Shopping is one of America’s favorite pastimes. There are always things that must be purchased, such as groceries, but shopping has become a way many people while away the hours. However, shopping and buying can put a hole in your budget.

We often talk about how some people are “shopaholics.” They can’t seem to stay out of the stores. How many pairs of shoes or jeans does a person really need? Even though your closet may be full, do you find yourself spending time and energy shopping? In the same manner that alcohol and drugs are highly addictive, shopping can join this group as an addictive activity.

Just like other addictions, shopping is a disease of emotions. When we talk about stopping any addictive behavior, we tend to fight it with logic or shame, neither of which works very well. In the same manner that you can’t shame someone for drinking too much, you can’t shame shoppers into stopping their destructive behavior. Pointing out that they won’t have money for rent also doesn’t work well. The shopper already feels inadequate and socially isolated. When you point out this behavior, they feel worse than ever. What is the treatment? Go shopping and spend even more money? It becomes a cycle of overspending, feeling bad, then shopping to feel better, which makes you feel bad.

Shopping addiction can be cured, but it takes time. First, figure out what triggers cause you to shop. Are you bored? Guilty? Mad? Keep track of what is going on with you when you choose to shop. Write it down and figure out what makes you want to shop.

Examine why you shop. Shopping probably fills a psychological need such as excitement, pleasure or confidence. By discovering why you shop, you’ll be able
to control when you shop. The shopping urge won’t go away until you figure out what need shopping fills in your life. Are you craving acceptance? Bored? Frustrated?

Does shopping give you pleasure, or does it make you avoid something as in loneliness, fear or inadequacy? What part of shopping makes you feel good? Is it the rush from getting a good deal? Or is it the social part because you are going with your friends? Knowing what you are getting out of this activity will help you control the urge.

Find an alternative to fill this need. This is the classic trade-off of losing a bad habit and replacing it with a good habit. Instead of shopping on Saturday, spend your day volunteering at the food bank or the health fair. Turn that need for an activity into something that benefits others.

Sometimes just replacing the bad habit isn’t enough. You have to consider what it is that you value the most. Do you treasure the time you spend shopping more than the time you spend with your family? A friend of mine described it well when she said addiction is when you put anything, whether it is shopping, alcohol or credit, above the relationships in your life.

Change your surroundings. Instead of walking through the store to shop, take a hike. There aren’t places to spend your money in the great outdoors. Stay out of stores, and remove the temptation to shop. Also consider where you are seeing ads that make you want to shop. You might consider eliminating television watching, reading magazines or even the ads in the newspaper. Those advertising gurus are good. They know how to make us want to buy. Begin to recognize what triggers your shopping urge and avoid it.

Find someone for support. It might be a friend or family member or even a self-help group. Addiction is hard to end, no matter if it is alcohol or shopping. So find someone who will be that conscience and will remind you to not spend money.

Shopping, like all addictions, takes time and persistence to kick. But it only happens if you take positive steps and keep on the track.

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