

Withdrawal **excerpted © 1995 S.L.A.A.**

What is Withdrawal?

A primary and critical step in beginning recovery from sex and love addiction is identifying our Bottom Line behaviors - those activities from which we must refrain in order to attain physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual wholeness. For guidance, we turn to our sponsor, our Higher Power, and other members of S.L.A.A. A change in our behavior - stopping the addictive pattern - one day at a time, marks the beginning of abstinence from compulsive and destructive acting out. The physical, mental, emotional, and often spiritual upheaval which generally accompanies the release of our addictive pattern is called withdrawal. Whether our craving is for sex, romance, or relationships, whether this craving is constant or periodic, not satisfying such a craving often comes as a shock to our system.

Abstinence from acting out is initially followed by a period of withdrawal. The word withdrawal typically conjures up an image of substance abusers dependent upon their "drug of choice" to alter moods and/or escape from the present moment. Like drugs, sex and love addiction can become all - consuming pushing us toward greater and greater risk to our physical health, our emotional well-being, our sanity ... our very life itself.

Times of withdrawal can be uncomfortable for many of us. Our bodies go through unexpected physical changes; our emotions hit highs and lows we never imagined possible. We feel, perhaps for the first time ever, the void which we have sought to fill with our addiction(s).

The Experience of Withdrawal

Abstinence from acting out on bottom line behaviors opens us to the vulnerability we have desperately sought to avoid. This vulnerability is experienced differently by each of us. The resulting withdrawal is sometimes recognized first by its symptoms:

- a craving to act out
- inexplicable aches and pains
- physical illness or exhaustion
- switch to a new addiction(s)
- changes in eating or sleeping patterns
- general self doubt
- desperation and fear
- suicidal thoughts
- desire to isolate
- obsessive thinking
- sadness, depression, or despair
- dreams of acting out
- emotional highs and lows
- irritability, anger, or rage
- preoccupation with fantasy
- confusion or trouble concentrating
- questioning of our interest in S.L.A.A. or recovery

If we aren't acting out, then what are we to do?

Sometimes, we just breathe. It may be all we can do, for the moment. Reciting the Serenity prayer has helped many of us pass that critical moment when we are tempted by our addiction. A phone call to a sponsor or other program member can help, as can reading an S.L.A.A. pamphlet, or Chapter Five of the basic text, Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous, where the experience of withdrawal is discussed in depth. Reflecting on the Twelve Steps can help us bring the focus back to the solution, instead of being stuck in the problem.

We found that the most healing antidote to the gnawing pain of our struggles and doubts was to turn over any questions concerning the outcome of our withdrawal to God, or to whatever Power we felt was helping us to abstain from our old patterns.

We might be thinking, "No Way! ... It's not worth it!" But the truth is, it is worth it. You are worth it. And you are not alone.