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Compulsive Buying Disorder: Recognise The Symptoms When Shopping Becomes An Addiction

Everybody loves to shop. But when you are constantly obsessing over what to buy, it may indicate an addiction.

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Shopping addiction is often a coping mechanism to help mask emotional pain and real-life distress.

The addiction to shopping is real. Many might mask it under the thin veil of 'retail therapy' but there is more than meets the eye when dealing with this medically classified psychological issue. Also known as the Compulsive Buying Disorder or Oniomania, this pathological need to buy was first described clinically in the early 20th century. Where many experts are at conflict over whether to call it a real addiction, here are a few signs to know whether you are 'Rebecca Bloomwood' from 'The Confessions of a Shopaholic' and how you can kick the habit. [Also Read - Is Mumbling A Sign Of Mental Illness? Know The Causes And Symptoms](#)

Understanding The Addiction

The current widespread consumerism encourages those who find solace in buying. Shopping addiction is often a coping mechanism to help mask emotional pain and real-life distress. Quite often, it allows the shopper the moment of instant gratification which might be making this worse for him/her. Some of the negative emotions associated with incessant shopping are: [Also Read - Mental illnesses on the rise in India: Know why and what you can do to fight the problem](#)



- [Low self-esteem](#)
- Emotional and sensory overload
- Cognitive impairment
- Sluggish cognitive capabilities due to stress

Determining Your Addiction

Shopping is, by no means, a bad thing and managing your expenditures that come along is a good habit. However, if you exceed that budget or spend most of your time shopping or thinking about shopping, then we have a problem at our hands. This is known as Shopping Preoccupation. [Also Read - If you enjoy the euphoria of drinking, beware of alcohol use disorder](#)

This what shopping preoccupation looks like:

- Digressing from your essential tasks and diverting that time to shopping or thinking about shopping.
- Devoting a significant part of your day to shopping or planning your shopping.
- Integrating shopping in almost every conversation or making it a social activity when you can catch a movie or go to a picnic.

When Shopping Takes Precedence

One of the biggest tell-tale signs of shopping [addiction](#) is indulging in it at the risk of one's well-being, both mental and financial. Such addictions often end in shoppers regretting their decisions. Some of the examples of such situations are:

- Shopping instead of paying bills
- Mounting debts as a result of shopping
- Spending more than you can afford
- Compromising on values

The Instant Gratification

People want to feel happy and, for shopping aficionados, retail purchase is their outlet. Those addicted to shopping try to dissipate every negative emotion via instant gratification provided by shopping and get caught in the vicious loop that can only end with intervention.

Recovering From Shopping Addiction

While this is a serious issue, there are measures one can take to recover from [shopping addiction](#).

- Say no to credit cards and destroy your existing cards (post clearing the debt, of course). Go for debit cards and cash for all your payments.
- Create a budget and stick to it.
- Ditch the 'Add to cart' syndrome. Limit your shopping list to what you need and buy it immediately, instead of piling up your cart and amount.
- When you feel the urge to shop, distract your mind. Engage in an exercise, a hobby or talk to your loved one, preferably who is aware of your problem to steer you away from the problem.
- Seek treatment. Shopping addiction is a complex psychological problem that needs intervention and support. It is important to consult a qualified psychologist to help you break the cycle and make a lasting change. Support groups also go a long way in providing the right encouragement and reinforcement that makes this journey easier for the addicts.

Final Takeaway

The journey from shopping addiction to freedom starts with acknowledging the problem. The person in focus needs to understand that they have a problem. This acknowledgment will smoothen the transition and the journey, less arduous.

(This article is authored by Dr Malini Saba, founder & Chairman, Saba Group & Anannke Foundation)