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Are You a Serial Dater — or a Love Addict?

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When does an obsession with a new relationship turn unhealthy? (Illustration: Erik Mace for Yahoo Health)

When [Shary Hauer](#) was 27, she appeared to be a successful corporate executive who had everything together. If you saw her walk down the hall at work, you'd think she had it all: looks, career success, and confidence.

"I was seen as someone who was in charge — and that attracted men," she tells Yahoo Health. But everything was not as it seemed: Inside, Hauer was an insecure wreck, longing for a [loving relationship](#). "I felt so empty, bereft, without someone by my side," she says.

But Hauer wasn't just *hoping* that some day she'd meet Prince Charming and build a healthy, long-lasting relationship — she was completely consumed with the idea. And even when she was dating someone, she didn't feel content. In fact, her obsessions only intensified. "I became extremely needy, weak, and dependent in relationships," she explains. "I constantly longed for attention — and everything that I represented on the outside became a shell of nothing on the inside."

Sometimes, she'd picture a life with someone before the second date. In her new book, [Insatiable: A Memoir of Love Addiction](#), she writes of one such incident: "Immediately, I started reconfiguring my life around him. I had to get a bigger bed — he was 6 foot 2 — and a slew of new dresses and Botox. I'd needed to book hair and nail appointments. Get a bottle of Shalimar. And shimmery body butter. A lingerie overhaul was essential. The kitchen required a new coat of paint, and I had to call the landscaping guy. Then order new silk sheets and fluffy

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towels. I was manic, wired, not sleeping for days. The frenetic high of a cocaine-like craving.”

But a slew of boyfriends and even a husband (Hauer was married for five years and then divorced) couldn't satisfy her. This was largely because of something that took her years to realize she had: an addiction to love.

What Is Love Addiction?

Rather than reaping a reward through viewing porn or experiencing orgasm (like sex addicts), love addicts tend to be serially drawn to the attachment of courtship, the beginning of a new relationship, or even the challenge of getting a relationship going, explains Jenner Bishop, clinical director of [Foundry Clinical Group](#) in California, which treats sex and love addiction. “Love addicts tend to be more addicted to people and relationships than specific sexual behavior,” she tells Yahoo Health. “It can be a quick hit of what someone is doing — by stalking Facebook or social media — or decoding texts, and thinking and fantasizing in an out-of-balance state about the relationship.”

In her book, Hauer writes of this kind of behavior, describing how she pined for a man she dated after her divorce: “The next day, less than twenty-four hours after meeting him, I was obsessed with Patrick, already consumed with waiting, wondering when his next call would come. My mind spun, speculating what he was thinking. I replayed and analyzed our conversations, coaching myself to reel in my emotions, play it cool, not appear too eager, put the brakes on my hungry heart. I remembered a friend's advice about transition relationships: Just have fun, keep it light. Between business calls and meetings, my eye was glued to the phone and the red message light. Did he call? What is he thinking? Did I go too far, too fast in telling my friends that I met someone special? Did I chase him away with my defensiveness?”

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Usually, love addiction behavior manifests as bouncing around between relationships or being a “serial monogamist” — jumping from one serious relationship to the next, Bishop says. “An addiction, colloquially, is really something where there are negative consequences — the behavior continues despite repeated negative consequences — and [the] person would like to stop the behavior. But with a love addiction, it's hard to do that.”

Bishop has seen people with love addiction engage in behaviors ranging from jealous fits to taking fertility medication without a doctor's consent to increase the chances of pregnancy. “There's a real spectrum when it comes to love addiction,” says Bishop. “Some people historically have problems with

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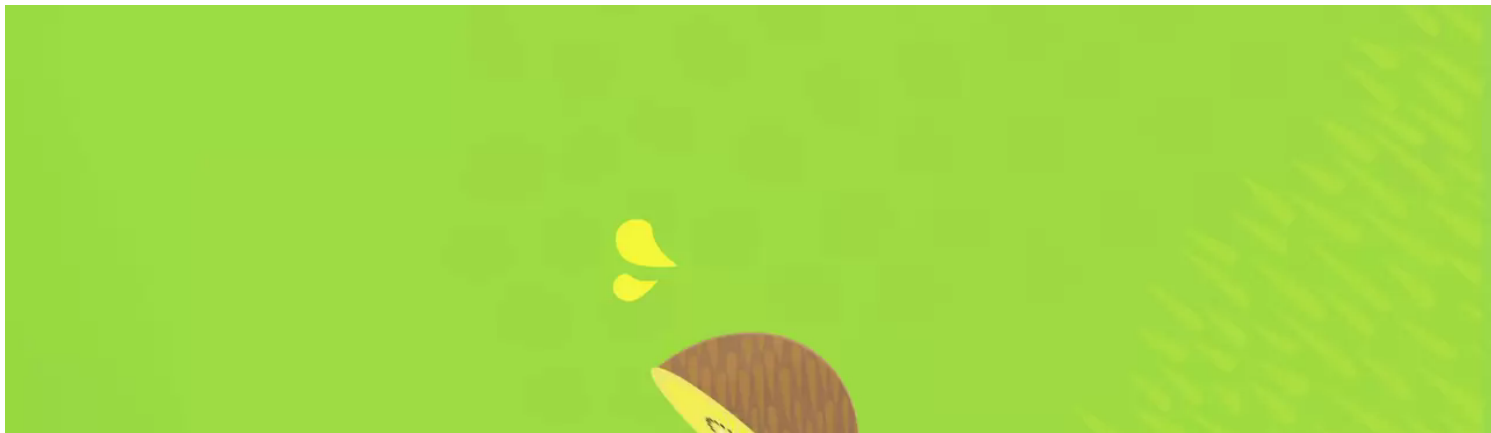
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boundaries; others stay with people who aren't good for them — and even though they have ample evidence that a person isn't good for them, they stay. Some people constantly pine over old loves; others have affairs.”

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