Are you addicted to shopping? We all have things we need to buy, and we always want to get a good deal on what we have to buy. However, has the buying become the thrill, not the product itself?

Researchers from the University of Bergen have developed a method to measure shopping addiction. The Bergen Shopping Addiction Scale is based on other addiction models such as drug addiction or alcohol addiction.

Let’s face it. Modern technology has made easy to shop. You can shop from the Internet, retail shops here in town, your phone and even on the television 24-hours a day. Goods are always accessible. If you are addicted to shopping, it is easier to get your “fix” than if your addiction is alcohol. The liquor stores and bars at least close sometime.

Who is most often affected by shopping addiction? It’s probably not a surprise to many of you that this condition is more predominant in women, but age also has an effect. Many people begin on the path to shopping addiction in their late teens, and the propensity to shop decreases with age. If you consider both men and women who are diagnosed with a shopping addiction, personality type has a great deal of influence on who is shopping. Two types of people most affected are those that score high in extroversion and neuroticism. Those with these personality traits are more at risk of developing shopping addiction.

Researchers say that those who are extroverts are typically social and sensation seeking. They will shop to express their individuality and social status.

On the other hand, those who are anxious, depressive and have low self-esteem use shopping to escape these unpleasant emotions or feelings. The challenge is that people
shop to fill the unpleasant feelings, yet if debt results from that shopping, they begin to feel even more depressed. It becomes a cycle leading to more shopping.

Those people who are less likely to engage in problematic shopping are those that are agreeable, responsible and have good self-control.

The researchers list seven signs that people are compulsive shoppers.

• You think about shopping/buying things all the time.

• You shop/buy things in order to change your mood.

• You shop/buy so much that it negatively affects your daily obligations (e.g., school and work).

• You feel you have to shop/buy more and more to obtain the same satisfaction as before.

• You have decided to shop/buy less, but have not been able to do so.

• You feel bad if you for some reason are prevented from shopping/buying things.

• You shop/buy so much that it has impaired your well-being.

If you can say that you “agree” with four of seven of these statements, you may be suffering from shopping addiction.

Next week we’ll talk about ways to cure a shopping addiction. Roxie Rodgers Dinstel is associate director of Cooperative Extension Service, a part of the University of Alaska Fairbanks, working in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Questions or column requests can be e-mailed to her at rrdinstel@alaska.edu or by calling 907-474-7201.