



Jump to: What is compulsive gambling?



Search for a counsellor



Enter your location



WHAT'S WORRYING YOU?

Gambling



Gambling is an activity where people take part in a game by placing something of monetary value at risk in order to win money or a prize. There are many different forms of gambling - from scratch cards, lotteries and bingo, to betting on sports or events or playing casino games and arcade machines. It is estimated that over seven billion pounds a year is spent on these activities.

Gambling is not necessarily a bad thing, but it can be risky and, in some cases, can develop into a compulsive habit that people struggle to give up. Even if the outcome is not always positive, some people will be so addicted that they end up driving themselves towards a financial crisis and possibly even poor health and well-being.

With the right treatment, it is possible to prevent a gambling addiction from escalating to this stage. Although it can be difficult for sufferers to admit to their problem and seek help, those who do have a good chance of regaining control of their lives.

This page will explore gambling addiction in more detail, highlighting the complications of this type of addiction as well as signs to look out for. It will also provide insight into gambling

We use cookies to provide and improve our services. By using our site, you consent to cookies. [More details](#)

Ok

Jump to: What is compulsive gambling?



What is compulsive gambling?

Gambling addiction is a form of impulse-control disorder where sufferers cannot control their urge to gamble - even when they are aware of the consequences and the hurt it may be causing themselves and their loved ones. Compulsive gambling arises out of an uncontrollable urge to experience the natural anticipation and thrill of making large bets and potentially gaining large returns.

A gambling addiction typically becomes the sole focus of a person's life. Ultimately, even when they know the odds are against them and even when they cannot afford to lose, people with a gambling addiction will be unable to take their eye off the next bet.

Unfortunately, rather than confront their problem, many people who compulsively gamble will go to great lengths to hide it. Reasons why may vary, but it is often out of fear and shame that

their friends and family will discover how much they spend on their habit. Failing to recognise and get help for a gambling problem can cause a lot of disruption and harm to the lives of the gambler and those around them.



More than two million people are addicted to gambling or at risk of developing a problem in the UK.

People with a gambling addiction will be under a lot of stress - constantly worrying about money - and may experience depression and anxiety. They may also face difficulties in their working life and relationships. Despite this, unlike other addictions such as alcohol or drug addiction, people who compulsively gamble will not have easily visible physical effects. This means you are unlikely to know someone has a gambling problem unless they tell you.

Every day people are given opportunities to gamble and, with the Internet making it more accessible than ever, more people are gambling in the comfort and privacy of our own homes. A gambling addiction can develop slowly and steadily, but there may be underlying reasons as to why some are more susceptible than others.

Although some people with gambling addiction think they can stop when and if they want to, often this is not the case and [professional support is needed](#) to help them overcome their negative habits in order to build a healthier lifestyle and make better choices.

Justyn Rees-Larcombe talks candidly about his experience for [TED X](#)

An error occurred.

[Try watching this video on www.youtube.com](#), or enable JavaScript if it is disabled in your browser.

Misconceptions of gambling addiction

The signs of gambling addiction can often be easily overlooked as a result of misconceptions of what it actually involves. A particular misconception is a view that people can only become addicted to a substance and not an activity. A person who is addicted to gambling will not experience the side effects linked to taking a substance, and thus they are not always seen as true addicts. In reality, however, when people gamble they experience the same chemical

changes in the brain that occur when certain drugs are taken.

The activity of gambling triggers the release of a neurotransmitter called dopamine. This makes a person feel alert, powerful and happy, creating a natural 'high'. Dopamine fuels an addiction - whether it is drug, alcohol or gambling related - because people will crave the high it brings.

Another common misconception of compulsive gambling is that you have to gamble every day to be addicted. With this view, people who gamble infrequently or those who gamble without losing money they can't afford are not considered addicts. But, an addiction is defined by the **severity** of the problem rather than the *frequency*.

It is the drive to gamble - the compulsion to put the habit before important everyday activities and relationships - that puts a person in the addicted category, even if they only gamble once a week or once a month.

Signs of gambling addiction

Due to common misconceptions and being a 'hidden illness', gambling addiction is often misunderstood. This can add to the difficulty in understanding what it means to be a compulsive gambler, and can even undermine the urgency of treatment. This misunderstanding may also cause people to ignore or avoid the signs of gambling addiction in the ones they love.

Evidence suggests up to 2% of adults who gamble will develop a gambling-related addiction, and they will typically display a number of common signs that indicate they have a problem.

People who have a gambling addiction are likely to:

- miss work or school in order to spend more time gambling
- lose interest in usual activities or hobbies, like seeing friends or spending time with family
- withdraw from social activity or neglect relationships
- have arguments with friends or family about money and gambling
- lie about their gambling and attempt to hide it from others
- borrow money, sell possessions or steal in order to gamble
- continue to gamble despite negative outcomes
- suffer frequent mood swings

Do you have a gambling addiction?

In many cases, it is the compulsive gambler themselves that will notice the signs of gambling addiction, but many will attempt to ignore them despite knowing their habit is unhealthy and

not sustainable. Others, however, may be completely unaware that their gambling has escalated until they are hit with a financial crisis that makes them consider the consequences and severity of their habit.

Often, people will engage in gambling as a way to escape stress and personal problems. In the beginning, it can be fun and stimulating, and a handy distraction from the pressures of everyday life. Yet, over time, gambling can lose its appeal and can soon become something people do to feel normal. Ironically, although unpleasant feelings such as stress, loneliness and anxiety often drive people to compulsively gamble, many will be driven into further depression and emotional discomfort as their addiction worsens.

Therefore, recognising and acknowledging the signs of gambling addiction is vital if a sufferer wants to prevent their disorder from getting worse. If you are worried that you have a gambling problem, take a look at the following signs which are common in those who compulsively gamble:

- Are you spending more time and money on gambling than you can afford?
- Are you finding it hard to manage or stop your gambling?
- Are you increasingly taking larger risks to satisfy your urge to gamble?
- Are you losing interest in usual activities and hobbies?
- Is gambling constantly on your mind?
- Do you gamble until all of your money is gone?
- Are you feeling constantly anxious, irritable, guilty or depressed?
- Do you feel the need to be secretive and lie about your gambling?
- Do you gamble even when you don't have the money?
- Have family and friends expressed their concerns?

If you can relate to a number of these, you should consider seeking help. Opening up to your friends and family about your addiction might be a good start, and they will help you to become aware of the impact compulsive gambling can have on your life. This awareness may be the kick-start you need to turn things around. Denial keeps the problem going but it is never too late to make changes and regain control.

Remember that asking for help is not a sign of weakness and there is a supportive network of health professionals available who can provide effective treatment to promote your recovery.

Treatment for gambling addiction

Overcoming a gambling addiction can be a tough process, and it may require extra support from the people around you to ensure that recovery is maintained. Each person will have their own unique gambling problem, so treatment needs to be tailored to ensure it meets the

individual needs of each person. But, with the **right** treatment, recovery and finding alternative means of dealing with these urges is possible.



“Stopping problem gambling can be extremely difficult, but once you have stopped, the ongoing task is to maintain abstinence. For most problem gamblers, if not all, an abstinence-based approach to recovery is needed in order to enjoy a full and wholesome life, free from active addiction.”

- Counsellor [Noel Bell](#).

Counselling is a particularly successful treatment for gambling addiction. Particularly talking therapies such as [cognitive behavioural therapy](#) (CBT), which can help people to understand their addiction and learn new, sustainable ways of managing their urge to gamble. CBT is ultimately designed to guide you through a process of change - helping to rewire thoughts and beliefs and encouraging you to aspire towards a future free from their addiction.

A key aspect that counselling focuses on is the triggers of the addiction - what it is that compels people to compulsively gamble even when they are aware of the negative consequences. Understanding the reason behind gambling urges - whether it's to numb unpleasant feelings, solve money problems, escape stress or simply out of boredom or loneliness - can help people to focus on healthier and more constructive ways of coping, without having to resort to gambling. It equips them with the necessary tools and support to reframe thoughts and behaviours for the long term.

As well as counselling for gambling, some alternative therapies have been found to be effective in managing addictions. Hypnotherapy, in particular, can help change the negative thoughts and behaviours associated with the addiction, using the power of suggestion.

Learn more about hypnotherapy for [gambling addiction](#) on Hypnotherapy Directory.

Medication can also be provided for people whose gambling problem is linked to mental health issues such as depression. It is important to note that additional treatment will also be required to tackle substance abuse if this is a further concern.

Significantly, very few cases of gambling addiction are isolated - many people with a gambling problem may also be addicted to alcohol or drugs. Therefore health professionals providing treatment will look to address a range of issues that may be contributing to a person's compulsion to misuse substances and gamble.

What should I be looking for in a counsellor or psychotherapist?

Whilst there are currently no official rules and regulations in position to stipulate what level of training and experience a counsellor dealing with gambling addiction needs, we do recommend

that you check your therapist is experienced in the area for which you are seeking help.

There are several accredited courses, qualifications and workshops available to counsellors that can improve their knowledge of a particular area, so for peace of mind, you may wish to check to see if they have had further training in matters of addiction.

In regards to psychological treatment, NHS Choices suggest [cognitive behavioural therapy \(CBT\)](#) be used as a tool to break the habit of addiction.

Further help

- [Gamblers Anonymous](#)

Related topics

- [Addiction\(s\)](#)
- [Alcoholism](#)
- [Drug addiction](#)
- [Smoking](#)
- [Internet addiction](#)
- [Sex addiction](#)

Would you like to provide feedback on our content?

Tell us what you think

Find a therapist dealing with gambling addiction

What type of session are you looking for?

In person

Online / Phone

Location ? *

 Enter your postcode, town or county

 Search

All therapists are ~~verified professionals~~.

Related Articles

More articles



How to maintain discipline in financial trading

Securing an edge in financial trading is the eternal quest of financial traders. Faster internet connections and...

Noel Bell



Having a flutter - what to do when gambling goes too far

At the time of writing this article, a major sporting event is about to take place. I decided to do something that...

Brian Turner



What are the best treatment plans for behavioural addictions?

Behavioural and process addictions such as gambling, sex, gaming, social media, physical exercise, and...

Noel Bell

Our health magazine - Happiful

We want to break the stigma of mental health in our society, and to shine a light on the positivity and support that should be available for everyone, no matter their situation.

[Subscribe](#)

[Find out more](#)

Counselling Directory

Counselling Directory
Building 3, Riverside Way
Camberley
Surrey
GU15 3YL



Support

- Find a counsellor
- Browse by region
- Your stories
- Helplines
- Site help
- Site map

For professionals

- Join us
- Log in
- Find a supervisor
- Professional bodies
- Proof policy

Company

- About
- Careers
- Contact
- Cookies policy
- Legal
- Press
- Privacy notice

Advertise your counselling practice

[Log in](#)

[Join us](#)

