

Shopaholic? Here Is What You Need to Know

Denise Kautzer, MA, LPC, CPA

A study conducted by the Stanford University School of Medicine in 2006 found that almost 6% of adults in the U.S. are shopaholics (1). Shopaholics are also known as compulsive buyers or spenders, overshoppers and/or spending addicts.

Problems of overspending

To some, shopping is a hobby or something that is done out of necessity. If you are true shopaholic, however, you may find yourself suffering from a genuine and a worrisome lack of self-control. This lack of control can damage your finances when you live above your means, your debts mount and you face potential bankruptcy. When shopping comes between your children, spouse and/or other family members it can damage relationships and result in family conflicts and divorce. Out of control shopping can also interfere with other areas of your life when it keeps you from going to work or causes you to give up social and recreational activities in order to shop.

So why do you keep shopping?

Shopping can be a coping mechanism that you use when you are emotionally distressed and are feeling angry, sad or lonely. You may also shop to compensate for problems you are experiencing in your life. You may feel happy and excited while shopping and it may provide an escape from reality. The euphoria, however, is short lived when you try to fill emotional needs with material possessions. The resulting guilt and shame from overspending can lead to depression, anxiety and feelings of low self esteem.

We live in a world in which more is better and success is equated with the quantity of material possessions. Add to this, credit that is easy to obtain and the convenience of shopping at malls and on the internet and you can see how societal influences affect shopping behaviors.

What to do about it

If you find that your shopping behaviors are negatively impacting your life and you are spending too much time, energy and money shopping, it may be time to change. Change may be difficult but not impossible. Admitting to your out of control shopping behaviors is a first step.

Denise Kautzer, M.A. is a Licensed Professional Counselor and a Certified Public Accountant. She is the founder of Professional Counseling Services and has a therapy practice at the River City Clinic in St. Paul, MN.

REFERENCES

1. Koran, L.M., Faber, R.J., Aboujaoude, E., Large, M.D. & Serpe, R.T. (2006). Estimated Prevalence of Compulsive Buying Behavior in the United States. *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 163, 1806-1812.