

## Hooked on Distractions

Soft Addictions Are on the Rise and Can Strike Anyone

*By Julie Deardorff, Chicago Tribune  
The Star's Valerie Vinyard contributed to this report.  
April 17, 2007*

[Excerpts]

When Rich and Gertrude Lyons first admitted they were powerless, television was the first thing to go. Then they weaned themselves from mail-order catalogs, electronic gadgets and sugar.

Today, the Chicago couple are still grappling with their "soft addictions," or ordinary behavior that, if overdone, can wreak havoc on your life. Unlike hard addictions, which are usually related to a chemical substance, you don't die from soft addictions.

"But you don't really live, either," said self-help guru Judith Wright, who labeled the phenomenon more than a decade ago.

Rich Lyons, 41, for example, habitually zoned out in front of the television at night, staying up far later than intended and waking up crabby the next day. That resulted in another soft addiction, he said, to a grumpy mood. His wife, Gertrude, 41, meanwhile, found she had a soft addiction to shopping for adorable but overpriced baby clothes that, ultimately, her children didn't want to wear.

Unlike a bad habit, a soft addiction also has an identifiable cost of money, time, energy or intimacy associated with it, according to Wright. Feeling numb, high, buzzed or in a trance when you're doing an activity could mean you have a problem.

"If you can't remember what you did, ate, saw or bought, that's a sign," she said. "But if you're doing the activity and feel more alive and vital, and you're learning, growing, clear, grounded and present, that's a passion. We shouldn't confuse the two."

Rob Johnson, 45, of Oak Park, Ill., found he was became too emotionally invested when he watched televised sporting events. But rather than cut sports out of his life, he added more time with his wife and three sons and began coaching youth hockey teams, something he finds much more rewarding.

**Breaking self-addiction can be done**

According to executive coach and author Noah Blumenthal, "It's not a lack of willpower. The real problem is that we're so thoroughly conditioned to act in the old negative ways, even though we know they're harmful. In fact, the hold these behaviors have on us is so strong that they are essentially like addictions. And over time they've become so deeply ingrained that, like it or not, they have become a part of us. In a very real sense we're addicted to ourselves."

But self-addiction can be broken. For more than 10 years, Blumenthal has been studying personal change and training his clients on how to break their addictive and harmful behaviors. Now, he's making his system available in his new book, "You're Addicted to You: Why It's So Hard to Change - and What You Can Do About It" (Berrett-Koehler Publishers, \$15.95).

Blumenthal offers tools and techniques for becoming more aware of our self-addictions and their impact on ourselves and others. He explains how to ask for specific types of support from friends, family and co-workers. And he shows how to create strategies to disrupt self-addictive behaviors and replace them with more positive ones.

"The process for breaking self-addictions takes effort, but it can be done," said Blumenthal.

"These exercises and strategies are designed to help individuals overcome their self-addictions, make the changes they want in their lives and become the people they want to be. Individuals from all walks of life can follow this system to improve performance in the workplace, at home, in relationships with friends and family, and more."