the sum total of human libido is constant; the more sexual energy that gets expended on PMO,^{vii} the less that is available for interpersonal relationships. The Third Law states that every social taboo inspires an equal and opposite porn category—a fascinating observation that you can read more about somewhere else.

Finally, The Second Law, the “law of fap entropy,” is most relevant to this discussion. The Second Law colorfully encapsulates the unfortunate spiral pornography users find themselves in of needing more and more complexity to obtain an ever-decreasing stimuli:

The Second Law describes the way all pornographic stimuli lose their erotic charge over

time, meaning users of porn will over time become desensitized to erotic stimuli. One important consequence of this is that even someone who started out feeling excited by lingerie catalogues will, if given unfettered access to porn, find himself pursuing ever more baroque, extreme and degrading content as the law of fap entropy numbs him to previously exciting imagery.

Does that sound like a good deal to you?^{viii}

Article III

The Destructive Effect of Pornography on Manhood

Manhood is another one of those things that if you asked a hundred people to define, you'd probably get a hundred different answers. Some people would highlight physical traits like muscle mass, facial hair, and voice pitch. Others would underscore character traits like courage, self-reliance and respect. Individual approaches have their place, but there is a social approach to the question that I find far more insightful.

To frame the question in familiar terms—*what separates a boy from a man?* A boy, I would argue, is about himself. His feelings, hopes, and dreams monopolize his attention. If you don't believe me, you probably don't have any 6-year-olds, 9-year-olds, or 12-year-olds in your life. A man, on the other hand, is about the team. He defines his self-interest in relation to that of the group's. A team may consist of a family, or a cause or community that transcends bloodlines. And participation on one team is not exclusive of participation on another.

Being a team player is about the law of give and take. The context in which we give other people what they need (time, resources, love, etc.) is the same context in which we take what we need. That is the way the world generally works.

I'm not saying that every guy who watches pornography is a boy. Or that guys who don't are men. What I am saying is that pornography develops a selfishness characteristic of boys whose fruits carry over into other areas of life. And that quitting pornography creates space for manhood to flourish.^{ix}

Article IV

The Myth of “Sexual Needs”

Human beings have physical needs: food, water, air, and shelter. Without these, it is only a matter of time before we die or get seriously hurt. Human beings also have psychological needs. Psychologists have cited four of the most essential of these: security; self-esteem; autonomy; and connection.^x Just as physical health depends on meeting physical needs, psychological health depends on meeting psychological needs. Many people classify sex, and sexual release, as a "need." Obviously, sexual activity involves both physical and psychological processes, but is this categorization accurate or helpful?

In "Sex and Our Psychological Needs," New York Times best-selling author Mark Manson distinguishes between *needs* that we as people have, and *strategies* that we employ to fulfill them. Manson contends that sex is an example of the latter.

Sex is a strategy we use to meet our psychological needs and not a need itself... How do we

know this? Because there is no evidence that celibacy or asexuality is actually physically or psychologically unhealthy. You don't die from not having enough sex. In fact, there are many health risks because of sex. One could even argue that there are psychological and health benefits from not having sex.

Manson proceeds to enumerate benefits of sex, like procreation, recreation, emotional attachment, and health; as well as physical risk factors and drawbacks, like unwanted pregnancies, STDs, and health complications (let alone trauma and undesirable emotional attachments).

To be sure, the fact that sex is not a need does not subtract from its importance. The sex drive is a fundamental human drive, arguably second in power behind only the drive to eat. (Napoleon Hill took it a step further when he described sex as “the most powerful of human desires.”) The stakes of sex, and sexual activity, both positively and negatively, are elevated.

However, understanding that sex is a strategy to fulfill other needs, not a need itself, allows us to think outside the box, especially in situations where no healthy sexual outlet is present. As with sex, many people consciously or

subconsciously believe that they *need* pornography for the immediate release it provides despite its ruinous effects in the medium- and long-term. While a healthy sexual outlet can increase feelings of security, self-esteem, autonomy, and connection, so can other habits and activities. If we struggle to control our sexual impulses, it could be that we need to incorporate more of the latter.

It serves anyone with a pornography habit or addiction to identify which of their psychological needs are not being met. For example, in the past I could identify a lack of security, self-esteem, and connection as contributing factors. The next step is to take action to address them. This is the work of a lifetime, and no one size fits all. However, the rest of this guide is ripe with strategies to meet human needs without resorting to pornography.

In sum, we do not need pornography. Nothing bad will happen if we do not act on our sexual desires. However, if we do not get our physical and psychological needs met, then all bets are off.^{xi}

Article V

Moonshine Versus Fentanyl: An Analogy for the Protective Effect of Conscience

“There’s a general feeling, isn’t there, in your core, if you look at pornography, that this isn’t the best thing for me to do.” (Russell Brand)

Every culture uses analogies, metaphors, and figures of speech to convey truth and make it easier to remember. Imagery also enhances the appeal of abstract ideas that might otherwise be bland. Imagine a website with text and no images. It is unlikely to garner much interest no matter how great the quality of the content.

The History of Moonshine

If you live in the US, you’re probably familiar with the name. Moonshine, technically speaking, denotes strong liquor (typically 40% to 80% alcohol by volume) that was traditionally made or distributed illegally. The term gained popularity in the US during the "Era of Prohibition" (1920-1933) when alcohol was criminalized.

People who broke the law and distilled alcohol typically did so at night to avoid discovery. They were called "Moonshiners," and their product was called "Moonshine." Today, alcohol companies have adopted the term and it has become synonymous with high-proof liquor of any kind.

Moonshine is strong to the smell and bitter to the taste. The body knows that it is extremely powerful (and dangerous). Consuming enough moonshine can lead to extreme side effects, the most radical of which is death by alcohol poisoning.

The History of Fentanyl

Fentanyl, on the other hand, is a potent synthetic opioid that was developed in 1959 by Belgian Doctor Paul Janssen as a surgical analgesic (pain-killing agent), and distributed in the 1960s by his namesake Janssen Pharmaceutica. Fentanyl is ~100 times more powerful than morphine and ~50 times more powerful than heroin. In 2019, fentanyl overdose became the leading cause of death in the US for people aged 18-45, overtaking suicide.

Due to fentanyl being so cheap and powerful, many drug dealers in the US use it to lace other substances (cocaine, heroin, ecstasy, etc.). The process of lacing a drug with another sub-

stance is called "cutting." Cutting a drug increases its weight, making it more cost-efficient, and strengthens it, which can increase demand. This dynamic has led to uncertain outcomes where people don't really know what's in the street drugs they're consuming. Since a miniscule amount of fentanyl can kill you, many people who are not suicidal, and have no desire to consume a drug so strong, wind up dying due to accidental overdose.

Fentanyl is eminently dangerous precisely because there are no warning signs. Unlike with moonshine, there's no bitter smell or taste alerting the user to potential danger. What looks like an innocuous powder—or cannot be seen at all—is the very thing that kills you.

A Metaphor for the Conscience

The prudent sees danger and hides himself, but the simple go on and suffer for it. (Proverbs 22:30)

Our consciences are designed as a defense mechanism against danger. The uncomfortable feelings they produce are supposed to give us pause and prompt us to think twice in advance of an action. In this sense, consciences function

similarly to the pain of a muscle pull, the discomfort of being out in the frigid cold, and the bitter, unpleasant sensation we get when we smell or consume strong alcohol.

You violate your conscience man, you will pay—that's hell. (Jordan Peterson)

The more we ignore conscience, the weaker it gets. There are people whose consciences have become seared due to repeat disregard over time or some other serious psychological disorder. The sad truth is that these people are no safer for it. When they engage in unethical activities, they face the same consequences as everybody else. The only difference is they are caught off-guard (like fentanyl users), and are unable to adapt themselves accordingly. Consequences aren't just physical. They are mental, emotional, and spiritual, where the ravages can be equally, if not more, catastrophic.

After we watch pornography, we often want the consequences to go away as fast as possible. However, these provide valuable insight that can grow us and guide us in the future. Viewed through this lens, consequences are a blessing for which to be grateful rather than an after-effect merely to be dreaded.

Conscience, in sum, is an alarm system that serves to protect our interests and those of our neighbors. We would do well to heed its advice.^{xii}

Book II

Strategies & Tools to Break Free

Victorious warriors win first and then go to war, while defeated warriors go to war first and then seek to win. (Sun Tzu)



Article I

The Single Biggest Mistake I Made When First Trying to Quit Pornogra- phy

Some people use the term *porn addict* loosely to refer to anyone who struggles with pornography, while others reserve it for the most severe cases of addiction. I, for one, have never identified as such. I think identifying the problem is important, but identifying ourselves with the problem less so. Luckily for me—unlike many of my friends and peers—I did not get hooked on pornography at an early age. This was primarily due to a lack of easy access and the presence of some parental oversight.

However, I did struggle on-and-off with pornography for years, beginning in my early twenties. I knew it wasn't the right path for me, and I could identify early on the negative effects it had in my mind and emotions. At worse, I relapsed a few times a week. At best, I relapsed once every few months. And I regretted it every single time. In fact, looking back on my life, I

have relatively few regrets, and lust is high up on the list.

That said, I tried quitting pornography almost immediately after it became a problem. I installed filters on my phone, established accountability relationships, read books, prayed, meditated, limited screentime, and resolved "never again." I achieved some success intermittently, to be sure. However, I always felt like there was a part of me that needed an outlet—a restlessness, a compulsion, an emotional unease deeply rooted within me.

The Art of Becoming

I was prompted by some of the anti-porn literature I was consuming to work on becoming the kind of person who didn't need or want pornography instead of using bully tactics to artificially change my behavior. *This insight was transformative.* I learned that if I could change my identity, the change of behavior would come naturally. Maybe for once it wouldn't feel like I was fighting an uphill battle.

But what you have to realize is a part of who you believe you are, a part of your identity is attached to your compulsive and addictive behavior with pornography. So, if you don't change yourself first—if you don't start from

the bottom up and change who you are and who you are becoming, then the quitting aspect is never going to be sustainable. (Frank Rich)

Pornography was having a destructive effect on my life. It was separating me from the root of my problems and impairing my ability to cope. I needed to stop the behavior to keep things from getting worse. However, I realized that unless I treated the cause, and not just the symptom, I would never be free. I would continue to find myself in an endless cycle of success-relapse-success-relapse. Or, in the best case, I would simply replace pornography with another bad habit or addiction.

I was carrying a lot of trauma and tension from my past. My parents got divorced when I was a young teenager after which I was raised by my mother and didn't have much contact with my father for years. In college, while I was a good student, I suffered from chronic pain and various health issues. Fear, anger, and shame were big players in my life, whether I liked to admit it or not. Rarely at ease, my mind was constantly searching for a distraction, a remedy, an escape from the reality that something inside of me was broken.

I like to say, *how we medicate our problems says a lot about our character*. It is true that the

correlation between pain and addiction is not inevitable. However, given our fallible nature as people, we see this pattern repeated time and again. As we resolve our trauma and tension, we often find that our behavior improves naturally and effortlessly. In the meantime, we don't want to throw oil on the fire, salt on the wound, or add insult to injury. Ultimately, the best evidence for healing is that we lose all interest in the problematic drug or behavior.

A Word on Vision

People will do crazy things for causes they believe in, but for yourself you will only go so far. If my kid's in trouble, I'll run through a wall of fire, wouldn't think twice about it. And that's step number one—you have to have a vision for your future that inspires you. (Jordan Belfort)

Beyond addressing fundamental questions of identity and healing, the beneficial effect of having a vision in life to break a pornography habit or addiction cannot be overstated. Vision gives us something meaningful to pit against our desire for instant gratification. In other words, vision elevates the stakes of our choices; the more compelling our future, the greater the oppor-

tunity cost is of engaging in a bad habit or addiction today. In the case of pornography, it is constructive to analyze the specific ways in which it undermines the vision we have for our lives.

There is no favorable wind for the sailor who doesn't know where to go. (Seneca)

I like the way Canadian psychologist and public intellectual Jordan Peterson explains the importance of vision to break free from an addictive process. For him, vision is an essential element, not an optional accessory, of any winning approach. While Peterson was directly addressing a question about smartphone addiction in the following excerpt, he generalizes his answer to apply to other behaviors, like drugs, alcohol, and pornography:

Often, what people have to do to get themselves out of an addictive process is to find something better to do to replace it... It can be personal. Maybe you want to have a relationship. You want to get married. You want to have kids. You want to have a career that's meaningful. You want to have a life. You want to have an Abrahamic adventure and be the "father of nations"... And so I think part of [the solution] is

to set your sights high, and make a plan, and figure out who you could be, and see if obsessive utilization of smartphone fits into that vision of nobility.

Today, my strategy to live free from pornography entails staying connected to others, starting with the Creator. It involves intentionally dealing with trauma from my past and attending to my mental health on a regular basis. It means immersing myself daily in activities that bring me closer to where I want to be in life. Last year, I also implemented dietary changes. No excessive sugar and trash food, within reason—a resolution I have stayed true to quite nicely during the last few years. I never had a weight issue; however, I strive to become the kind of person who doesn't indulge in anything that isn't good for me. As I like to say, *excess in one area is a threat to moderation in other areas.*

Quitting pornography can be hard, especially early on in the process as our brains are first beginning to rewire. It also takes time and effort to develop strategies and tools that empower success. However, if quitting is still hard months or years later, that is likely an indication we have deeper issues in our soul duly deserving of attention.

I leave you on an uplifting note with a favorite quote of mine from self-help guru and founder of Universal Man, Mark Queppet, that captures the magnificent scope and unparalleled opportunity of quitting a pornography habit or addiction. It is excerpted from a viral video he uploaded entitled "Quitting Porn Is the Rite of Passage for the Modern Man":

When men go through this process, popularly called "reboot," they experience a huge number of positive side effects that go beyond just the realm of sexual health. They become stronger, more disciplined, more focused. They reconnect with a vitality in life. They gain strength that then enables them to go on and do other, more positive things. And it seems like once a man is able to navigate the field of porn—be able to quit porn—he's able to navigate these other vices, these other issues, and develop a lifestyle that can really help him show up as the man he wants to be.^{xiii}

Article II

An Ounce of Accountability Is Worth a Pound of Willpower

"On one side of accountability is courage, on the other is freedom." (Jean Hamilton-Ford)

Breaking a bad habit or starting a good one is preceded by a change in thinking. We will only say "no" to something that is easy and "yes" to something that is difficult when the benefits add up. However, change is not just a function of the way we think (internal processes), but also a function of our environment (external processes). A lot of people fail to quit pornography because they focus too much on thinking differently and mustering extraordinary amounts of willpower, and not enough on changing their environment.

When scientists analyze people who appear to have tremendous self-control, it turns out those individuals aren't all that different from those who are struggling. Instead, "disciplined" people are better at structuring their lives in a way

that does not require heroic willpower and self-control. In other words, they spend less time in tempting situations. (James Clear in Atomic Habits)

Establishing Accountability to Break a Pornography Habit or Addiction

Given easy, anonymous access to explicit material on the internet, a passive, think-as-you-go approach is destined to fail.

Porn is a silent vice. Unlike smoking, drinking, gambling, or doing drugs, it requires no paper trail, brokerage, supply chain, or social interaction to sustain it. (NoToPorn)

An active approach, on the other hand, requires entering into a *proactive* accountability relationship with a trusted person or persons. Under such an arrangement, the accountable is invited to check in regularly during the week and receive support in the heat of temptation, not merely to confess relapses after the fact.

I have been a part of churches and communities where solid accountability was a given. In other contexts, I had to get creative. It may take effort to find an ideal accountability partner(s), but it's a worthy priority since the success of everything else we do depends on it.

Accountability personalizes, elevates, and impresses the stakes of our choices, hence increasing the probability that we make wise ones. (NoToPorn)

Pornography Filters and Accountability Software

An active approach seeks to eliminate access to pornographic media and increase transparency. Software like Covenant Eyes (blocks explicit content), Accountable2You (sends detailed reports of internet usage to an accountability partner), and Lion (a free accountability browser with a reporting function), were designed with these goals in mind.

The market for pornography filters and accountability software is a fast-evolving space. Research the available offerings and find an arrangement that works for you. I contend that every dollar invested in accountability is money well spent; and a desire to get a good return on that investment might further motivate compliance.

The best way to use porn filters is part of a comprehensive approach to ending your behavior with porn and masturbation. They aren't a waste of time when you know that

they're not the true solution to your problem. They are simply a deterrence—a short-term deterrence. (J.K. Emezi)

The goal of reboot/recovery is to become the kind of person who doesn't need pornography and would choose wisely in any circumstance. However, human nature and the ongoing pitfalls of technology make accountability and internet filtering/reporting a universal necessity.

Obviously, as I continued to go along and get further into freedom, a level of clarity came to my mind. It was like I was seeing with new eyes. It was really because I had that accountability in place that I was able to get to that point of wanting to keep the freedom and never wanting to go back. (Brandon)

For me, what made the biggest difference was opening up to someone that I really loved and trusted. (Larry Wheels)

People typically fail to attain freedom from pornography until they establish accountability. I can testify that the times when I had solid accountability in place were my most successful,

and the times where I had flimsy accountability—or none, at all—were when I relapsed and spiraled the most.^{xiv}

Article III

7 Toxic Beliefs That Keep People From Quitting Pornography

In this chapter, I debunk seven toxic beliefs that keep people enslaved to pornography. I see these expressed all the time, overtly and covertly. I even believed some of them at one point in my life. If you believe any or a combination of the following beliefs, you will likely have a very hard time quitting porn; you might not even try. On the flip side, if you take the opposite view on all of these beliefs, you are a leg up in your pursuit of freedom.

1. I need pornography

Human beings are hard-wired to seek out and satisfy their needs. If you think you need something, you will go out of our way to get it. You will not make sacrifices to avoid something that you think is serving you or benefiting you. The truth is humans need food. Humans need love. Humans need connection. Humans do not need pornography. Pornography often masks what's really going on within us, as many people who

quit it can attest. It may feel good in the moment, like a drug, but we know it always leaves us worse than when it found us.

2. Pornography is natural

The word *natural* denotes something that is in conformity with its original condition. I don't know any human societies prior to the internet where watching other people copulate was the norm. In any case, the argument that something is natural, therefore it is good, or advisable, is flawed. Sometimes following our nature produces harmony; other times, it produces dysfunction.

3. Everyone watches pornography

"Everyone does it" is the oldest sleight of hand to avoid taking responsibility. But what basis do we have for such a sweeping statement? There are eight billion in the world, many of whom belong to diverse cultures in places of the world we have never been to. When we say "everyone watches porn," we are typically referring to ourselves, our immediate friend group, and the perception we have about others from the media. I know many people who do not have a habit of watching pornography. Anti-porn online communities boast millions of members.

At the end of the day, it doesn't matter what everyone does. People are flawed and engage in self-destructive behavior all the time. For the same reason we wouldn't jump off a bridge if our friends did, there is no rationale for a pornography habit or addiction.

4. Something bad will happen if I don't act on my sexual urges

There is the temptation for people to interpret sexual urges as warning signals that something bad will happen if they do not take action. This is especially true for people who have no history of ignoring them; they simply do not know how their bodies will react. Consumerist values are another culprit in shaping people's expectations. Self-control doesn't sell; neither does it make for good entertainment.

Well, what happened is popular culture, TV, social media, the movies, have given you the impression that whenever people have sexual urges, they do something about it. (J.K. Emezi)

Something bad will happen if we don't eat. Or if we jump into a busy intersection. Nobody ever died from not watching pornography or masturbating. On the flip side, there are numerous documented cases of people who died within a

short while of sexual activity. The only way to know what will happen if we don't act on our sexual urges is to ignore them.

One of the very basic beliefs as a human being is that you don't have to act on your sexual urges. You're not going to die. You're not going to lose your mind. Nothing bad is going to happen to you. Your body is going to react. Your mind is going to react, but after a while, it realizes that, "Oh, it's not the end of the world. I'm going to be okay. And this is going to pass." (J.K. Emezi)

5. Pornography won't negatively affect my life

Despite what we believe to be true about the physical, emotional, and spiritual harms of pornography, we often treat ourselves like the exception to the rule. This double standard enables poor choices while maintaining us in a complacent state of self-justification. In the past I illustrated this tendency in an article about Biblical Samson, whose sexual indiscipline was his downfall. Maybe Samson thought he was immune from the consequences of his actions due to his high calling or personal pride.

Can a man carry fire next to his chest and his clothes not be burned? (Proverbs 6:27)

There are many equalizers among men. For example, we all get 24 hours in a day. We all need oxygen to live. We all put our pants on one leg at a time. And we all suffer when we keep a pornography habit or addiction.

6. Only religious people need not watch pornography

One need not be a person of faith to discern right from wrong, healthy from unhealthy, resourceful from toxic. What distinguishes a person of faith is that their sexual integrity has spiritual implications, *in addition to* the physical, mental, emotional, and relational ones. Just as we can all agree that smoking is bad for human health, based on experience and observation, we can arrive at the same rational conclusion about pornography. It is also of note that the popularity of the secular anti-porn movement has skyrocketed in recent years. This belief simply does not hold water, neither philosophically nor empirically.

7. Pornography is a victimless crime

To deny that our actions profoundly affect others and vice-versa is to betray ignorance of human nature. (No man is an island!) In Book I, I expanded at length on the personal detriments of pornography. However, the damage is not limited to self. Sex trafficking is a multibillion-dollar criminal industry, the demand for which pornography fuels. *And what about consenting adults who engage in pornography due to personal hardship—shouldn't we care about them, too?* Some of us are unmoved by the moral argument against harming ourselves, but we cannot ignore the harm pornography does to our neighbors.^{xv}

Article IV

7 Offensive Weapons to Defeat

Lust

“Every battle is won before it is fought.” (Sun Tzu)

The phrase "defense wins championships" used to be one of the most common phrases uttered in American sports parlance. An explosion in offense in the NBA and NFL in recent years has prompted people to take a more balanced view of things. Today, people seem to appreciate that "offense wins championships" just as much as defense does. If pornography is our opponent, we play defense when we resist tempting sexual urges. On defense, lust is ready to strike, and we reactively adapt ourselves to neutralize its potential. On the other hand, we play offense against pornography when we are not actively being tempted. On offense, we take steps to weaken the power that lust may have over us in the future. How we respond in the heat of the moment can make or break an outcome, but

what is far more important is what we do in the days and hours leading up.

There's a saying in English, "The best defense is a good offense." It applies to sports, competition, warfare, and yes—sexual integrity. I don't always quote from Wikipedia, but I like how it breaks this saying down:

Generally, the idea is that proactivity (a strong offensive action) instead of a passive attitude will preoccupy the opposition and ultimately hinder its ability to mount an opposing counterattack, leading to a strategic advantage. ^{xvi}

If we analogize sexual integrity with sports, the heat of temptation is like game day. On game day, there are things athletes can do to increase their chances of winning. They can eat a nutritious pre-game meal, down an energy drink, stretch, focus, and get fired up. However, the team that typically wins is not the team that has the best game day routine, but the team that prepares the most *in advance*. The times in my life when I was most defensive-minded in my battle for sexual integrity are the times I suffered the most losses. The times in my life when I was the most offensive-minded are the times I experienced the most victories.

People who labor all their lives but have no purpose to direct every thought and impulse toward are wasting their time—even when hard at work. (Marcus Aurelius)

In Article I of Book II entitled “The Single Biggest Mistake I Made When First Trying to Quit Pornography,” I expanded on the utility of having a vision for our lives during the porn reboot/recovery process. In a nutshell, vision elevates the stakes of our actions and motivates good behavior. The bigger the vision, the more we have to lose. Go check that section out if you haven’t already.

In truth, anything we do to grow as people—physically, emotionally, and spiritually—is an offensive weapon against lust. In this chapter, I expand on seven such actions with a golden reputation that we can consistently put into practice to further the vision we have for our lives.

I hear guys say all the time, “Oh, I have a really hard time being consistent.” I’m like, “Bro, if that was true, you would not have an addiction. The whole premise of an addiction is consistently engaging in a behavior. You have proven that you actually can be consistent.” (Sathiya Sam)

1. Fasting

In the past, I described fasting as the "reset button for the soul" and the "atomic bomb of personal growth." In Article VII of Book II, "Fasting to Break Pornography Addiction and Control Lustful Behavior," I outline five mechanisms by which fasting works to achieve results: 1.) *Fasting trains self-control*; 2.) *Fasting trains will-power*; 3.) *Fasting retrains the way the brain views pornography*; 4.) *Fasting is an aid to processing unresolved emotions and traumas*; and 5.) *Fasting is a tool to build a stronger relationship with God*. Fasting works, and when done right, it works quickly and efficiently. When I feel that I am in an emotional or spiritual rut, fasting is one of my first resorts. Fasting is also one of my first resorts when things are going well and I want to take my personal growth to the next level.

Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? (Isaiah 58:6)

Disclaimer: I am not a doctor and do not give medical advice. You should consult your doctor before

implementing any fasting regime or dietary changes.

2. Meditation

Do you have the patience to wait till your mud settles and the water is clear? Can you remain unmoving till the right action arises by itself? (Lao Tzu)

Meditation is self-therapy. It's just that instead of paying a therapist to sit there and listen to you, you're listening to yourself. (Naval Ravikant)

Recovery specialist and founder of Rebuilt Recovery, Frank Rich, described stillness as “the key to quitting porn,” a sentiment he unpacks in the following excerpt:

It makes sense when you think about somebody that is struggling with porn addiction. They're overstimulated. They're overconsuming. Their day is either social media, pornography, work, this, that—they're always intaking, intake, input, input, consume, consume, consume. So, in fact, if you can just learn to slow down and literally do nothing, to sit there and be present with your own thoughts... it will help you quit porn.

Meditation has been described as "the art of doing nothing," or "the art of masterful inactivity." Meditation happens when we intentionally quiet our souls. It is a tool to de-stimulate. When we are overstimulated, emotions backlog and our bodies experience discomfort. This discomfort drives the impulse to escape via pornography.

The following quote from French intellectual Blaise Pascal is thought-provoking and telling. Could it also apply to a pornography habit or addiction?

All of humanity's problems stem from man's inability to sit quietly in a room alone. (Blaise Pascal)

3. Diet

The food and drink we consume, both in terms of quality and quantity, impact our health, our stress levels, our emotions, our self-esteem, and our interactions with people. The evidence for the effects of diet on various markers of human well-being is abundantly clear in the scientific literature. As for the spiritually-minded, they have every reason to apply themselves. In the Hebrew Bible, God gave the Jews a large number of dietary laws to follow partially because

diet was and is an important input in human outcomes. In addition, diet is a discipline that requires self-control and moderation. How we manage it may influence our consumptive habits in other areas.

4. Gratitude

Thankfulness is the opposite of lust because the thankful heart has stopped prowling around for everything it doesn't have and is overwhelmed with appreciation for all the good things it already possesses. (Heath Lambert)

Pornography consumption stems from personal discontentment and self-centeredness to which gratitude is diametrically opposed. Gratitude is soul satisfaction that boils over in the mind and demands to be expressed. The object of gratitude is always someone, or something, other than the self. Gratitude for family and friends who make life worthwhile. Gratitude for nature, education, health, security, and material objects that fulfill needs and enrich lives. And gratitude to God for love, grace, and the gift of life. The more the mind overflows with gratitude, the less it longs for the forbidden.

One of the fastest ways for us to rewire those neural pathways, to reset that dopamine response... is the practice of daily gratitude. What ends up happening when you show or express gratitude on a daily basis, that reward center, that pleasure center, that dopamine response—it fires in the same exact way as it does when you're getting that external stimulus. (Frank Rich)

While no special tools are necessary to practice gratitude, a print or online journal can help foster a routine practice. For another virtue that militates against temptation, see Book II, Article X entitled “Humility Is an Antidote to Lust.”

5. Physical Activity

The problem of people who struggle with pornography is rarely that their testosterone is too high. In fact, it's often the opposite—they're too stressed out. They lack healthy stimulation in their lives and find it hard to decompress. One of the fastest ways to relieve stress is via physical activity. I like to say, *many times we think we need a sexual release, when, in reality, we really just need a physical or emotional one.* An addict's problem isn't their need for stimulation; it's how they get their fix. To its credit,

physical activity promotes positive emotion and clarity of mind without a laundry list of side effects. It is also a tool to develop discipline, which is necessary to live a porn-free life.

6. Social Relationships

Addiction thrives in isolation. If you have ever struggled with pornography, you already know this to be true. When we can't experience real connection, we often settle for cheap counterfeits. The older we get, the more discretion we have over how we spend our time, and who we spend our time with. Many of us prioritize education, work, and hobbies above relationships with people. This is a big reason why our mental health suffers despite any success we might experience in these domains. Human beings are social creatures that need to be around their own every day in order to thrive. In solitary confinement, inmates notoriously go insane. The bottom line is that when we isolate ourselves, we set ourselves up for failure in life. I'm speaking from a place of experience.

Whoever isolates himself seeks his own desire; he breaks out against all sound judgment. (Proverbs 18:1)

7. Spiritual Walk

By the fear of the Lord one turns away from evil. (Proverbs 16:6)

If you are a spiritual person, then this might as well be #1 on the list. In Christianity, the most important attribute of God is holiness. Holiness implies supremacy, but it also implies moral integrity. They say you become what you behold. It follows that the more we worship God, the purer our thoughts and actions will be.

When you are in the presence of God, it is easier to do right than to do wrong. (Steve Gallagher)^{xvii}

Article V

5 Defensive Strategies to Defeat Lust

The best defense is, in fact, a good offense. However, no matter how far out in front we get, no one's environment is ever so sound, or character so strong, so as not to experience temptation. (Jesus Christ himself was tempted!) In this chapter, I enumerate five fast-acting defensive strategies that we can execute in the heat of the moment, that is, *after* temptation has already struck. If temptation is the game, then the objective is to overcome by not capitulating. While most of these strategies are universal, everyone's drawing board will look a little different.

1. Reach out to an Accountability Partner

Iron sharpens iron, as one man sharpens another (Proverbs 27:17)

Accountability is a surefire way to achieve progress in an area. It's true of the gym, diet, school, work, relationships, and it's true of sexual integrity. If we could have done it on our

own, we wouldn't have a problem to begin with. Having at least one trusted person—or a small group of people—can be the difference between failure and success.

The best accountability is *proactive*, not reactive. Being proactive means taking action in advance of an outcome in order to improve it. In the case of sexual integrity, that means letting our accountability partner know when we're feeling tempted so that they can support us, advise us, pray with us—or simply supply the light and presence we need to choose wisely in the moment. Being reactive, on the other hand, consists of only confessing our mistakes and relapses after the fact. It is the lowest and least effective form of accountability.

2. Disconnect From the Internet

You live in one of the most lustful and exposed ages in history. Not because men have gotten worse, but because the opportunities have gotten greater. The internet, media—everything. So you're bombarded by every sort of image and every sort of lustful thing. (Paul Washer)

A lot of the temptation we face is enabled by the internet. It follows that taking a leave from cy-

berspace can stop temptation in its tracks. Practically, this may mean putting our phones in airplane mode, leaving our phones unattended in a different room, or simply ceasing to surf the web, scroll on social media, and do legitimate computer work that can be done another time. There are certain days of the week, and times of day, when we are more prone to temptation. Disconnecting from the internet at the earliest onset of a "temptation cycle" is a wise course of action.

3. Go to a Safe Location

While some people are brazen enough to watch pornography in public, most do so in the privacy of their own homes. This means that time spent inside—at home and away from people—is prime time for temptation. It follows that leaving home to go to the park, visit a friend's house, or eat out can shift our focus away from the object of temptation to a neutral or wholesome stimulus. There are other times when *returning* home from somewhere out can have the same effect. For example, if we are at a friend's house, party, or event where we feel compromised. In sum, we "flee" temptation whenever we exit a space, cyber or physical, that enables it.

4. Engage in Physical Activity

Physical activity is an offensive strategy to grow as a person, when time is not of the essence. It is also a defensive strategy to escape in the heat of temptation, when time is critical. Physical activity rapidly transforms our mental state. There is a saying, "Motion creates emotion," which motivational speaker Tony Robbins made famous. Sometimes, we cannot will our way out of how we are thinking or feeling. That is where movement, in the form of physical activity, can come to the rescue.

5. Practice Spiritual Disciplines

Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. (Matthew 26:41)

No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it. (1 Corinthians 10:13)

While it is easy to lose focus of God amidst the business of life, prayer restores God-consciousness and reconnects the believer with their deepest convictions about the world. In the

Lord's prayer, Jesus said to pray, "And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil" (Matthew 6:13). As a second example, Christ, when he was tempted by the devil, repeatedly quoted the Word of God. The Word of God, it follows, is arguably the best weapon a believer has to resist temptation.

A Metaphor for Evil Thoughts (Desert Wisdom)

Finally, I leave you with a favorite quote of mine from *Desert Wisdom* by Henri J.M. Nouwen and Yoshi Nomura.^{xviii} *Desert Wisdom* is a collection of sayings of the early church fathers and monastics. It is full of simple practical wisdom on questions of faith, relationships, and temptation:

A brother came to Abba Poemen and said: Abba, a variety of thoughts are coming into my mind and I am in danger. The old man took him out in the air and said: Open your robe and take hold of the wind. And he answered: No, I cannot do it. The old man said: If you cannot do it, neither can you prevent those thoughts from coming in. But what you should do is to stand firm against them. (Desert Fathers, p. 78)^{xix}

Article VI

Managing Emotional Triggers in the Porn Reboot/Recovery Process (Stress, Loneliness, and Boredom)

“My freedom didn't come from getting rid of porn, even though that was a good thing, but it came from learning how to handle rejection.”
(Jason Mahr)

Bad habits are fueled by emotional triggers, especially in cases where they conflict with individual values. Stress, loneliness, and boredom are the most common emotional triggers for pornography. Stress, loneliness, and boredom are uncomfortable, and human beings are wired to seek relief from emotional discomfort. In moments of weakness, they can drive us to act in self-destructive (or other-destructive) ways. People seeking freedom from a pornography habit or addiction do well by monitoring their emotional states and taking remedial action, as needed, during the reboot/recovery process.

Learning how to manage emotional stress in the form of anger, fear, anxiety, loneliness, boredom, and depression starts by planning ahead. If I know I have a long day ahead of me, it serves me to schedule in breaks, exercise, recreation, or social activity with friends. This is an example of being *proactive*. How we *react* to emotional states in the moment is also of the essence. Life is dynamic; we don't always know how we're going to feel, let alone we cannot predict various contingencies or "change of plans" that happen every day. When I notice the onset of stress, it serves me to slow down, to spend time outside or with friends at the earliest opportunity. It serves me to take a break from that project I was hoping to get ahead on.

Managing emotional triggers is about being intentional rather than letting things take shape with no deliberate effort. The sheer presence of a porn habit/addiction is evidence that autopilot will not yield the desired results.

Stress in the Porn Reboot/Recovery Process

Addiction is an attempt to escape suffering temporarily. (Gabor Maté)

Stress, according to Elizabeth Scott, PhD, can be defined as "any type of change that causes physical, emotional, or psychological strain. Stress is your body's response to anything that requires attention or action."^{xx} Not all stress is bad. Working out, for example, is a kind of stress that makes us stronger when done in moderation. The same is true of fasting. In addition, a controlled measure of emotional stress enables us to grow psychologically. Imagine if we never experienced any conflict. Our ability to process future conflict would be severely impaired, and we might crumble at the slightest adversity.

That said, the stress that grows and develops is temporary in nature. The subject experiences a stressor, like fear, they process it, and they become stronger for it. However, many of us are chronically stressed out due to past traumas, current triggers, and future anxiety. Chronic stress, unlike its temporary counterpart, can do a number on physical and mental health. As per above, it is necessary to be *proactive* (planning ahead) and *reactive* (adapting to the moment) in order to deal with stress in a constructive way. When we are intentional about stress management, we relieve stress in a manner consistent with our values and consistent with our medium and long-term interests.

Loneliness in the Porn Reboot/Recovery Process

Loneliness is inner emptiness. Solitude is inner fulfillment. (Richard Foster)

According to Kendra Cherry, MSED, loneliness is “a state of mind linked to wanting human contact but feeling alone.”^{xxi} Some people suffer from chronic loneliness, whereas most people feel lonely at least some of the time. Loneliness isn’t reserved exclusively for people who have few friends or social relationships. Loneliness is a *feeling*, not an objective reality. Just as it is possible to feel lonely in a crowd, it is possible to feel lonely when surrounded by family and friends. On the flip side, there are those who find fulfillment in solitude.

You leave me alone for a day, it’ll be like the happiest day I’ve had in a while. And that is a superpower that I think everybody can obtain. (Naval Ravikant)

Loneliness is a form of stress, and like all stress, it is uncomfortable. Lonely people are more likely to overeat, consume drugs, and watch

pornography. The lonely mind craves connection but will often settle for anything that makes it feel better.

Managing feelings of loneliness is critical during the porn reboot/recovery process. Choosing to spend time with our friends over our phones and prioritizing relationships over solitary hobbies, projects, and pursuits can go a long way. If we aren't getting enough out of our relationships, we can start by putting in more effort.

Boredom in the Porn Reboot/Recovery Process

There is an old saying, "Idle hands are the devil's playground." Boredom happens when we do not feel stimulated by our environment. According to Art Markman, PhD, from Psychology Today, "Boredom is unpleasant. It can make you angry and frustrated. It can also influence your behavior in negative ways. Bored people are prone to overeat, for example."^{xxii} Boredom, like loneliness, is associated with stress and demands to be relieved.

School and work are common triggers of boredom, which is unfortunate because they make up a great deal of life. When we study a subject we enjoy and work a job we don't loathe,

we feel stimulated. However, it isn't always possible to make major changes in these areas, certainly not right away. While we figure these things out in the long term, we can tend to our emotional states on a daily basis.

When the iPhone came along, boredom was dead. I would never be bored again. And it's a disease. It's actually the road to misery. (Naval Ravikant)

Remember, like stress, not all boredom is bad. Boredom creates space to process emotions and can be a prompt for creativity. In fact, a lack of boredom, like a lack of healthy stress, is detrimental to personal growth. As in other areas of life, moderation here is key.

In conclusion, many times we feel that we need sexual stimulation or a sexual outlet to relieve stress, when we really just need a physical or emotional one. Working out, stretching, spending time in nature, and hanging out with friends are things we can all do more of every day. These activities are naturally cathartic and can resolve much of the tension that drives us to view pornography and engage in other impulsive behaviors despite their known negative effects.^{xxiii}

Article VII

Fasting to Break Pornography Addiction and Control Lustful Behavior (5 Powerful Benefits)

In this chapter, I delve into a discipline that has helped many to achieve progress in the area of sexual integrity. The ancients fasted out of necessity, or to cure illnesses (e.g. 5th-century-BC Hippocrates). Followers of major world religions have fasted for thousands of years. For example, Christians, Jews, and Muslims have scheduled fast days throughout the year. Heroes of the Bible, like Moses, Elijah, Daniel, Esther, and Jesus, fasted. Jesus, in Matthew 6, said to his disciples "*When* you fast," not *if*.

A dominant ideology of the 21st century is *consumerism*. The thought of skipping a meal is blasphemous to many despite the respected status of fasting in the history of human evolution, medicine, and spirituality. Having said that, there are countless testimonies online by people who have fasted and lived to speak about the various physical, mental, and spiritual benefits they experienced.

For some context, I have been fasting on and off for years. I used to practice intermittent fasting as a lifestyle for the health benefits. I've completed numerous 3-day fasts to date. I've done other fasts of differing lengths, with and without water or calories, on a semi-regular basis.

Without further ado, I elaborate five of the most powerful benefits of fasting for people trying to break free from a pornography habit or addiction.

Disclaimer: I am not a doctor and do not give medical advice. Do your research and consult a professional before doing a fast of any length.

1. Fasting trains self-control

A man without self-control is like a city broken into and left without walls. (Proverbs 25:28)

Fasting develops the skill of delayed gratification. Fasting says that just because we have an impulse, that doesn't mean we have to act on it now—and in some cases, ever. Fasting increases our capacity to refrain from acting on bad impulses—like lusting, stealing, and violence—and to delay acting on good impulses—like eating, drinking, and having sex—until when the time

is right. If self-control sounds bland, keep in mind that a lack of it can literally ruin our lives.

2. Fasting trains willpower

Strength does not come from physical capacity. It comes from an indomitable will. (Mahatma Gandhi)

The best way to think of willpower is not as some shapeless behavioral trait but as a sort of psychic muscle, one that can atrophy or grow stronger depending on how it's used. (Jeffrey Kluger)

It takes willpower to achieve anything in life. A goal as worthy as freedom from pornography is certainly no exception. To be sure, willpower isn't the be-all and end-all. It is an axiom that people are largely products of their environments. However, environments can be changed, and willpower is needed to do so. As I like to say, *the man makes the environment, and the environment makes the man*. Indeed, willpower is a great asset, and fasting is a tool to strengthen it.

3. Fasting retrains the way the brain views pornography

The brain seeks pleasure and avoids pain. If you have a strong impulse to view pornography, that

is because your brain associates it with pleasure. Fasting, especially after a relapse, can retrain the brain to associate pornography with pain instead of pleasure. It works like this: During a fast, we experience pain in the form of discomfort. In this discomfort, as we meditate on the consequences of our actions, the association between pornography and pain strengthens. While fasting in this manner, we are effectively saying to our brains, “Remember that pleasure? This is what pornography *really* feels like.”

For more on this idea, see Book II, Article VIII entitled “How to Bounce Back From a Relapse (Spiritual + Secular Approaches).” In it, I break down *penance* and its secular counterpart, *changing the reward*, which are general strategies to retrain the brain after a relapse; they encompass specific actions, of which fasting is an example.

4. Fasting is an aid to processing unresolved emotions and traumas

Not all addictions are rooted in abuse or trauma, but I do believe they can all be traced to painful experience. (Gabor Maté)

The fact is that everyone medicates emotions with food, even people who maintain a healthy

weight. Food is emotionally gratifying, and there is nothing wrong with that. However, sometimes it pays to give up feeling good now to feel even better in the future. When we fast, we come face to face with our fears, anger, and sadness. When we fast, the emotional garbage of our souls gets taken out. Fasting, which has therapeutic potential, should never be confused with starvation, which is psychologically devastating:

Fasting is completely different from starvation in one crucial way: control. Starvation is the involuntary abstention from eating... Fasting, on the other hand, is the voluntary abstention from eating for spiritual, health, or other reasons. Food is readily available, but you choose not to eat it. No matter what your reason for abstaining, the fact that fasting is voluntary is a critical distinction. (Jason Fung)

5. Fasting is a tool to build a stronger relationship with God

To the spiritually-minded, fasting is a double-edged sword. Not only do we reap the secular, universal benefits of fasting, but we can use it as a means to grow closer to God. As I mentioned in the intro, the great prophets of the Bible

fasted, including Jesus. Keep in mind that Jesus was fasting when he overcame temptation by the devil. And believers throughout history have followed in his footsteps. When we fast, we obey God. We create space in our hearts, minds, and emotions for God to intervene. And, in my experience, he often does.

Note that fasting is not simply a mechanical exercise. The state of our hearts will influence results. This is why people are routinely advised to prepare their hearts in advance. I personally have found that shorter fasts I undertake with love and humility on my mind are more beneficial than longer ones I undertake with a spirit of fear or self-righteousness.

Behold, you fast only to quarrel and to fight and to hit with a wicked fist. Fasting like yours this day will not make your voice to be heard on high. (Isaiah 58:4)

In sum, I would say that fasting is a cheat code, but cheating is easy, whereas fasting is a discipline that requires effort. As a general rule in life, if we are willing to give effort in an area, we will see positive change, whether it takes place overnight or after a period of persistence.^{xxiv}

Article VIII

How to Bounce Back From a Relapse (Spiritual + Secular Approaches)

“Our greatest glory is not in never falling, but in rising every time we fall.” (Oliver Goldsmith)

Relapse, or moral failure, is not a good time. There's the pain of conscience reminding us we did something wrong. There's the pain of having wasted time and energy. There's the pain of knowing we took an action that was not in our medium or long-term self-interest. There's the pain of the effect our action might have on the people we love. If we are spiritual, there is the pain of having grieved the heart of God (Ephesians 4:30). I did what I did. The question after the fact is always, *what do I do now?*

If you just relapsed, listen up. Stop feeling shameful. It makes you want to do one thing: isolate. Studies show that when you isolate, you become extremely stressed out. That stress builds and builds and makes you want to do

one thing again, go and relapse. Relapse, shame, isolation, stress, relapse, all the way to your inevitable hell. (Josh Hudson)

Confession

You are only as strong as you are honest. (Craig Groeschel)

I learned early on in my faith that I healed as I revealed. (Kirk Franklin)

For a believer, confession is the first step in the process of restoration. In the Lord's prayer, Jesus said to pray, "And forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who have sinned against us." 1 John 1:9 says, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." There is also utility in confessing our sins to someone we trust, like an accountability partner. James 5:16 says, "Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, *that you may be healed.*" Indeed, the healing power of confession works in mysterious ways.

We confess to God for forgiveness, but James says we confess to people for healing. (Craig Groeschel)

That said, the mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual effects of lust don't always disappear immediately after confession. Besides letting time pass, there are additional steps we can take to accelerate healing in our hearts, minds, and relationships.

Meditation

The only real mistake is the one from which we learn nothing. (Henry Ford)

Failures are finger posts on the road to achievement. (C.S. Lewis)

Meditation consists of stopping and thinking about what happened—and what, specifically, went wrong. In meditation, we become intimately acquainted with the nature and consequences of our mistakes, which makes us less likely to repeat them in the future. We gain insight into our characters, motivations, and weaknesses, which can inform our battle plans moving forward.

For example, if I relapsed after a late night of scrolling, I may make a habit of exiting the grid during off-peak hours, a kind of intermittent fasting from technology. Or, if I relapsed while studying or working under stress, I may limit myself to shorter sessions, seek out social

environments, and learn to step away if the urge gets too strong.

When we study our relapses, we learn from history and glean wisdom from our biographies. On the other hand, when we do not stop to reflect on our mistakes, chaos and confusion reign. Chaos and confusion, rather than leading us to make better decisions in the future, tend to send us on a downward spiral.

Penance

For you [God] will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise. (Psalm 51:16-17)

Penance: voluntary self-punishment inflicted as an outward expression of repentance for having done wrong. (The Pocket Oxford Dictionary of Current English)^{xxv}

In the ancient world, there were a number of penance rituals that people could perform after making a mistake (e.g. fasting, prayer, pilgrimage, charity, etc.) The Hebrews, for a famous example, had an elaborate sacrifice system consisting of mandatory and voluntary offerings. The purpose of penance, as I understand,

is to deepen and accelerate the process of restoration. Penance and its secular counterpart, *changing the reward*, which I elaborate below, retrain the brain to view the problematic behavior through the lens of its consequences—that is, as painful rather than pleasurable.

Hey brain, remember that pleasure? This pain is what pornography really feels like. (Book II, Article VII on “Fasting to Break Pornography Addiction and Control Lustful Behavior”)

While penance is not a term we hear very often in the modern world, the mechanics of disciplining ourselves after we screw up function quite similarly.

Note: To my mind, punishment breaks down, whereas discipline builds up. I like to think of penance in terms of *restorative action*. While forgiveness comes from confession, restorative action can retrain the way our brains perceive the offensive act. Taking restorative action after relapsing, with a heart of self-love, shows that we take the issue seriously *and* value our own healing. For example, I have found that fasting after falling into temptation is effective at getting me back on track, as well as praying and meditating with intention.

Changing the Reward

There is a concept similar to penance in secular psychology that neuroscientist Trish Leigh refers to as "changing the reward." The idea of "changing the reward" is to transform the positive association our brain has with the problematic behavior to a negative one, as alluded to above. Dr. Leigh says, for example, that "[after watching pornography], we may consider revoking some privilege, like going out to our favorite spot, or donating to a political candidate we don't like. Something negative [without going overboard], that can get us back on the right track."^{xxvi} The aim, as iterated above, is that our brains will come to identify the undesirable behavior with negative consequences such that it stops motivating us to engage in it in the future.

A Word on Streaks

Day one after a relapse is a pivotal crossroads at which temptation is greatest and past progress hangs in the balance. Day one determines whether our failure was a hiccup in the road or if we crash and burn off the side of the mountain. Indeed, for a few days we are especially vulnerable and must be doubly vigilant to avoid binging and wiping out hard-earned gains.

The truth is that personal progress is rarely linear; rather, it is a series of ups and downs, with higher peaks and valleys and greater rises than falls. When we bounce back from a relapse, we soldier on a path of steady, if fitful, progress. On the other hand, when we yield to defeatist impulses, we run the risk of hitting rock bottom and truly having to start over again.

Instead of counting the days of a porn-free streak, consider focusing on more qualitative measures, like discipline, relationships, and emotional health. While it is possible to drive up a porn-free streak through brute force or dumb luck, the latter will eventually prevail and are the surest indicators of long-term success.

Failure should be our teacher, not our undertaker. Failure is delay, not defeat. It is a temporary detour, not a dead end. (Denis Waitley)

In sum, while failure is disappointing, it presents an opportunity to come back wiser and stronger. By confessing, meditating, practicing penance, and changing the reward after a relapse, we accelerate healing and catalyze personal growth. Armed with new knowledge and emotional strength, the restored is much better equipped to avoid mistakes in the future.^{xxvii}

Article IX

Integrity Tip: Charge Your Phone in Another Room

The last thing most people do before bed is check their phones. It's also not a coincidence that late at night is the time most people watch pornography. You're alone. You're tired. And the possibilities of the internet are endless. If change is what we're after, then we need a strategy tailored to the times we are most vulnerable to temptation.

Why resist a temptation in the future if you have the power to eliminate it today? (Craig Groeschel)

I had a housemate in college who had the habit of charging his phone in the kitchen at night. I thought it was a little odd. Eric was the first person I had ever seen do that. For me, scrolling was my favorite thing to do before falling asleep. And I used my phone as an alarm clock. But when Eric explained to me how vital this step was for him to live a porn-free life, it made perfect sense. Simply by moving the place he

charged his phone—an action that took maybe 30 seconds— he was able to make progress in an important area. When you add that to the other remedial measures he took, Eric went from being an almost daily consumer of pornography to someone who lived true to his values and whose mind was in a much healthier place.

The greatest victory is that which requires no battle. (Sun Tzu)^{xxviii}

Article X

Humility is an Antidote to Lust

In *Finally Free: Fighting for Purity With the Power of Grace*,^{xxix} the author Heath Lambert makes a provocative statement: "The root problem of men who look at porn is not neediness—it is arrogance." That doesn't sound very empathetic. *What about my trauma, loneliness, and boredom? What about my need for a sexual outlet? What about unprecedented temptation made possible by the internet?* Historically, theologians agree that pride is a master vice that enables all other vices. Absent pride, there is no moral compromise, regardless of whatever pain and temptation might be present. It is generally true that how people medicate pain and navigate circumstances is indicative of their character.

So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. (Matthew 7:17)

Pride manifests as an open disregard for God. When we disobey God, we are effectively saying,

"I couldn't care less about you." Pride also manifests as an open disregard for others. When we act in a manner that impairs our ability to love others, we are effectively saying, "I couldn't care less about others." Our worst moments do not define us. There's more to the story. But if we struggle in an area, it is instructive to identify the underlying root of pride.

Finally, pride creates the illusion that we are immune from the consequences of our actions. In extreme cases, it leads people to believe that they can get away with murder. When pride is at play, people will make the lowest-probability decisions expecting the highest-probability outcomes. Humility, on the other hand, brings us in line with reality and motivates wise decision-making.

In advanced cases, pride shows up as the belief that the ordinary rules of life don't apply to a person as great as me... Paul speaks to this as well: "Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap." (Gal 6:7-8) (Jacob Hudgins)

The word *pride* may conjure up images of a loudmouth, blowhard, or showoff. However,

pride can just as well manifest as a quiet, anonymous decision to do wrong when no one is looking.

Humility only works when we practice it. Praising humility, studying it, and decrying the lack of it are not the same as doing. (Jacob Hudgins)

The million-dollar question is, *how does one grow in humility?*

I read an excellent book on this topic by a pastor based out of Texas named Jacob Hudgins. It is entitled *Humility Practice: 27 Ways to Think Less of Yourself—and of Yourself Less*.^{xxx} Below, I have transcribed the table of contents, which summarizes specific things anyone can do today to cultivate humility. After the semicolon, I have added a brief summary to better articulate the main thought behind each chapter.

27 Exercises in Humility

1.) *Confess a sin*; humility comes when we own our faults to others. 2.) *Pray for someone*; humility comes when we think deeply about the needs of others. 3.) *Admit you don't know*; humility comes when we own our ignorance. 4.) *Skip a meal*; humility comes when we forgo

gratification. 5.) *Read the Bible for no reason*; humility comes when we consume truth. 6.) *Take the lowest place*; humility comes when we give honor to others. 7.) *Consider the other side*; humility comes when we admit we might be wrong. 8.) *Disagree respectfully*; humility comes when we treat opponents well. 9.) *Compliment someone*; humility comes when we identify others' praiseworthy attributes. 10.) *Do a good deed secretly*; humility comes when we do good without expecting applause. 11.) *Let someone else decide*; humility comes when we surrender power to others. 12.) *Refuse to complain*; humility comes when we accept hardship without protest. 13.) *Be nice to someone undeserving*; humility comes when we show mercy. 14.) *Apply the Bible to your faults*; humility comes when we own our faults to ourselves. 15.) *Question your anger*; humility comes when we distance ourselves from our feelings. 16.) *Say thank you*; humility comes when we learn that we are not self-made. 17.) *Ask for advice—and follow it*; humility comes when we acknowledge the superior wisdom of others. 18.) *Serve someone*; humility comes when we let others be the star. 19.) *Give a soft answer*; humility comes when we prioritize harmony over agendas. 20.)

Let it go; humility comes when we forgo revenge. 21.) *Deflect a compliment*; humility comes when we acknowledge the efforts and sacrifices of others. 22.) *Worship*; humility comes when we give God praise and receive His perspective. 23.) *Hold your tongue*; humility comes when we think less of our thoughts and words. 24.) *Remember your roots*; humility comes when we own shame and embarrassment from the past. 25.) *Notice your green grass*; humility comes when we choose gratitude over entitlement. 26.) *Shine the spotlight on others*; humility comes when we highlight the good others are doing. 27.) *Wait*; humility comes when we acknowledge our limitations and act like our needs and wants are not that urgent. Conclusion: Ask "Is it I, Lord?"; humility comes when we take an honest look in the mirror and see ourselves as we truly are.

It is impossible to look at porn and be humble. Because this is true, it gives us a key weapon in the fight against porn. (Heath Lambert)^{xxxi}

Article XI

Transmuting Sexual Energy

The times we feel most uncomfortable are the times we most eagerly seek out stimulation. Due to pornography, sexual stimulation is available 24/7, and so many people have made a habit of using it to medicate their pain. A porn habit can have pretty devastating psychological and relational consequences, so this is not a good solution—as you may be able to deduce from your own experience. In this chapter, I elaborate some of the ways we can achieve the stress-relieving, emotionally-cathartic effects of pornography and other impulsive behaviors without any of the negative side effects.

The human race evolved in nature, where stimulation is abundant. It follows that nature helped to offset the stress of living for most of human history. In modern society, we spend our days cooped up indoors, typically in a sedentary position, while under the constant visual strain of technology and electronic devices. A lack of strong in-person relationships between friends and family is another culprit. When we are around the right people, we feel pleasantly

stimulated. When we are around the wrong people—or no people at all—we emotionally disengage and accumulate tension. There is a reason why conversation is often described as "stimulating." Presence can have the same effect.

When we are under stress, we may reason that we need a sexual outlet to help decompress. A healthy sexual outlet can, indeed, have this effect. The issue is when no viable sexual outlet is present. Young people in school or college; businessmen or soldiers away from their spouses; and people with values for whom sleeping around is not an option all face this challenge. Engaging with the wrong sexual outlet increases stress and creates a host of other problems, so that is also a non-starter.

Many attest that a number of non-sexual activities can blow off the steam of sexual desire. Lifting weights, cardio, stretching, massage therapy, etc. are all tried-and-true ways to release bodily tension. Physical activity stimulates the senses; afterwards, we feel good, and our sexual urges often diminish substantially.

As I alluded to in Article II of Book I, "7 Reasons to Quit Pornography," some experts recommend "habit replacement" more generally as a strategy to counteract strong impulses. For example, instead of battling our urges, we may

choose to exercise, go for a walk, call a friend, leave the house, and so on. Everyone is different, so the onus is on us to figure out what new, desirable activities can function as replacements for old, undesirable ones.

The late Napoleon Hill, author of *Think and Grow Rich*, had these famous words to say on the topic of sexual transmutation, that is, the channeling sexual energy into non-sexual pursuits:

Sex desire is the most powerful of human desires. When driven by this desire, men develop keenness of imagination, courage, will-power, persistence, and creative ability unknown to them at other times. So strong and impelling is the desire for sexual contact that men freely run the risk of life and reputation to indulge it. When harnessed, and redirected along other lines, this motivating force maintains all of its attributes of keenness of imagination, courage, etc., which may be used as powerful creative forces in literature, art, or in any other profession or calling, including, of course, the accumulation of riches.

Sexual transmutation flips the narrative that not having a sexual outlet is a disadvantage. Many athletes, entertainers, and clergymen

throughout history (Steve Jobs, Nikola Tesla, Muhammad Ali, etc.) have sworn by the benefits of sexual transmutation, either as a temporary fix or permanent lifestyle. This is relevant to keep in mind for those times when sexual activity is unavailable or inadvisable due to spiritual or rational concerns.^{xxxii}

Article XII

How to Relieve Tension in the Body (7 Psychophysical Truths)

“It’s not stress that kills us, it’s our reaction to it.” (Hans Selye)

There's a saying one of my mentors loves to repeat: "It's easy to love people on a mountain or in a cave." What he means is that loving people, which is a noble intention, is difficult to execute amidst the daily challenges of life. This is precisely why integrity is so hard. Far from being a form of escapism, it is intimately connected to the mundane aspects of our lives. Mood, emotions, sleep, exercise, and stress influence our behavior in profound ways. To neglect these things is to neglect what matters most.

Intentions don't matter. Actions do. That's why being ethical is hard. (Naval Ravikant)

Without further ado, my 7 "truths" of stress management, framed as commands, are as follows: 1.) *Say goodbye to perfectionism*; 2.) *Stop being a people-pleaser*; 3.) *Forgive everyone*,

including yourself; 4.) Eat a balanced diet; 5.) Do physical activity; 6.) Prioritize connection with others; and 7.) Cultivate a strong spiritual identity. As we engage in these areas of opportunity, health improves, compulsions weaken, and better life outcomes ensue.

To be sure, what qualifies me to elaborate these headings isn't that I have mastered them, but that I have struggled to apply them for years:

1. Say goodbye to perfectionism

In *The Mindbody Prescription: Healing the Body, Healing the Pain*,^{xxxiii} M.D. John Sarno had this to say about the role *perfectionism* plays in the generation of tension in the body:

Ben Sorotzkin, a practicing psychologist, suggests that perfectionists unconsciously set up standards for themselves they cannot possibly meet; their inevitable failure to live up to them results in unconscious shame and rage... Perfectionism is the predominant personality characteristic in many of my [chronic pain] patients.

In sum, perfectionism generates chronic tension that makes people miserable and drives

them to engage in impulsive behaviors. Perfectionism is out-of-step with integrity because it is a denial of human nature. It follows that dispensing with perfectionism is one of the best things anyone can do to improve their health.

2. Stop being a people-pleaser

In *The Mindbody Prescription: Healing the Body, Healing the Pain*, M.D. John Sarno had this to say about the role *people-pleasing* plays in the generation of tension in the body:

These [people-pleasers]... have a desire to ingratiate, to want everyone to like them... What's wrong with striving to be perfect and good? Doesn't that benefit everybody? From a social and interpersonal perspective, it's wonderful, but it also engenders great internal anger.

The more we are kind or indulgent out of a mere desire to avoid anxiety or sense of social obligation, the more tension it generates in our minds and bodies. Integrity isn't just about fulfilling moral obligations; it's about staying true to ourselves. If we can't do both, then we have room to improve.

3. Forgive everyone, including yourself

One of the biggest things these scientists found to get your brain to function like the brains of monks who have been meditating for 20 years... It was this one thing: radical forgiveness. (Vishen Lakhiani)

No one can act beyond their current level of consciousness. (Eckhart Tolle)

It is okay that you have made mistakes. Life didn't come with instructions. (Viking Proverb)

Forgiveness comes from a place of understanding and compassion. Whereas resentment enlarges pain, forgiveness has a calming and healthful effect. Whereas resentment is backward-looking, forgiveness has an eye toward the future. For more, see Article II of the Appendix entitled “A Psychological Insight to Heal Resentment.”

4. Eat a balanced diet

I learned this one the hard way, and so I'd be remiss if I left it out. Nutritional deficiencies (iron, B12, Vitamin D, etc.) are known to increase tension and dysfunction in the body. As are nutritional excesses (obesity, excessive

sugar intake, fried foods, etc.). Without a balanced diet, it is virtually impossible to live a balanced life. Secularly, it is an axiom. (“You are what you eat.”) In religion, diet is also enshrined as having special importance:

Diet and nutrition influence things like mood, emotions, sleep, and health, all of which impact our ability to love and be loved. This must be the reason why God gave the Jews so many dietary restrictions in the Hebrew Bible, while modern science evidences the tremendous importance of diet in shaping human outcomes. (NoToPorn)

5. Do physical activity

In Article XI of Book II entitled “Transmuting Sexual Energy,” I had this to say about the therapeutic effect of physical activity on tension, specifically sexual tension:

Many attest that a number of non-sexual activities can blow off the steam of sexual desire. Lifting weights, cardio, stretching, massage therapy, etc. are all tried-and-true ways to release bodily tension. Physical activity stimulates the senses; afterwards, we feel good, and our sexual urges often diminish substantially.

I'm told that our ancestors lived highly active lives, traveling in nature, foraging for food, and living off the land. They didn't have the technology and luxuries we enjoy today, and so it stands to reason. That said, human biology evolved to excel at physical activity and depend on it in order to thrive. This may be the reason why our backs start to hurt after being sedentary for too long and we begin to experience mental discomfort.

6. Prioritize connection with others

I define connection as the energy that exists between people when they feel seen, heard, and valued; when they can give and receive without judgment; and when they derive sustenance and strength from the relationship... We are hard-wired to connect with others. It's what gives purpose and meaning to our lives. (Brené Brown)

When connection is present, we feel complete, lacking nothing. When connection is absent, we feel incomplete, eager for an escape or quick-fix.

Connection isn't something we can will into existence, but there is hope. As I have written elsewhere, "We don't have total control over the

success of a relationship—familial, friendly, romantic, or otherwise—but we can always do our part. Usually, when we do our part well enough and long enough in the area of relationships, things overall work out in our favor. Conversely, when we give no effort and opt out of the process entirely, the outcome is guaranteed to be bad.”

7. Cultivate a strong spiritual identity

As we spend time with Abba, He will cut away places of fear and anxiety, which become idols that demand our worship. Abba challenges us to open our hearts and minds to His, removing these hindrances so He can minister healing to our past brokenness. (Matthew Stevenson)

With no spiritual anchor, we are at the mercy of every trial and trauma of the natural world. On the other hand, a spiritual anchor has a grounding effect that soothes hearts and supplies meaning to experiences.

Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people. (Karl Marx)

“Religion is the opium of the people” is often quoted as a dismissive critique of religion. People, they say, practice religion to escape from reality, in the manner of a drug. However, as a person of faith and believer in a true religion (better understood in terms of a *relationship* with God), I actually fancy this quote. If being in relationship with God is like the effect of a drug, then that’s the way it was meant to be.^{xxxiv}

Article XIII

Changing My Emotional State to Guard Against Temptation

The most immediate effect of an addictive substance or activity is to induce a change in state. It happens when you pop a pill. It happens when you smoke. It happens when you gamble. It happens when you engage in sexual activity. It happens when you drink coffee or eat ice cream. That isn't to say that every such action stems from addiction. Or that every such activity necessarily constitutes a problem in someone's life. However, it is generally true that what gets people hooked on an activity is that it makes them feel better emotionally.

Frankly, there is nothing wrong with wanting to change our emotional states from bad to good, or to keep them from going from good to bad. Human beings are hard-wired to seek pleasure and avoid pain. The problem is when our desire to experience positive emotion in the short-term leads to an increase in negative emotion in the medium- and long-term. As I like to

say, the essence of addiction is instant gratification, whereas the essence of discipline is delayed gratification.

What separates addicts and healthy people is how they go about changing their emotional state. Healthy people change their emotional state by exercising (“motion creates emotion”), hanging out with friends and family, doing meaningful work, cultivating a spiritual life, and resting. Addicts, on the other hand, change their emotional state by engaging in impulsive behaviors—like pornography—or consuming stimulating substances—like drugs or junk food—whose only benefit is instant gratification.

To distinguish between activities that trigger changes in state, we have to lengthen the time horizon. *What effect is this action going to have, not only in 5 minutes— but in 5 hours? 5 days? 5 weeks? 5 months? 5 years?*

In sum, when seeking to change our emotional state, we want to avoid activities that overtly cause damage across a longer time horizon. An activity that fosters positive emotion in both the present and future is the best of both worlds.^{xxxv}

Article XIV

Stretching: An Unsung Remedy for Blue Balls

In medicine, *blue balls* goes by the name "epididymal hypertension." According to Healthline, blue balls "can cause pain and aching in the testicles after having an erection without an orgasm," but is "not serious."^{xxxvi} In this chapter, I use the term *blue balls* to denote sexual frustration more generally. Blue balls, for our purposes, is the condition of having strong sexual desires with no sexual outlet.

This guide is premised on the belief that PMO is inadvisable as a method to satisfy one's libido. PMO comes with a host of problems, *side effects*, if you will—physical, mental, social, and spiritual—that far outweigh its benefits. In the absence of a healthy sexual outlet, sexual desire must be controlled rather than expressed.

To be sure, stretching for most of my life was what you did to warm up before playing a sport to avoid injury. Stretching is also what you did after getting injured to speed up recovery. It had

no practical application for me outside of these contexts.

What prompted me to give stretching a second look was the testimony of none other than David Goggins. Goggins is a former American Navy Seal, extreme athlete, and author of *Can't Hurt Me: Master Your Mind and Defy the Odds*,^{xxxvii} which has sold more than five million copies to date. I was a fan of Goggins, and I was intrigued by the passage in his book where he credits stretching for "saving his life." Goggins said that his body had become so tense from repeat childhood trauma, cumulative emotional stress, and an extreme athletic lifestyle that he seriously thought he was going to die. He couldn't exercise anymore. He had masses on his head and hips. He had lost two inches vertically. He compared his body to a "rock." To make a long story short, Goggins discovered stretching through a military contact; within months of daily practice, stretching relieved the extreme tightness he felt, healed his thyroid, and shrunk the stress-induced masses that had grown on his body.

Unlike the intense workouts I do (sympathetic nervous system—fight or flight), stretching has an opposite purpose (parasympathetic nervous system—relaxation). The purpose of

stretching to relieve tension isn't an increase in flexibility or range of motion, although this growth is inevitable. *The purpose is to relax, get blood flowing, and feel better.* The benefits typically last for hours—from the evening into the night and following morning. Or from the morning throughout the day and evening. Stretching also makes it easier to slow down and tend to our emotions, which fosters healing and wisdom. By the end of each session, I often lose any urge I might have had before to PMO.

I stretched my body lightly for around 30 minutes to an hour, multiple times a week, for almost a year and a half; in silence, while watching TV, and sometimes even while hanging out with friends and family. Stretching (static and dynamic) doesn't need to take that long, but you may find, like I did, that the time flies.

Back to blue balls. In sum, stretching for me has become my go-to to relieve it. I'm far from an expert, but I feel strongly enough about it based on personal experience to dedicate this chapter. And credit to David Goggins for sharing his story because without it I may never have discovered this gem.^{xxxviii}

Article XV

Counting: A Simple, Powerful Technique to Manage Unruly Emotions

The pitfalls of unresolved anger, chronic anxiety, and insatiable lust are legion. When I look back on my life, many of my worst moments took place in the heat of one of these emotions. Maybe you can relate. They say we can learn a great deal from emotions, but we don't want to be ruled by them.

Oftentimes, the fastest way to gain control of our emotions isn't to confront them head-on but to gently direct our attention to something else. Chalk another one up to *motion creates emotion*, or *the power of distraction*. People commonly exercise to change their emotional states, practice hobbies, talk to friends, meditate, or go to sleep—simply anything to get the mind off the pain. That said, counting has recently become one of my personal favorite activities for this purpose. Below, I unpack a simple, practical technique favored by children and Navy Seals alike that can instill calm and control in the presence of strong emotions.

Counting consists—you got it—of reciting numbers within a chosen interval. For example, you might count from 1 to 10, 20, 30, 90, or 1,000. You might count backwards. You might count in increments of 3, 6, or 7. The key with counting isn't the direction or number of the count but simply that we engage with the discipline (in other words, "Just do it!"). I prefer to count out loud whenever possible, but counting may be done in silence.

Counting can be integrated in a variety of contexts. For example, athletes make a habit of counting while stretching or lifting weights. While counting may serve the functional purpose of tracking progress in an activity, it has numerous psychological benefits. In this chapter, I elaborate 1.) *counting for anxiety and stress relief*; 2.) *counting for anger management*; 3.) *counting for emotional healing from trauma and PTSD*; and 4.) *counting for sexual control*.

1. Counting for Anxiety and Stress Relief

Many meditation and breathwork practices consist of counting. Counting is a feature, not the bug or necessary inconvenience that many people mistake it for.

"Box breathing," for example, reportedly a mainstay of Navy Seal training, entails breathing in for a count of 4, pausing for a count of 4, breathing out for a count of 4, and then pausing for a count of 4. Another popular breathing technique, 4-7-8, involves breathing in for a count of 4, pausing for a count of 7, and then breathing out for a count of 8. There are numerous variations. Counting, when coupled with slow conscious breathing, works to promote inner calm and relieve stress.

Counting Sheep to Relieve Insomnia

If you grew up in an English-speaking country, you may have been told growing up to try "counting sheep" if you had a hard time going to sleep. Per Wikipedia, "Counting sheep is a mental exercise used in some Western cultures as a means of putting oneself to sleep... In most depictions of the activity, the practitioner envisions an endless series of identical white sheep jumping over a fence, while counting them as they do so. The idea, presumably, is to induce boredom while occupying the mind with something simple, repetitive, and rhythmic, all of which are known to help humans sleep."^{xxxix}

I would replace "boredom" with "relaxation" or "calm," but you get the idea. As a child, I never found the concept of "counting sheep"

persuasive because I didn't understand the mechanism behind its action. However, as an adult, counting does for me that which it couldn't do for me as a child—namely, help me fall asleep and stay asleep. By all accounts, the traditional folk remedy for insomnia is here to stay.

2. Counting for Anger Management

In high school, I had a history teacher who used to dramatically count out loud whenever he felt angry or stressed. I thought it was strange then, and probably would think the same today if I saw someone doing it in public. However, what my teacher learned in therapy is a technique widely hailed by anger management specialists.

When angry, count to ten before you speak. If very angry, a hundred. (Thomas Jefferson)

Specifically, you may have heard of the "90-second rule." According to Dr. Jill Bolte, a Harvard-educated neuroscientist, "Although there are certain limbic (emotional) programs that can be triggered automatically, it takes less than 90 seconds for one of these programs to be triggered, surge through our body, and then be completely flushed out of our bloodstream."^{xl} While my teacher never counted anywhere near

that long, 90 seconds is a standard increment used by people to manage anger.

In sum, experts say that emotions cycle through our body in 90 seconds when we don't consciously choose to entertain them. By slowing down—and counting—we give our unconscious reaction (e.g. the anger) time to cycle through. Counting works by supplying a neutral, alternative activity to set our attention on while we let time pass.

Note: I like to count at the speed of time, with each successive number corresponding to a second. I find this speed fast enough to occupy my attention and slow enough that I'm not counting neurotically or repressing my emotions. Remember, the goal isn't to escape emotions but to reprocess them in light of the calming stimuli that counting provides.

3. Counting for Emotional Healing From Trauma and PTSD

While counting for anger management and anxiety/stress relief is most common, counting's application in the field of psychotherapy is of great interest. The "counting method" (Ochberg's counting method), and its offshoot, "progressive counting therapy," involve a therapist counting out loud (from 1 to 100 in the former case, and 1 to a smaller number in the

latter) while a PTSD sufferer visualizes their traumatic memories.

The counting method is a kind of "dual focus therapy." Dual focus therapies entail focusing on a neutral activity or stimuli while conjuring up troubling memories. Currently, the two most popular evidence-based "dual focus" therapies are EMDR (eye movement desensitization and reprocessing) and tapping (emotional freedom technique).

How do dual focus therapies work?

The editor for the Trauma Institute and Child Trauma Institute favors the "mindfulness account" as an explanation for the efficacy of dual focus therapies:

I propose what I call the mindfulness account. Even if a therapy client working through a trauma memory does not become overwhelmed, it may take a lot of effort to avoid that, and that effort can slow the work down. However, by concentrating on something else (e.g., the therapist's moving fingers in EMDR, or the therapist's counting aloud in PC) at the same time as the trauma memory, the client is no longer only inside the memory, but also out-

side it concentrating on the distractor. This enables the client to be an observer of the self and of the memory while also engaging with the memory. This mindfulness effect frees the client from getting overwhelmed or bogged down, facilitating the mind's ability to proceed with the desensitization, emotional working through, insight-making, or whatever is needed to heal from the memory.^{xli}

Trauma specialist Brian Powell said, "If we keep experiencing an old thing in a new context, it gets reoriented to the new context." In other words, dual focus therapies work by calmly anchoring individuals in the present (new context), where past memories become reoriented. While the focus of this heading is on trauma, dual focus therapies can be used for daily stress management.

4. Counting for Sexual Control

Finally, the goal of this guide is freedom from pornography. In the same vein as anger, anxiety, and trauma, sexual desire is a powerful emotion. Where a healthy, wholesome outlet is present, it can be expressed. In any other context, it must be controlled. While this guide is full of insights to control sexual urges and avoid

unnecessary temptations, nobody in this world can avoid them all.

In the heat of the moment, it pays to direct our focus away from the object of temptation. *For immediate relief, we may begin to count.* As I explained above, counting facilitates self-control by anchoring us in the present; it distances us from powerful emotions/impulses that might otherwise monopolize our attention. Extra credit if we combine counting with a physical activity like stretching.

In sum, counting is a traditional, evidence-based technique to achieve emotional control, and a tool to be added to the toolbox of people with an interest in sexual integrity.^{xlii}

Article XVI

What Rats and Cocaine Can Teach Us About Pornography and Addiction

In November of 2022, Jordan Peterson and Andrew Huberman sat down for a one-on-one in which they addressed the topics of pornography, masturbation, and mental health.^{xliii} Peterson was mostly the one asking the questions, but he did interject with the following quote, which I thought was pretty profound:

You know you cannot get rats addicted to cocaine if they live in their natural environments. You can only get rats addicted to cocaine if they're isolated rats in a cage. They won't bar press for cocaine in the natural environment, and it's because they have alternative sources of dopaminergic gratification. That's very interesting.

Like cocaine in the experiment, pornography is available on demand, in unlimited quantities, for anyone with a Wi-Fi router and no proper accountability in place. Similarly, when humans

are deprived of "alternative sources of dopaminergic gratification"—like nature, physical activity, and social interaction—we tend toward impulsive behavior.

Rats Prefer Social Interaction to Heroin and Methamphetamine

A fascinating study published in 2019 found that rats preferred to interact with other rats than take shots of heroin and methamphetamine.^{xliv} When given the option to push a lever that triggered a drug infusion or a lever that opened a door that enabled them to interact with their peers, rats chose the latter option *more than 90% of the time*.

The rats "exhibited behaviors that correspond to human addictive behaviors." The authors concluded that the experiment "introduces a novel model for studying the impact of social motivation in studies of drug use and addiction."

In sum, the rat example underscores the power of replacing a bad habit or addiction with a natural alternative. For people deprived of social interaction, getting this need met is a first priority.^{xlv}

Article XVII

3 Natural Ways to Reduce My Libido

Libido, or *sex drive*, is a natural energy that motivates people to pass on their genes and connect with others. While a strong libido can be evidence of good health, the opposite is often true of a low libido. Healthline identifies *low testosterone; medications; restless leg syndrome; depression; chronic illness; sleep problems; aging; stress; too little (or too much) exercise; low self-esteem; and alcohol and drug use* as common causes of low libido.^{xlvi}

Why, then, would anyone ever want to lower libido?

The desire to lower libido is actually not uncommon. People who are not in a place to pursue a serious relationship may not see the upside of having a strong sex drive. A strong sex drive, with no healthy sexual outlet, can become a source of temptation to watch pornography, masturbate, or hook-up. At best, people may see

it as an unwelcome distraction or nagging frustration. Independent of relationship status, people may want to lower their libido if their sexuality is hyperactive and not in balance with other areas of their lives.

According to Healthline, libido is a function of three major causes—*biological* (testosterone and physical health); *psychological* (stress, mental health, and self-esteem), and *social* (relationship status and cultural sexual norms).

In this section, I address three natural ways to reduce libido, and the pros and cons of each approach.

1. Take an Aphrodisiac (?)

You may have heard of *aphrodisiac*, a word derived from Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love. An aphrodisiac is a food, herb, or substance that people consume to *increase* their libido. An *anaphrodisiac* has precisely the opposite effect of lowering libido. Aphrodisiacs and anaphrodisiacs are intended to address the *biological* factor of libido. These substances work by altering testosterone levels and/or other biological parameters that influence sex drive.

The problem is that biological parameters serve more than one purpose. For example, low-

ering a man's testosterone levels to control libido can have side effects, including reduced energy, reduced drive, lowered self-esteem, diminished athletic ability, and even feminization. *Yikes.*

Just because a substance is marketed as "natural," that doesn't mean its preparation isn't artificial. Many powerful herbs on the market today are sold in potent concentrations enabled by advanced technology. And just because a substance is "natural," that doesn't mean its consumption is healthy or side-effectless. Any substance, for example, that alters the stress hormone cortisol, without altering the stress that regulates it, can create chemical imbalances; these, in turn, can trigger a host of mental, physical, and emotional side effects.

Another thing to keep in mind is that high testosterone is often *not* the culprit of an out-of-control sex drive. Many people who struggle with impulsive sexual behavior have normal or below-average testosterone levels. If you really care to know, then get your levels checked. However, what this means is that psychological and social factors often play an outsized role in the process.

2. Change the Way You Think

Number two is the most natural way to reduce an out-of-control libido. In the first place, we have to ask ourselves, *when did my libido become out-of-control?* And, *what were the contributing factors?* Many people with an out-of-control libido have a history of impulsive sexual behavior. Hardcore pornography is often a huge culprit here, as it leads people to think in hyper-sexual terms. Mainstream media is another contributing factor. The median user of technology is bombarded with sexual stimuli from morning to night in the form of ads, memes, and innuendo.

Eliminating pornography and insulating oneself from hyper-sexual cultural influences can go a long way toward reining in an out-of-control libido. How we think, as it turns out, is as much a function of our environments as it is internal processes.

3. Practice Abstinence for an Extended Period of Time

Many people who abstain from PMO find that their libido progressively increases in the following days and weeks. However, that build-up typically flatlines before stabilizing at much more manageable levels.

The drop in libido associated with abstinence is twofold. First, sexual interest positively correlates with exposure to sexual stimuli. Take away the latter and the former is likely to decrease. Second, going a long time without sexual activity may motivate the brain to divert sexual energy into non-sexual pursuits. For more, see Book II, Article XI entitled “Transmuting Sexual Energy.”

The sad truth is that many people who grew up in the digital age have never gone weeks without watching pornography or masturbating. They simply have no reference for how their brain, body, and emotions will respond. Fortunately, one effect of the reboot/recovery process is to bring an outsized libido under control.^{xlvi}

Article XVIII

Hope for the Pornography Addict (7 Tips to Get Free From Your Habit or Addiction)

“All big things come from small beginnings. The seed of every habit is a single, tiny decision.”
(James Clear)

The human brain is plastic, which means that it is capable of change. This is true of every stage of life, not just the formative years. Just as the brain of a porn addict or frequent user has changed for the worse, reversal can take place once new input is given.

Neuroplasticity: the capacity for continuous alteration of the neural pathways and synapses of the living brain and nervous system in response to experience or injury. (Merriam Webster)^{xlvi}

They say "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." However, many people did not

have the luxury of being protected from pornography as children due to the internet and a lack of parental oversight. And there are people who began to struggle with pornography for the first time as adults. Fortunately, it is possible to get completely free from a pornography habit or addiction no matter how longstanding the issue or how great the damage that has been done.

In this chapter, I present seven tips that anyone can apply today to get free and stay free. Chances are that if someone continues to struggle, they can be doing better in one or more of these areas. Most of these items are part and parcel of various porn reboot/recovery programs, and that is because they work.

1. Establish Accountability

Addiction thrives in isolation, especially pornography addiction, where you don't need a drug dealer, bookie, or slot machine, and almost everyone prefers to be alone in the act for obvious reasons. Many people don't tell anyone about their pornography problem because of the associated shame and fear of reputational consequences. In addition, the mainstream is often woefully incapable of providing actual help since the issue of pornography is scarcely understood. As a result, people need to be selective about whom they choose to open up to.

That caveat aside, accountability is vital during the reboot/recovery process. There is a Biblical proverb, "Iron sharpens iron, as one man sharpens another." Simply put, the advice, support, and presence of a caring, like-minded individual (or individuals) can be a total game-changer. There are also professionals specializing in pornography and sexual addiction who are eager to put their time, empathy, and knowledge to work for those who need the extra help.

My friends, I did not last one week away from porn because it's not about commitment. It's not about willpower. It's not even about consequences. I was in a place where I was too uncomfortable to even ask anyone for help, to even talk to anyone about this.

Eventually when I got into therapy—and I spoke to my therapist about everything. My childhood sexual abuse. My relationships, or lack thereof. My goals, my wishes, my desires, my work. I didn't tell him anything about porn. I didn't tell him anything about me trying and failing for so many years with it. It was too much shame. (Eli Nash, a tech entrepreneur who gave a Ted Talk entitled "Escaping Porn Addiction")^{xlix}

2. Restrict Internet Usage and Install a Porn Blocker

Porn blockers aren't the be-all and end-all of porn reboot/recovery. For one, none of them are airtight, and a determined mind will always find a way around them. In addition, the goal is to eventually get to a point where we say "no" as an expression of our character regardless of whatever external triggers might be present. That said, porn filters can serve as a deterrent on an interim basis to reduce the probability of relapse. Find a software that works for you, and don't buck at the cost, which is likely going to be less than a monthly Netflix subscription.

3. Immerse Yourself in Literature on Porn Reboot/Recovery

Pornography is a challenge to beat even for people who have strong conviction about its detriments. If a frequent porn user wants any hope of getting better, they need to understand, in fine detail, how it's harming them (and those around them) mentally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually. This knowledge is power. In addition, knowledge of the exploitation (legal or consensual) endemic in the porn industry (both producer and consumer alike) can be a powerful motivation to change.

*It's like you're letting yourself be degraded simply because you don't have control over your sexual charge, and so much of this stuff is like tied to so much deeper sh*t, I know. It's like it's become your panacea. It's become the way you deal with your stress, with your loneliness, with your boredom, with your angst about the world. But at the same time, sometimes you just got to wake up to the truth like "This is poor behavior. This is not the man I want to be."*
(Mark Queppet)

4. Consume Success Stories of People Who Broke Their Porn Habit/Addiction

There's a motto I like to live by, "If he (or she) can do it, so can I." Oftentimes, we don't know what we're capable of doing until we see someone else do it. Arguably, the most famous example of this is Roger Banister. He was the first person ever to run a sub-four-minute mile in 1954 after other athletes had attempted the feat for decades. Within a few years, several other people had done it, and today more than 1,000 people are credited with the exploit.

5. Focus on Personal Growth

Personal growth is a far more reliable indicator of success during the reboot/recovery process

than the length of a porn-free streak. The fact is we can be doing something every hour, if not every moment, to heal, grow, and evolve. I'm talking about diet, exercise, meditation, hobbies, spiritual discipline, to whom it may concern, and spending time in nature. And, most importantly, spending time with others. While addiction thrives in isolation, connection is the opposite of addiction.

The second biggest mistake that I see men making all the time is they're focused too much on quitting porn, not on becoming the man that can live a life porn-free. I'm going to repeat that one again. The second biggest mistake that I see men making all the time is they're too focused on quitting porn, not on becoming the man that can live a porn-free life. It's a very subtle shift. It's a very significant change in how we look at our ourselves, and how we look at our responsibility in this process. (Frank Rich)

6. Study Your Relapses

Relapse is typically a question of when, not if, for people recovering from a pornography habit or addiction. The truth is that how we respond in moments of weakness and moral failure is of

the essence. When we self-deprecate, we fuel the relapse cycle. On the other hand, when we study our relapses, we gain valuable insight into our habits, emotions, and environment that can keep us from going back in the future. While a relapse may be disappointing, it doesn't have to be devastating. In fact, it can be an opportunity to come back smarter and stronger.

7. Be Patient

Just as a porn problem takes time to develop, it takes time to experience the benefits of a complete recovery. Denying reality by trying to accelerate time only increases stress, which fuels the relapse cycle, as does denying human nature by being hypercritical of mistakes. Progress during the porn reboot/recovery process is typically not linear, and it is common to experience low moments (e.g. flatline) while the brain adapts to a new, healthier baseline. However, if we do our part, we can trust that the magic of time will work in our favor.

Meanwhile, improving by 1 percent isn't particularly notable—sometimes it isn't even noticeable—but it can be far more meaningful, especially in the long run. The difference a tiny improvement can make over time is astounding. Here's how the math works out: if you can

get 1 percent better each day for one year, you'll end up thirty-seven times better by the time you're done. (James Clear)^l

Article XIX

Life After Pornography

If we don't have a vision for the future, we won't take the necessary steps to get there. But if that vision is not realistic, we may get there only to experience disappointment. Just as porn is not the source of all of our problems in this world, quitting is not their solution. A life without pornography is a major upgrade, as I have taken great pains to demonstrate in this guide. But there are other roadblocks on the journey.

Everybody's life gets better when they quit this stuff. Every single time. I've never seen an exception where someone fully quit this and their life got worse. (Mark Queppet)

After we quit porn, we still experience negative emotion and trauma. We still have relational challenges. We still have serious character flaws that need addressed. We still have to work hard and fight for our dreams. There are good days and bad days. And we are better able to deal with all that life throws our way.^{li}

CONCLUSION

I trust that you have been able to glean something of value from this guide that empowers you to attain lasting freedom from pornography. One of the mottos I like to live by is “If he (or she) can do it, so can I.” As a next step, I invite you to visit <https://notoporn.com> and immerse yourself in the stories of people who overcame a pornography habit or addiction. There you can also find a free downloadable version of *The No-To-Porn Guide* and hundreds of articles on sexual integrity.

I hope you enjoyed reading *The No-To-Porn Guide* as much as I enjoyed writing it. If so, please consider leaving a rating/review on Amazon—they're incredibly helpful to other readers and I value your feedback. You can leave a rating/review by visiting the book's [product page](#) or by swiping/scrolling to the end of the book on Kindle.

Appendix:

Articles on Emotional Healing

Article I

The Speed of Love

“Love has its speed. It is an inner speed. It is a spiritual speed. It is a different kind of speed from the technological speed to which we are accustomed. It is ‘slow’ yet it is lord over all other speeds since it is the speed of love.”
(Kosuke Koyama)

A decade ago, an American lady went viral after contracting bronchitis from a house fire. Her famous words? *Ain't nobody got time for that!* People use this expression when they experience an inconvenience they didn't plan for and don't feel like dealing with (e.g. their car breaks down, someone is being melodramatic, they get bronchitis, etc.) Most people in modern society identify as being "busy." In fact, not being busy and in a hurry is often conflated with laziness and underachievement. There is truth to the expression, "Idle hands are the devil's playground." But could the opposite also be true?

Corrie Ten Boom once said that if the devil can't make you sin, he'll make you busy... Both sin and busyness have the exact same effect—they cut off your connection to God, to other people, and even to your own soul. (John Mark Comer)

A lot of us have that same “ain’t-nobody-got-time-for-that” mentality when it comes to dealing with our emotions. *Just not in the mood today!* I have heard it said, “If you do not make time for your wellness, you will be forced to make time for your illness.” Speed can literally kill us before we know it.

Hurry is not of the devil. Hurry is the devil. (Carl Jung)

There's a story in the Gospels of a woman named Mary and her sister, Martha. One day Jesus was visiting in their house. Mary was busy doing chores while her sister Martha was fellowshiping with Jesus. After Mary complained about Martha, Jesus said to her, “You are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary” (Luke 10:41).

The obvious takeaway here is that spending time with Jesus should have been the priority.

It was the most important, even *necessary* thing for her to be doing in that moment.

The fact is we have to make tradeoffs in life. Time spent doing one thing is necessarily time not spent doing something else. It follows that the quality of an action should be measured by its relative importance to an individual at a particular moment in time. If we need healing, it's never okay to use business as an excuse.^{lii}

Article II

A Psychological Insight to Heal Resentment

“New insight brings new feeling.” (Lewis
Smedes)

Oxford Languages defines resentment as “bitter indignation at having been treated unfairly.”^{liii} In other words, resentment is a painful feeling that happens in response to a perceived injustice. The fact that the world is full of injustice is a point that does not need belabored. But the goal here is to reduce human suffering. Psychologists say resentment is like drinking from a poisoned cup and waiting for the other person to die. Practicing empathy by seeking to understand the offender’s perspective and background is a first recommendation. There is always a reason why people do what they do and are the way they are. Empathy does not excuse bad behavior, but it can make it easier for offended parties to process their grievances.

There is also a lesser-known, inward-looking approach that turns resentment on its head.

It happens when we take inventory, not of the times people wronged us, but of the times people—most often due to ignorance—did not hold us accountable for our mistakes. Put differently, the times that we “got away with it” and people treated us *better* than we deserved. Secret sins, if you will, simply do not get the attention they deserve.

If your thoughts were laid bare here tonight, every one of them, you would all run out of here in shame. (Paul Washer)

In this category fall lust envy, greed, gossip, fear, anger, and so on. The extent of these is unknowable by others because they take up primary residence in the mind. And people project the best versions of themselves in public. In truth, even the best of friends would be in for a lot of surprises if they had unlimited access to each other’s thought life. No one armed with knowledge of another’s secret sins could ever look at them the same again.

In Matthew 18, Jesus told a parable of a man who was forgiven a great debt by a king to whom he owed money. The man then went out and ruthlessly prosecuted delinquent debtors who owed him a much smaller sum. The king sum-

moned the man and punished him for his hypocrisy. The king is supposed to represent God. God sees our secret sins and chooses to look the other way. Yet we often hold on to even the slightest offenses from others.

Sometimes we don't get the good that we think we deserve, whereas other times we are spared the bad that we *know* we deserve. It follows that both injustice and grace are woven into the fabric of society. This insight gives us something positive to pit against whatever resentment we might be tempted to feel.^{liv}

Article III

Help! I Am Angry With My Parents! (5 Critical Reminders)

Evidently due to the presence of a large number of neurons in the cerebral cortex, people live longer and spend a lot more time developing and maturing than other species. As a result, our parents exert great power over our lives. Not only did they bring us into the world, but in most cases we spend more or less eighteen formative years in their care. In situations where the parents were present and did a good job, the children benefit greatly. In situations where the parents were absent or did not do a good job, the children suffer. The strong emotional attachment people have with their parents, even as adults, means that they are liable to get hurt, which is true of any close relationship where a degree of vulnerability is present.

Due to issues in our upbringing and adult interactions, a lot of us walk around with resentment toward our parents. Sometimes it is explicit and open, while other times it subtly lurks beneath the surface. In either case, it is

harmful to our physical, emotional, and spiritual health. Our parents, after all, are supposed to represent God to us. They are our first experience with authority, and they shape our lives in tremendous ways. Some people have experienced abuse at the hands of their parents. My heart goes out to those people. Most of us, however, grew up with at least one parent who was more or less loving, albeit in situations that were far from ideal, because life is not perfect. And we make additional memories with our parents, positive and otherwise, during our adult years.

Today, if we have a hard time forgiving our parents, we can meditate on these five truths:

1. We are quick to remember the bad and slow to remember the good

All those dirty diapers our parents changed, the times they stayed up late and got up early with us, the times they took us to and from school and activities and took care of us when we were sick. Today, if we feel resentful toward a parent, we can think of all the good things they did for us, even things that we have long forgotten about.

2. Our parents more often than not did the best they could

Most parents have good intentions. The flaws they exhibit are typically the result of flaws in their own upbringing and life experiences. Even absent “parents” typically regret the fact that they were not there for their kids. We practice understanding when we learn the factors that led our parents to be the way they are. And we extend grace when we give them the benefit of the doubt.

3. There are no *what-ifs* in life

Sometimes, we think "I would be here in life, if only my parents had done *x* or had not done *y*." This flawed line of thinking leads only to regret. The same parents who gave us life treated us the way they did, both the good and the bad. It may help to think of our parents like the weather. We cannot control the weather; we just accept it. It is a given phenomenon. If the choices our parents made were different enough, we wouldn't even be alive.

4. If you don't like it, change it

Resentment typically lingers where healing has not taken place; the more healed we are, the less we fixate on the past. The good news is that as

human beings we have the power to overcome many things. But nobody can exercise this potential on our behalf. There is a saying I like to repeat: *while pain isn't our fault, healing is our responsibility.*

5. Our parents will not live forever

Growing up, we consciously or unconsciously think our parents will live forever. The proof is how shocking and traumatic the thought, or reality, of losing a parent can be. Tomorrow is not promised. In the great majority of cases, our parents will pass away before we do. When our parents are gone, we will not want to wish that we had handled things differently.

Honor your father and mother is ancient wisdom and one of the Ten Commandments. I leave you with a definition of what it means to honor our parents that I found particularly helpful. I originally came across it in a meme years ago, and it still rings true today.

To honor our parents means to thank them for the life they have given us, to accept and take responsibility for what they were not able to give, to live a worthy life, and to honor their presence in our hearts. (Popular Wisdom)^{lv}

Article IV

4 Telltale Signs of Inner Healing

I recall an interview in which Jeff Bezos, of all people, once said, "There is no shortage of hardship in the world." In context, he meant that no matter who you talk to—rich, poor, young, old—people go through difficult experiences. Some of that pain is physical, like when we feel hot or cold, when we get a headache, or when we need a root canal. And a lot of that pain is emotional, like when we feel tired, alone, angry, anxious, or stressed. Due to human biology, the environment, and how people treat each other, emotional pain is a dime a dozen.

Trauma, for its part, is a particular kind of emotional pain that exceeds an individual's ability to cope. I don't think I've ever met anyone who never experienced a trauma at some point in their life. (*Birth itself can be traumatic!*) The truth is some peoples' lives have been deeply impressed by trauma, even from childhood. And we all carry a backlog of unresolved emotions, traumatic or not, that influence our lives in subtle and not-so-subtle ways.

Trauma is a psychic wound that hardens you psychologically that then interferes with your ability to grow and develop. It pains you and now you're acting out of pain... Trauma is not what happens to you, it's what happens inside you as a result of what happened to you. (Gabor Maté)

In this chapter, I elaborate four signs of inner healing that I have gathered from my life experience and observation. If we can apply all of these to an emotional pain or trauma, the chances are that the wound has been patched. On the flip side, these headings can prompt areas of opportunity that haven't fully been exploited.

1. We can talk freely about it

They say the subconscious mind has no concept of time. This means that it is possible to relive years-old memories as if they happened yesterday. Words can trigger emotions, which is why talk therapy has such great potential. This is also why it can be so difficult to talk about past experiences. If we cannot talk about our past or mention a person's name without getting triggered, that is a clear indication we still have some healing work to do. On the other hand, if we can talk about a past pain or trauma with

ease and transparency, that is because a great deal of healing has already taken place.

2. We experience gratitude for what we learned and who we became

One sign of healing is that we stop seeing the painful experience as a mere misfortune and start to appreciate the wisdom that came as a result. We appreciate that the experience, as bad as it was, helped transform us into stronger, more empathetic and well-rounded human beings. This shift is often accompanied by a change in verbiage. Instead of thinking of the experience as having happened *to* us, we get a real sense that it also happened *for* us. This one applies as much to personal hardship (illness, accidents, etc.), as it does to relational conflict (abandonment, heartbreak, etc.).

3. We gain understanding of why the situation happened

At the end of the day, everyone is responsible for their behavior and reactions; there is no excuse to mistreat others. However, understanding why people act the way they do (i.e. empathy) can keep us from taking things personal and becoming resentful. Reality is that flaws people exhibit typically stem from flaws in their own upbringing and experiences (“Hurt people hurt

people”). The more painful the offense, the more apparent malice at work, the harder understanding can be to arrive at. However, in most cases understanding can cast even the worst experiences in a more charitable light. Some things come in pairs; empathy and healing are a prime example.

4. We exhibit a hopeful outlook for the future

Hope is like the sun, which, as we journey toward it, casts the shadow of our burden behind us. (Samuel Smiles)

While the pessimist projects negative experiences into the future, the optimist’s perspective is aligned such that future opportunities eclipse past disappointments. Against this horizon, they are eager to move in forward in life confident that something greater awaits.^{lvi}

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



I'm an intellectually curious millennial passionate about seeing people make healthy, informed choices about the moral direction of their lives. When I'm not reading or writing, I enjoy hiking, web-making, learning foreign languages, and watching live sports. Alumnus of Georgetown University (B.S.) and The Ohio State University (M.A.).

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