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# Gambling Addiction

Gambling addiction may be more difficult to spot than other addictions but understanding the signs and symptoms can make it easier to identify if someone has a gambling problem.

📞 24/7 Helpline



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Updated on 07/12/21

Overview
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to mind. However, for 6 to 10 million Americans addiction falls into another category – gambling. Compulsion drives the person with gambling addiction to keep betting and bidding despite the negative consequences they’ve suffered in the past. Compulsive gambling is a process addiction, wherein someone is addicted to the behavior of gambling.

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## Common Types of Gambling

To fully understand gambling addiction, the most common types of gambling must first be recognized. Most gambling can be categorized into three types: professional gambling, social gambling or problem gambling.

### 1. Professional Gambling

A professional gambler’s primary source of income is winnings from gambling. When a person participates in professional gambling their actions may seem to resemble a gambling

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[Signs You’re Addicted to Gambling](#)

addiction. However, when someone is a professional gambler, they don't necessarily lose control of their gambling behaviors. Someone who gambles professionally can take calculated risks and maintain a stable life without experiencing the highs and lows associated with problem gambling.

## 2. Social Gambling

Because gambling is available in most states, social gambling has become a cultural norm. While someone who gambles socially may experience losses like someone with a gambling problem, they do not typically continue to gamble away their assets when a loss is experienced. People who gamble socially can usually control their gambling behaviors and often will have a predetermined amount of loss at which they will stop gambling.

## 3. Problem Gambling

Problem gambling occurs when someone has lost control of their gambling behaviors. Someone who has a problem with gambling is likely to engage in high risk and even criminal behaviors to support their gambling. When unable to continue gambling, someone with problem gambling behaviors is likely to experience intense urges and cravings to gamble.

# What is Compulsive Gambling?

Whether the condition is called compulsive gambling or gambling addiction, it can be difficult to identify if someone's gambling behaviors are dangerous. To answer the question of, "what is gambling addiction?" two additional questions should be answered:

- What is compulsive gambling?
- What is considered safe gambling?

A common compulsive gambling definition states that this condition is present when someone continues to gamble despite experiencing negative effects of their gambling behaviors. To determine whether gambling is compulsive, someone first needs to identify if gambling behaviors can be controlled. Someone who continues to gamble even when they have lost all their money may be out of control while another person who stops after reaching a predetermined maximum loss would appear to be in control. In both situations, someone may lose the same amount of money but in one of the situations, control is maintained.

## Signs and Symptoms of Gambling Addiction

Gambling addiction occurs when someone loses control of their gambling behaviors. Understanding the signs of gambling addiction can help it be recognized earlier. Some of the most common gambling addiction symptoms include:

- Growing a tolerance and placing larger, riskier bets
- An obsession with gambling
- Playing back past wins over and over in the mind
- Using gambling as a distraction from problems in life or feelings of emotional discomfort
- Hiding gambling behaviors
- Spending time away from loved ones to gamble instead
- Feeling down and guilty after gambling
- Failing at attempts to scale back or quit
- Gambling urges

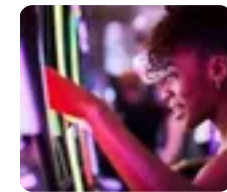
## Causes of Gambling Addiction



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Gambling is a potential problem for millions of people. After all, it is legal within certain limitations. Many people can gamble recreationally without getting addicted to it. If someone is not able to maintain control when gambling they may wonder, “What causes gambling addiction to develop in some people and not others?” and “What causes

compulsive gambling behaviors to begin in the first place?”

While specific causes of gambling addiction are not easily identified there are some risk factors that make someone more vulnerable. Many people who develop gambling addiction also have co-occurring [mental health disorders](#).

Another factor that appears to influence the development of gambling addiction is proximity to casinos. Individuals living within 50 miles of a casino are twice as likely to become someone who compulsively gambles. While it may seem counterintuitive, people who are unemployed or have a low income are more likely to gamble compulsively.

People who abuse substances are at an increased risk for gambling addiction. These individuals are already predisposed to thrill-seeking behaviors. [One study](#) on 298 people with [cocaine addictions](#) resulted in an increased rate of compulsive gambling among people with cocaine addictions compared to the general population.

## Gambling Addiction Statistics

Some gambling addiction facts indicate that in families where a parent struggles with compulsive gambling there is a higher risk of [domestic violence](#). This act of violence may occur from impairments in frustration tolerance associated with compulsive gambling. As many as one percent of adults in the country are estimated to struggle with gambling addiction. Another 2-3 percent meet partial criteria for gambling addiction and are thus categorized as people with a gambling problem. Other gambling addiction statistics indicate that there may be a genetic predisposition for developing an addiction.

### Risk Factors for Gambling Addiction

Anyone who chooses to gamble and is considered at risk based on common gambling risk factors could try to be more cautious when gambling. Some gambling addiction risk factors include:

- Being male
- Being young
- Having a relative with a gambling addiction or another addictive disorder
- Having another mental health disorder like [depression](#)
- Having a substance use disorder

### Gambling and Substance Abuse

[Gambling and substance abuse](#) frequently co-occur. As many as [30 percent](#) of people seeking treatment for a substance use disorder also meet the criteria for gambling addiction. This is likely due to both types of addictions sharing similar risk factors. The brain of a person who gambles compulsively reacts to gambling the same way any brain would respond to drug use. Experiencing a psychological high from gambling is likely to continue to reinforce future gambling. People who compulsively seek a high in the form of drugs might also seek other forms of a high.

## How to Tell if You Have a Gambling Problem

A mutual aid group, Gamblers Anonymous, has developed a [20 question](#) gambling problem quiz. This self-assessment helps a person answer the question of how to tell if you have a

gambling problem. Questions focus on the consequences someone can experience due to gambling.

For someone who is asking themselves if they have a gambling problem, [this quiz](#) may provide some answers. However, an online quiz is not enough for providing a diagnosis. An addiction professional can diagnose compulsive gambling and assist in getting much-needed treatment.

Take Our Problem Gambling Self-Assessment

## Treatment for Gambling Addiction

[Gambling addiction treatment](#) has been shown to be effective, with recovery rates estimated from 50 to 60 percent. While these figures are promising, many people go without gambling addiction help because of the stigma associated with treatment or not realizing that help is available. It is estimated that only 3 percent of people with gambling addiction seek treatment.

A lot of people with gambling problems have trouble accepting reality and gamble to experience an escape, temporarily. These types of issues are something that therapy can assist with. Treatment can also help people who struggle with holding themselves responsible for their gambling losses.

Most people who gamble compulsively show signs of self-sabotage and a deep-rooted interest in punishing themselves. Whether someone is struggling to pay the bills or not, they may still have a problem with gambling. Compulsive disorders are no different than any other addiction—they are just as real and cause just as much pain.

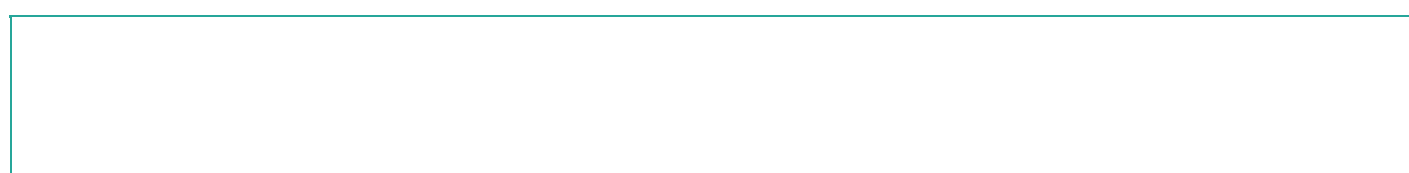
Gamblers Anonymous is a resource for those struggling with gambling addiction. The organization follows a 12-step format like Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous. Many people who gamble compulsively who reach and maintain abstinence seem to have one thing in common — they avoid triggers and learn how to manage triggers when they do encounter them. For example, someone may avoid areas where gambling is easily accessed. For slot machine fans or someone who gambles at the horse track, this may be less difficult. For other people who have gambling addictions, like those who regularly bet on sporting events or buy lottery tickets, it might be more challenging, but it is possible.

## How to Help a Loved One with Gambling Addiction

Helping someone with a gambling problem can seem challenging, especially when someone with a gambling addiction does not seem to recognize their gambling as problematic. Loved ones often seek out how to help someone with a gambling addiction.

One of the most important approaches for how to help someone with a gambling problem is to be supportive and nonjudgmental. Avoiding enabling the gambling behavior while being supportive can help increase motivation.

If you or someone you know is struggling with a substance use disorder as a result of gambling addiction, help is available. At The Recovery Village, a team of professionals can design a treatment plan for substance use and co-occurring disorders. Call and [speak with a representative](#) to learn more about what [treatment program](#) could work for you.



**Medical Disclaimer:** The Recovery Village aims to improve the quality of life for people struggling with a substance use or mental health disorder with fact-based content about the nature of behavioral health conditions, treatment options and their related outcomes. We

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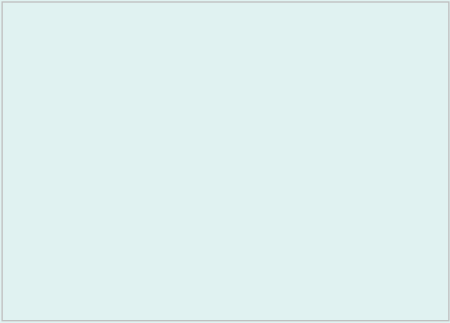
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