

I don't know what to do next . . .

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I don't know what to do or where to go next.

TLDR: I have struggled with P and M addiction since I was very young. I have tried many solutions and made significant growth in my relationship with both addictions, however, I have been unable to completely rid myself of either. I don't know where to go now, but I am looking for solutions and seeking G-d's guidance.

My Story: I discovered P when I was young (11-12) through DVDs and Magazines in my house. It was how I learned about sex and where I have built my relationship with the subject over the next 17 years of my life. From that first exposure I started seeking P wherever I could find it. I searched my home, friends' homes, the internet, and stole from libraries and retail stores. I was hooked and nothing satisfied the need to consume more. Multiple times I was caught, even then the shame and guilt was never enough to keep me from returning. I grew up religious and constantly struggled with my faith due to the guilt placed on M and P. I could not find a pathway to free myself from lust and so I could not understand how G-d had given me a challenge I seemingly could not overcome. I still struggle with this today, however, I am more confident than ever that there will be freedom. As a teenager and then young adult I had a few relationships that turned physical, P was always still an unbreakable habit, even while I was in committed and physically active relationships.

When I was in my 20's I left faith and allowed myself to be consumed by the secular world and my habits. I fully gave into P and M believing that I was unable to fight my urges and that it was "not harmful" as the secular world likes to claim. I am now part of a community, I daven 3 times a day normally with a minyan, I learn as often as I am able, and I love Hashem. I have not found freedom yet. I understand that Hashem gives us challenges in life that we are able to overcome, that each sin we have is a vessel that can be transformed and filled with His goodness. I understand that He loves me, forgives me, and seeks my good in all things—before, during, and after the moment when I am weak. However, I am done, I am sick of struggling, fighting, and failing time and time again. I am frustrated with how weak I feel. Discouraged and hurt by the lack of support I feel. I don't know what to do next. So, I am trying this. If this fails, I will try something else.

At one point I would watch hours of P a day. It was and is a form of anxiety relief for me, a drug to help me focus, and an endorphin rush that I am hunting for. I don't know if I need to seek out medication for ADD or anxiety as a way to help me fight the addiction. I have other habits I have been unable to break that deal with the same physical and mental release. Such as biting nails. I have had success from time to time with stopping—then, during periods of high stress or hard work, I always fall back to old habits. I am at the point now where I can go for one-two weeks without falling into my old

habits. I have made a lot of growth—but I want to be fully rid of this.

What has worked so far.

- **My phone has no social media or internet.** I have found that by removing my access to easy and mindless scrolling I am able to limit my exposure. However, no system is full proof and even with a guarded “kosher” phone I can find ways to view stimulating images if I want.
- **Charity.** You are able to challenge G-d with your charity. I have given consistently, daily. For over a year now. Sometimes manually each day, others through an automatic charity service. I have and am challenging G-d to remove and help me overcome my addiction.
- **Prayer.** I pray sincerely for freedom from lust. I find that after I have failed my prayers are distant, guilty, and distracted but when I am able to focus I believe I am heartfelt in my requests to be free.
- **Learning.** I have been learning a wide range of topics. All torah learning helps me distance myself from temptation. None of it has been the final nail in the coffin of this addiction. I know the chemical makeup, the way addiction works on the brain, I can observe myself during moments of temptation, I even know steps I can take to help or stop myself from giving in—It often delays but never fully breaks the habit.
- **Schedule.** Having a dedicated schedule is very helpful. Praying 3 times a day, learning, eating well, working hard, exercise—all of this helps me remain strong. At some point however all of these structured habits make me grow exhausted and I break. I don't go to sleep early enough, I take a day to watch a TV show or movie, I grab junk food, miss a minyan, and then always end up watching P and M.

There is more I could go through that I have tried, am trying, and might be working to some degree. At the end of the day - nothing has fully worked.

Why it's not working.

- **The desire to M for me becomes extremely strong.** I think this is my biggest problem. I can guard my eyes, I can avoid temptation, I can delay long enough that the desire to watch P goes away. However, I get a pressure in my mind and physical discomfort in my waist that pushes me to find a release. I think this is a mental thing overall. When I am stressed and my body wants the endorphin rush. I become fixated on the idea of release and the pressure never seems to go away, it can last for days. It is distracting and very much impacts my focus throughout the day.
- **The ease of P and temptation.** Our world is packed to the brim with sexual images, quick access to our drug, and temptation. I work online and can't be

disconnected from the world. As much as I would love to learn full time, stay in my community, and shut down every online access point - my job requires me to be online. Going to the store exposes me to images and clothing that's hard to avoid. Doing anything in the secular world seems to immediately expose you to sexualized images.

- **My own mind. I have so many images and thoughts in my own mind from the years I spent giving in fully to temptation. Those images become a catalyst without anything else external feeding them.**
- **The reward for a avera is a avera. When I fail, I am more likely to fail again. When I am faithful and diligent I am more likely to succeed. However, I always seem to have a point of failure where I start over again.**
- **The guilt. Why keep trying? It can be very hard to have hope and push forward when you have 17 years of failure.**

Questions.

- **Is it better for me to M as a way to avoid looking at P? Should I make the transition away from P fully while still getting physical release when I seem to have no option?**
- **Why has G-d not removed this challenge from me? Why after prayer, charity, repentance, and so much suffering am I still facing this same challenge?**
- **Should I seek medication as a way to fight? I know that some of the signs of ADD, Anxiety, Depression are a likely dependence on endorphins and higher proclivity to addictive substances. Am I at the point now where I should seek medical help?**
- **Is it normal to have a physical desire that is overwhelming, distracting, and seemingly impossible to overcome?**

Thanks for reading. I hope to be active and work through the 90 day challenge. This is the next step forward. G-d willing it is the last one needed before I find freedom from this addiction.

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