

## Are You a "Shopaholic"?

Let's face it. We all spend more money than we should from time to time. It's fun and exciting to bring home a new gadget or pair of shoes. We feel alive, in style, even powerful. For some, the "high" that come from shopping can be so seductive that we begin to chase that feeling repeatedly. It's more fun to shop than deal with the realities of life so we keep on, telling ourselves "I have to have just this one more thing". Does this hit close to home? Here are some signs that you may be under the spending spell:

You head to the mall or shop online when you feel afraid, upset, depressed or unappreciated.

You experience a euphoric "high," along with feelings of anxiety when spending money.

While shopping for gifts for others you end up purchasing as much for yourself.

You experience a sense of remorse and shame after a shopping spree.

You buy expensive gifts for others in an attempt to make an impression of having money and good taste.

You juggle credit card accounts and bills to accommodate your shopping habits.

You "stretch the truth" about what you buy, how much you spend, and sometimes even hide purchases and receipts.

Your spending causes conflicts with your spouse or other loved ones.

You make promises to yourself and others that you're "done" shopping and then soon after start rationalizing making another purchase.

You spend money on things you feel you "have to have" and then end up never using or wearing them.

Why is it so easy to be addicted to shopping and spending? Truthfully, it's the same reason that an alcoholic can't stop drinking, or an overeater can't cut down on calories. Deeper problems within drive a person to seek relief in spending. When we are overloaded with stress or difficult situations in our home or work life, our minds search for a means of escaping that stress. Our imaginations wander and we convince ourselves: "if only I had...I'd be happy". Of course, those of us who have ever bought that dream, know the let down that comes after getting what we want. After the thrill is gone we wake up to the same real-life issues that were there before, such as difficult in-laws, trouble spots in our marriage, adolescent teens, an unsatisfying job, or feelings of self-loathing. If there are no apparent problems, we still may find ourselves asking, "is this all there is"?

Besides the apparent escape shopping provides, there are other motivations for our penchant for purchasing. If we suffer from low self-esteem we may use shopping to boost our egos: the ladies in the Nordstrom dress department or the Macy's make up counter dote on us and make us feel special; we think that a new leather jacket will make us look cool; or perhaps we believe that by showing up to the party with the most expensive gift we will be noticed and admired. The shopping fetish may be a habit we learned from our parents: they spent money whenever they felt down, hoping money and material things would "fix it" and we learned to do the same. (Are you sending the same message to your kids?) Or perhaps we grew up having very little materially, and the pain and shame of that experience have driven us to live in excess.

Most importantly, we use spending money as a way to fill a void inside. We may have lost a spouse or are suffering from "empty nest syndrome" and find ourselves feeling lonely. Or our kids and grand kids have relocated across the country and we feel the loss. When we make a purchase, our aching void is temporarily filled. But the fact is that the void is something that can't be filled materially. It is an emotional and spiritual void, and only by connecting with others and ultimately with our Source, a Higher Power or God, can it be filled. The truth is, no Gucci handbag, Rolex watch, or BMW feels as comforting as a long, honest chat with an old friend. No vintage wine warms us inside like a hug from a grateful single mother at the soup kitchen. No attentive salesperson can boost our mood like a "check-in" call at just the right moment to a relative or a friend to offer to lend a hand. No, there is no amount of money, cars or clothes that can ever fill that God-shaped hole inside. It can only be filled when we face our problems squarely, and allow love back into our hearts by reaching out and spreading joy to others.

## Try These "7 Secrets for Shopping Sanity":

Don't shop when you're upset in any way (postpone for another day when you feel more balanced emotionally).

Don't use purchasing to "fix" your problems, or to "feel better".

Try a "waiting period" for 48 hours before making a significant purchase.

Don't buy anything that cannot be returned.

Give the credit cards a rest: try paying only cash for your purchases for a month.

Consider your needs before shopping: set an intention for exactly what you need to purchase and leave the store when you've accomplished your mission (Spend the extra time getting other errands done...you'll be amazed at how productive you are!)

Don't try to keep up with the Jones...they moved to Thailand!

**Tricia Greaves is the founder of Be Totally Free!, an organization helping others overcome emotional eating, eating disorders and various addictions. She is also a "Self-Care" coach, for those desiring maximum results with "self-care" instead of self-control. For more information, visit our services at <http://www.betotallyfree.com/ourservices.php>.**