**Changes the Brain**

**1.** To explain how it works, brain scientists have a saying: Neurons that fire together, wire together.

If you’re wondering what a neuron is and why it’s on fire, here’s what that means. A neuron is a brain cell, and when brain cells get activated at the same time by something you see or hear or smell or whatever, they release chemicals that help strengthen the connection between those neurons. For example, when you eat something delicious, your brain releases dopamine, a chemical that makes you feel good. Or if you hold hands with someone you care about, your brain releases a chemical called oxytocin, which helps you bond with people.

So if every time you went to visit your Uncle Carl he gave you a big hug and then took you out for ice cream, you’d probably start feeling pretty great about Uncle Carl, since your brain would build pathways connecting Uncle Carl with feeling happy and loved.

You have these kinds of brain pathways for all sorts of things: riding a bike, eating a sandwich, and walking the dog. And when a person looks at porn, their brain creates new pathways for that, too.

**2.** Neurons that fire together, wire together. Just like other addictive substances, porn floods the brain with dopamine. That rush of brain chemicals happening over and over again rewires the brain’s reward pathway ultimately changing the make up of the viewer’s brain. This can result in an increased appetite for porn.

**It’s like a DRUG**

**3**. On the surface, cocaine and porn don’t seem to have a lot in common but studies are showing that viewing pornography tricks your brain into releasing the same pleasure chemicals that drugs do. What’s more is your brain actually begins to rewire itself because of this artificial stimulation. It may sound crazy, but it’s true.

**It is Addictive**

**4.** Porn is basically sexual junk food. When a person is looking at porn, their brain thinks they’re seeing a potential mating opportunity, and pumps the brain full of dopamine. And unlike healthy sexual relationships that build up over time with an actual person, porn offers an endless stream of hyper-sexual images that flood the brain with high levels of dopamine every time the user clicks to a new image.

Setting your brain up for an overload of feel-good chemicals might sound like a good idea at first, but just like with junk food, what feels like a good thing, in this case isn’t at all. Because porn use floods the brain with high chemical levels, the brain starts to fight back. Over time, the brain will actually cut down on its dopamine receptors—the tiny landing docs that take the dopamine in once it’s been released in your brain. As a result, porn that once excited a person often stops having the same effect, and the user has to look at more porn, look at porn more often, or find a more hardcore version—or all three—to get aroused.

**Kills Love**

**5.** Research has found that after men are exposed to pornography, they rate themselves as less in love with their partner than men who didn’t see any porn. On top of that, another study found that after being exposed to pornographic images, people were more critical of their partner’s appearance, sexual curiosity, sexual performance, and displays of affection.

**6.** You see, in real life, real love requires a real person. And a real person has thoughts and ideas and talents. Maybe they’re quirky and fun to be around; maybe they’re a great listener and always take time to hear how you’re feeling; or maybe they’re awesome at karaoke and being with them gives you the courage to get on stage too. Every person is a unique mix, and it’s that awesome blend that we fall in love with.

Of course, pornographers can’t offer any of that, so instead they capitalize on the fact that the real people that real love requires come with some complications. In real life, there’s a chance your partner will be having a bad day or a bad hair day. Maybe they’re tired or under a deadline, so they don’t have time to do exactly what you want. And they have needs of their own that need to be considered.

In porn, all of that can get edited out: any physical flaws can be quickly Photo shopped away; no matter what’s happening to them, the people on screen can be made to look like they’re having a good time; and no one seems to have any needs of their own, opinions, or feelings to consider. Besides, if anyone fails to immediately satisfy, there’s always someone new to click to.

Doesn’t sound much like real life or real love does it? Here’s the thing: not only is porn a fantasy, but it also makes it harder for users to have real loving relationships.

**It is a LIE**

**7.** Back in the 1950s, two researchers, Dr. Nikolas Tinbergen and Dr. D. Magnus, played a trick on butterflies. After figuring out which marks on female butterfly wings were most eye-catching to their mates, they created their own cardboard butterflies and painted them to look like super-females. Their wing patterns were based on the wings of normal butterflies, but with more exciting marks than would ever be found in nature.

And the butterflies fell for it. Even though real female butterflies were around and available, the males kept trying to partner with the cardboard versions. It wasn’t getting them what they wanted—which was the chance to mate—but they had been tricked, so they ignored the real females and kept trying to charm the decoys.

Any of this sound familiar?

In porn, everything from the way people look to how and why they have sex is no more real than Tinbergen’s cardboard wings. And just like the butterflies that got duped, porn users often get so obsessed with chasing something that isn’t real that they miss out on actual relationships.

**Leaves you Lonely**

**8.** Studies have found that when people engage in an ongoing pattern of “self-concealment,”—which is when they do things they’re not proud of and keep them a secret from their friends and family members—it not only hurts their relationships and leaves them feeling lonely, but also makes them more vulnerable to severe psychological problems. For both male and female porn users, their habit is often accompanied by problems with anxiety, body-image issues, poor self-image, relationship problems, insecurity, and depression.