



(877) 764-5798

# Gambling and Debt

Compulsive gambling often leads to unsupportable debt. Gamblers will stop paying on credit cards, mortgages, auto loans and student loans, trying to compensate for losses.

Choose Your Debt Amount

\$67,000

Call Now: (866) 612-9971

- OR -

Continue Online

[Advertiser Disclosure](#)

## Table of Contents



- [The Odds Are Against You](#)
- [Gambling Is Common in the U.S.](#)
- [College Students and Online Gambling](#)
- [Problem Gamblers and Debt](#)
- [Gambling’s Impact on Family and Friends](#)
- [Steps to Overcome Gambling Addiction](#)
- [How to Pay Off Gambling Debt](#)
- [Gambling Debt Help Options](#)

Debt FAQs Menu

Debt FAQs



Annuities and Structured Settlements

Debt Myths

Building an Emergency Fund

Do I Have Too Much Debt?

Do I Need a Debt Lawyer?

Tax Debt Relief



(877) 764-5798

The Truth About Dave Ramsey: A Review of Dave’s Bad Math
Dave Ramsey’s Zero-Based Budget: Is it Realistic?
The Truth About Dave Ramsey’s Baby Steps: Do They Work?
Debt Snowball Method Works – But It Will Cost You \$\$\$\$
What Is the Debt Avalanche?
How To Get Out of Debt with Bad Credit
Envelope System Explained: Pros, Cons and Alternatives
The 8 Best Debt Consolidation Options
Mortgage Debt Forgiveness & The Mortgage Debt Relief Act
The Best Debt Relief Companies
9 Ways to Borrow Money
Financial Assistance for Single Parents
Financial Assistance for Widows
Financial Assistance for Mental Health Treatment
What to Do When You Can’t Pay Your Utility Bill
Can You Inherit Debt?
Emotional Effects of Debt
Good Debt vs. Bad Debt
How Do I Get Out of Debt?
What Is Debt Recovery?
What Is a Finance Charge?
Financial Assistance for Seniors: Government Programs and Debt Help
Financial Aid for Special Needs Children and Adults
The Rule of 78 – How to Avoid a Debt Trap



(877) 764-5798

What to Do About an Eviction
What to Tell Your Aging Parents about Debt
How to Avoid Landing in Debt
How to Tell Your Kids about Your Debt
Americans in Debt: How Do You Compare?
Timeline of U.S. Federal Debt Since Independence Day 1776
Best Ways To Get Rid of Debt
Adding a Teenager to Your Car Insurance Policy
Phone Bills Bring a Holiday Surprise: 62 Percent in Fees
10 Things to Know When Shopping for a Car
Compound Interest: How It Works
The Dos and Don'ts of Investing
Financial Concerns of Caring for a Child with Autism   Real People, Real Life
Hidden Cellphone Costs Can Pull You into a Financial Black Hole
These 7 Habits Will Help You Become Rich
What To Do with Gift Cards if a Store is Out of Business?
How to Cut Your Utility Bills This Winter, No Matter Your Heating Fuel
4 Steps to Living Debt Free
High Yield Savings Account vs CD – Which Should You Choose?
<div> Debt FAQs Menu</div>

[Home](#) > [Debt Help Advice](#) > Gambling and Debt

Gambling is essentially anything that starts with the phrase “I bet...”

And you can bet America loves to gamble.

About 75% of adults in the U.S. – that’s 194 million people – have gambled at least once in the past year, according to Keith Whyte, Executive Director for the National Council on Problem Gambling.

(877) 764-5798 

“Gambling always has been a problem in America, but with the massive expansion of legalized gambling and use of mobile phones and people using credit cards to fund their gambling ... the risks and severity are just increasing exponentially,” Whyte said.

The best thing the industry and 44 states that run lotteries do, is hide, or refuse to pursue information on how much gambling is going on in America and how it affects the families of problem gamblers.

Reports say the gambling industry in the U.S. generated record revenue of \$53 billion in 2021, a 21% jump in just two years. That obviously doesn’t count that \$57 billion that the top 10 state lotteries took in that year. Florida topped that chart with more than \$9 billion in revenue, though New York (\$8.6 billion), California (\$8.4 billion) and Texas (\$8.1 billion) weren’t far behind.

Contrast those numbers with Whyte’s assertion that U.S. gamblers lost \$120 billion in 2021.

“It’s incredibly hard to find good numbers because state governments and the gambling industry don’t want people know how big a problem this is,” Whyte said.

But no one disputes it is a problem. So how do gamblers pay for their losses?

They “borrow” from credit cards, savings accounts, investment portfolios, retirement funds – anywhere there’s money or credit available – hoping to fund the one big bet that gets them back to even.

But if you’re out of luck and that pile of chips has turned into a pile of debt, the answer is not to go all in. The answer is to convince yourself to stop gambling altogether and seek psychological help for the addictive nature of the problem.

The National Council on Problem Gambling offers a free workbook called “Problem Gamblers and Their Finances.”

Gamblers anonymous has a program called Pressure Relief that helps guide problem gamblers and their families through the process of paying off debt.

The American Gaming Association spends \$300 million a year on intervention and support programs to help gamblers address their disorder. The AGA created a public service campaign called [Have A Game Plan: Bet Responsibly](#) to educate bettors on how to wager responsibly.

There also is a national hotline for those seeking help. Call -800-ADMIT-IT (800-236-4848).

## The Odds Are Against You

There is a tiny minority of people who make a living by gambling, but unless you are an expert in statistical analysis, you are most likely in the vast majority who don’t win.

If you are an expert in statistical analysis, you would know that the odds are stacked high against you. It’s one of the reasons the United States leads the world in gambling losses.

According to the American Gaming Association, there are plenty of places to bet with 987 casinos (462 commercial and 525 tribal) open in 2021. In fact, in the 2020 elections three more states – Virginia, Nebraska and Colorado – authorized or expanded casino gambling. There are now 33 states where gambling is legal and another seven are working to join them.

The casinos in Nevada and New Jersey are the most obvious spots, but hardly the only places to gamble. Native American casinos operate in 28 states with annual revenue of nearly \$30 billion.

And gambling does not have to take place in a casino at all. There are horse tracks, dog tracks, jai-alai frontons, daily fantasy leagues and online gambling sites for those so inclined. In fact, gambling of some kind is permitted in every state in the U.S., except in Utah and Hawaii.

The easiest place to gamble is probably right in your neighborhood where you can buy a state lottery ticket or play in the weekly poker game at a friend’s house. Either place can take a big bite out of the family budget if you spend \$200-\$300 a week to get your fix.

## Gambling Is Common in the U.S.

**Betting on sports and gaming in other areas is easy to find in the United States. There are many outlets. They include:**

- Card playing
- Commercial and American Indian-owned casinos
- Charitable games like bingo
- Sports betting
- State lottery games
- Pari-mutuel wagering on horse and dog racing and jai alai

(877) 764-5798 

Most Americans are casual gamblers and can indulge from time to time without suffering any negative emotional or financial consequences. They gamble for relatively small sums and don't bet more than they can afford to lose.

They just want some action. It's a form of entertainment to them. Their small losses are simply the price of admission. And there is the thrill of winning. The satisfaction that you beat the odds, and this time it wasn't luck!

## College Students and Online Gambling

College students are among the most vulnerable when it comes to gambling. The combination of free time and easy access to student loan money doesn't mix well. About 75% of college students have gambled in the last year, and 6% of young adults have a gambling problem— a higher rate than adults— according to the National Center for Responsible Gaming.

There are state lotteries that 18 year-olds can play, and some casinos have an 18+ policy on poker, but the real cause has been the rise of online gambling.

The Unlawful Internet Gambling Act of 2006 tried to restrict online gambling, targeting poker sites such as PokerStars, Absolute Poker and Full Tilt Poker. Online poker has survived in five states (New Jersey Delaware, Nevada, Michigan and Pennsylvania) and online sports books like Bovada and BetOnline lead a host of only sports betting sites.

Fantasy sports were declared a game of skill and excluded from the UIGEA, giving way to an explosion of daily fantasy sports leagues, like DraftKings and FanDuel, in recent years. You may remember them from their \$200 million ad campaign in 2015. Fantasy sports have long been a popular recreational activity, with 46 million people playing in the U.S. in 2019. Now it has become a feeding ground for former online poker professionals.

When the U.S. Department of Justice indicted three of the main poker sites in 2011, they fled the U.S. market. Online poker players turned to daily fantasy sports. It's a lucrative business for professionals with access to spreadsheets and algorithms that give them all the advantage over your average sports fan.

Fanduel and DraftKings operate in 41 states, but are blocked in Arizona, Alabama, Hawaii, Idaho, Iowa, Louisiana, Montana, Nevada and Washington.

A credit card is all it takes to get wrapped up in the world of online gambling. Before you know it, you've landed in a pile of credit card debt.

Don't be afraid to seek help.

## Problem Gamblers and Debt

According to the National Council on Problem Gambling (NCPG), an estimated two million people in America meet the accepted criteria for addictive or pathological gambling.

As many as five million people are classified as problem gamblers, and perhaps another 15 million are thought of as at-risk.

Problem gambling is a mental health disorder, in which the individual can't control the urge to gamble. Like any addiction, problem gambling can cause major disruptions in personal, professional, and family life. It can also precipitate [serious financial difficulties](#).

A problem gambler cannot stop gambling behavior despite the recognition of ever-increasing, serious negative consequences.

**Problem gamblers may exhibit any or all of the following characteristics:**

- A preoccupation with gambling and thoughts of gambling
- Borrowing from co-workers, friends or family in order to gamble
- Lying about money lost and/or the amount of time spent gambling
- A growing need to continue betting larger amounts to overcome gambling losses
- Shifting money around in various accounts to hide gambling activity
- Selling possessions to finance a gambling habit
- Restlessness or irritability when attempting to stop gambling
- Continued unsuccessful attempts to stop or limit gambling
- Neglecting to pay bills on time and/or taking out many loans
- [Spousal financial abuse](#) or taking money from children
- Criminal activity for the purpose of funding a gambling habit

(877) 764-5798 

“Now that you can gamble using a credit card, you can spend virtually any amount you want,” Whyte said. “That places an enormous amount of risk on the gambler and their family.

“Gamblers often chase their losses. They bet more money trying to get back their losses and it’s more likely, they’re just going to end up losing even more.”

And the bills pile up, accordingly.

The average debt generated by a man addicted to gambling is between \$55,000 and \$90,000. Women gamblers average \$15,000 of debt.

In extreme cases, problem gambling can result in serious legal problems or financial ruin. More than 20% of compulsive gamblers end up [filing for bankruptcy](#) because of gambling losses.

The personal damage is also great: the divorce rate for problem gamblers is twice the rate of non-gamblers, and 1 in 5 addicted gamblers attempt suicide – 20 times the rate of non-gamblers.

Contributing to the debt problems of the compulsive gambler is all-too-easy access to credit: 90% of those suffering from gambling addiction withdraw [cash advances](#) from their personal credit card accounts in order to gamble.

Also, long gone are the days when a gambler has to leave the table because of a lack of funds. Casinos extend billions of dollars of loans to their customers each year in the form of credit markers. The casinos charge 3% to 10% interest or more for that service. In fact, only about half the money wagered in casinos are funds physically brought onto the premises. The rest is borrowed.

## Gambling’s Impact on Family and Friends

A gambling addiction affects more than just the gambler. The money lost at the casino could have gone to bills and to provide for a family. Friends and relatives that feel the effects of someone’s gambling problem can seek help from organizations like [GamCare](#).

Family and friends absorb the fall out that comes when gamblers start searching for ways to cover their habits and their losses.

**Some of the signs that someone you know might be addicted to gambling include:**

- Constantly talks about gambling opportunities
- Unable to cut back or stop gambling
- Willing to take high risks when gambling
- Takes time off from work to gamble
- Tries to hide gambling habits from family and friends
- Asks for loans to cover gambling losses

Family and friends are usually the first ones to recognize these signs. If you see this happening, bring it to the gambler’s attention and stand by them when they reach out for help at treatment centers or clinics.

## Steps to Overcome Gambling Addiction

Before you think about paying off your gambling debts, treat the root of the problem: an addiction to betting. It won’t do you any good to make a \$1,000 payment on your credit cards, if you bet a \$1,000 on this week’s big game and lose. You’re still in a hole, it’s just a little deeper.

Here are some ways to address your gambling addiction first. Once you get your mind right, then you can get your finances straightened out.

1. **Make a choice to quit gambling:** A gambling addiction is classified as a substance abuse disorder, so treat it as such and get straightened out. To say that you are going to stop gambling implies that you may start again. Decide yourself that you will quit gambling forever.
2. **Cut off gambling fund:** Close any credit accounts that could feed your gambling problem. Get rid of credit cards and especially ATM cards. Have your bank require two signatures for a withdrawal, one from you and one from a trusted friend or relative. Compulsive gamblers can get the urge to place a bet at any time. Create a buffer between you and your money.
3. **Treat your addiction:** There is an 800-number national help line as well as many treatment centers and clinics for people with a gambling addiction. Therapy can help with your problem, and entering a safe environment where you can get some things off your chest will offer relief. Gambling addictions were added to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders as a substance abuse disorder. That means your health insurance is required to provide some form of coverage for therapy through the Affordable Care Act mandate.
4. **Get a support system:** It’s hard to admit to yourself that you have a problem, and it’s even harder to admit to others, but it could be the key to keeping you motivated. Explain to your friends and relatives that you have a problem. They should be understanding and admire that you





(877) 764-5798



**5. Understand the term winnings:** Winnings is how much money you won gambling. It's what everyone wants to know after you place a bet. How much did you win? You probably know deep down that winnings does not count how much you bet, so know it up front. For example, don't think that you won a modest \$30 if you placed \$10 bets in five different leagues and only one paid out. That's a loss. Daily fantasy sports are especially good at tricking you into thinking you are winning money, when in fact, you are losing.

## How to Pay Off Gambling Debt

Once the addiction has been treated, it's time to deal with the debts that resulted. There are several avenues to address that issue, but one that seldom is suggested would be to put them in touch with a credit counselor from a nonprofit [debt management agency](#).

The credit counselors can help them get on a budget and assist with things like reducing interest rates on credit cards. This is usually a long process so family and friends of a gambler should be patient while waiting for a successful outcome.

Gambling debt is no different than other types of debt. You often owe multiple people or creditors money plain and simple. You need to develop a plan to pay them back.

- **List who you owe and how much you owe** – Write down everyone you owe money. That includes casinos, bookies, loan sharks, credit cards, overdrawn bank accounts, personal loans and home equity loans. Calculate the dollar amount you owe each of them.
- **Pay off as much as you can** – Consider selling some of your valuables like jewelry, electronics or memorabilia. Don't sell your car if it provides you transportation to work. Pay off what you can right away. The longer you wait, the more dangerous the situation with bookies and loan sharks becomes and the more interest you rack up through credit accounts.
- **Consolidate your debt** – [Consolidating your debt](#) gives you a clearer picture on what it will take to break even. The basic principle is that you take out one large loan to pay off your smaller debts. Then you only pay one creditor. There are a few ways to do this. Consolidation credit cards and loans are two options. Look for a credit card that offers 0% interest for a year to 18 months. Another option is to enroll in a debt management program, which will take over payment on your credit card debts and help you lower interest rates. You pay the debt management company once a month and they pay your creditors. Talk with a nonprofit credit counselor to see if this might be your best option.
- **Create a budget** – You won't know how much money you can put toward your debt until you know exactly how much money you need to pay every day bills each month. If the numbers don't add up, you're going to need more income.
- **Get a second job** – The quickest way to get out of debt is to boost your income. That doesn't mean bet the house on black. You need steady, predictable income. Find a part-time job and apply that money to your gambling debt.
- **Bankruptcy** – This should always be a last resort, but in extreme cases it might be the only option. There is no guarantee that your gambling debt will be discharged, but there isn't a specific law for or against it. However, the trustee may decide that you accumulated the debt with no intention of paying it back. If you can discharge your debts through bankruptcy, know that your credit will tank, and it will stay on your credit report for 7-10 years depending on whether you file for [Chapter 7 or Chapter 13 bankruptcy](#).

## Gambling Debt Help Options

If you are ready to quit gambling and get your finances back in order, it is time to call a nonprofit credit counseling agency and let one of their professionals review your finances and help come up with a plan to get out of debt.

There are several options that could help including:

- [Credit counseling](#) – This is a free service offered by nonprofit credit counseling agencies. The counselors review your income and expenses, help you create an affordable budget that provides money to pay off debt and suggests programs that can do this for you.
- [Debt Management Program](#) – This could be one of the debt-relief options that suits your situation. A debt management program will reduce the interest rate on credit card debt to somewhere around 8% so you free up money that will reduce your debt.
- [Debt Settlement](#) – This is another debt-relief option, but comes with a warning sign. Debt settlement involves negotiating with your creditors to pay less than you owe on credit card debt. The goal is to get the debt reduced by 50% and in some cases that might happen. However, after fees and late payments, the result more often is a 25% reduction.



(877) 764-5798



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Max Fay

Max Fay has been writing about personal finance for Debt.org for the past five years. His expertise is in student loans, credit cards and mortgages. Max inherited a genetic predisposition to being tight with his money and free with financial advice. He was published in every major newspaper in Florida while working his way through Florida State University.

[← Debt Disputes](#)

[Debt Stress →](#)

Sources:

1. Yakowicz, W. (2022, February 15) U.S. Gambling Revenue Hit Record \$53 Billion In 2021. Retrieved from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/willyakowicz/2022/02/15/us-gambling-revenue-hit-record-53-billion-in-2021/?sh=9f3dc637f506>

2. N.A. (2022, March 8) AGA Commercial Gaming Revenue Tracker. Retrieved from <https://www.americangaming.org/resources/aga-commercial-gaming-revenue-tracker/>

3. Lee, K. (2021, December 23) 'An invisible addiction.' Amid pandemic, a rise in gambling addiction emerges. Retrieved from <https://www.latimes.com/world-nation/story/2021-12-23/la-na-las-vegas-gambling-addiction>

4. Lock, S. (2022, January 25) Sales of lotteries in the U.S. 2021, by state. Retrieved from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/388238/sales-of-lotteries-by-state-us/>

Too Much Debt? Let Us Help You Eliminate Your Debt

Consolidate Debt In Minutes

NAVIGATION

- Home
- Understand Your Debt
- Manage Your Debt
- Debt Advice
- Blog

OUR SERVICES

- Debt Consolidation
- Free Consultation





(877) 764-5798



[Privacy Policy](#)

[Terms & Conditions](#)

## STAY CONNECTED

Join our mailing list for monthly tips on ways to manage your finances!

First Name

Last Name

Email Address

Subscribe

## JOIN OUR COMMUNITY



© 2012-2024 Debt.org LLC. All rights reserved

5750 Major Boulevard, Suite 350  
Orlando, FL 32819