

Anorexia - Sexual, Social & Emotional

What Is Anorexia?

In Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous, we suffer from addiction to sex, love, relationship, fantasy, romance, and co-dependency. However, there is still another addiction some of us suffer from: anorexia. As an eating disorder, anorexia is defined as the compulsive avoidance of food. In the area of sex and love, anorexia has a similar definition: Anorexia is the compulsive avoidance of giving or receiving social, sexual or emotional nourishment.

Some Varieties of Anorexia

Some of us may not have had sex or been in a close personal relationship in years. Or we may be in partnerships but find it difficult to be emotionally close. We may be the members in S.L.A.A. who seldom speak in meetings, disappearing the instant the meeting is over. Or we may be those who, outside meetings, are barely social. Or we may be the kind who do not have intimate friendships. We may have many acquaintances but no one we're really close to. Or we may have close relations with only certain people, our children, say, but keep our distance from anyone else. There are many other varieties of anorectics as well. But whichever kind we are, all of us in some important way have distanced ourselves from experiencing love.

As anorectics or as people with anorectic tendencies, we may have a wide range of feelings and responses. Some of us feel overwhelmed in social settings. Others of us get high by socializing with a great many people in order to keep ourselves from intimacy with any one person. Some of us feel incapacitated by shyness in relationships with others. Others of us are in a relationship but are passionate only in one arena of it; for instance, we may be emotionally invested in the relationship but remain sexually or socially unavailable. Just as our feelings have a wide range, so do our behaviour and patterns. For some of us, anorexia might take the form of an overwhelming dread of making phone calls. Some of us function well in particular situations, such as the workplace where intimacy is not usually valued, but find we are distant with family or friends. Others of us have used alcohol or drugs to become emotionally withdrawn. Or we have used them to become sexually, emotionally, or socially daring, while essentially remaining out of contact with others in any meaningful way. In this way, we have used other addictions to act out anorectically.

Anorexia may be difficult to recognise. Anorexia is a form of sex and love addiction, but it is often hard to detect. Other forms of sex and love addiction themselves can mask anorexia. Indeed, anorexia may be masked so completely that the individual doesn't recognise that anorexia is present at all. Sexual promiscuity, for instance, may actually hide an avoidance of intimacy. Co-dependency, while producing the "appearance" of relationship, may actually hide a resistance to real relationship. Often, when S.L.A.A. members stop acting out their most obvious addiction they discover to their surprise that anorexia lies beneath their addiction after all.

There are anorexics, of course, who are aware of ways in which they are anorectic. But there are others of us who have no sense of what is lacking in our lives in matters of sex and relationship and social communion. Many of us don't even know what is possible. Some of us, for instance, know we can give love, but have no idea that love might be given to us. Others of us know only what it is to respond to other people's needs, but don't know what our own needs might be. Some of us have never known social joy, or honest intimacy, or emotional reciprocity. We have no sense of these things. Faced with getting our needs met, we are baffled because we can't even name these needs.

Anorexia is not just fear of intimacy. In some way, every person alive is afraid of intimacy, for shyness, modesty, and a sense of privacy are natural human endowments. But we anorexics have made fear of intimacy into a fixed policy, automatically operating. And anorexia may operate without a hum, with scarcely a ripple. For while there are blatantly acted-out forms of anorexia, there are also quiet, subtle forms of it. Some anorexics may be in no other way addicted. However, beneath the surface, anorexia is a busy addiction: it consists of not doing something, and not doing something, and not doing something. Not trusting, not committing, not surrendering. Here, unlike picking up a drink or shooting up a drug, anorexia's symptoms are obscure, uneventful. Here anorectic's don't act-out, they act-in, by refusing to act. For anorexia maintains itself by industriously declining to allow movement: outwardly the anorectic may appear to be quite still; inwardly the anorectic may feel quite still also. And so the anorectic pattern may remain invisible. Numbness to itself may make anorexia additionally difficult to notice as well.

Anorexia is a great disguiser. It can look like natural shyness or modesty or reserve. Even when hidden under extroversion or charm, anorexia often maintains a quiet, status quo state. It can even put on the face of spiritual purity. And neutral or vivid, it can go on for years unsuspected. One day, however, we anorexics begin to realise that we have been living our lives for a long time without love. We observe the absence of closeness in certain areas of our lives and we observe that we are engaged in a policy of dread of others, and a strategy to keep them at bay. Whether our anorexia is social, sexual, or emotional, we awaken to the fact that we are not experiencing the giving and receiving of love that is so precious to human life. Having become aware of this lack of love in our lives, we may then have tried to change our conduct. If we found we could not change it, we may come to understand we are addicted to it: it was conduct we repeatedly engaged in and could not stop despite its consequences. Are you anorectic?

Here are ten of the fifty questions (from the SLAA FWS pamphlet) you might want to address. There is no score for these questions. Your own instinct will tell you to what degree they apply to you.

1. Do you go for long periods without being involved in a sexual or romantic relationship?
2. Do you go without social activities for extended periods of time?
3. Although in a relationship, have you found that, for a long while, you have not experienced: romance? sexuality? intimacy? friendship?

4. Are you alone more than you want, but feel unable to change that?
5. At work do you have trouble developing relationships, talk only when absolutely necessary, or hide out in the work?
6. Do you avoid relationships with a certain gender?
7. Do you stay aloof when in groups?
8. Are you afraid of being noticed?
9. Does being in the presence of others exhaust you, even if you like them?
10. Do you habitually panic or push people away when they start getting too close?