

JENNY WESLEY, 31, was spending £3,000 a month on things she didn't want, until sessions with a hypnotherapist cured her addiction to shopping

'My house was full of purchases that I didn't even wear or use, many still in their wrapping, stashed under my bed'

I first realised my shopping addiction was out of control in August 2007 when I was two hours late for work because I'd been up until five in the morning shopping online. In a mad spending spree I'd bought an ice-cream maker, linen sheets and a Gucci handbag.

That morning I told my boss I'd been in a car accident and sat at my desk feeling foolish as everyone fussed over me. I hated lying, but to admit what I'd really been doing would have been unthinkable.

By that point my house was full of purchases that I didn't even wear or use, many still in their wrapping, stashed under my bed and in the boot of my car.

Every night the first thing I did when I got home from work was go online to shop. On average I was getting through £3,000 a month on fripperies; I once spent £800 on an outfit for a wedding only to discover I'd only been invited to the reception. Generally, I didn't even care what I bought, as long as I got a good deal. Finding an expensive item on sale left me elated.

My shopping addiction took place entirely from home via the internet. One year I decided to buy my Christmas presents online. Over just four days I spent £2,500 on my credit card. It was more than I could afford, but I told myself that I'd pay it back in the New Year. Still, I really don't think my online habits then were any different to anyone else's at that point.

I got a job as a property consultant, which meant moving from my home in Leeds to Nottingham, and my long-term relationship came to an end. It was then that something changed:

I started shopping for comfort. With hindsight I think I was trying to plug the gaps in my life with the things I bought. Newly single and in a new city, I felt very isolated. Shopping distracted me from sitting around thinking about the fact that all my friends were married with babies, while I had no idea what my future held.

By August 2008 I was struggling to keep up with the repayments on my credit cards and mortgage. I was forced to ask my father for a loan of £4,000. A real low point came that month when

I was frantically trying to buy something at three in the morning, but my card wouldn't work. I phoned my credit-card company, telling them I was a nurse who did shifts, that this was the only time I could shop and they had to make my card work. In the end it turned out there was a problem with the website I was shopping on, but I felt crazed and couldn't believe the lies I was telling.

It was then I realised I needed to get help. I went to my GP to ask to be referred for counselling, but there was a waiting list of 18 months. I decided to try hypnosis, and went to see Monica Black at Hampstead Hypnotherapy, who had been recommended by a friend.

In the three sessions I had I was put into a deep state of relaxation, during which Monica trained me to lose the urge to shop. I'm not even sure exactly what she did; all I know is that, incredibly, it worked. I was so relieved to have my life back on track that I actually felt physically lighter, odd as that sounds. ●

