

Problem Gambling

Problem gambling – also called compulsive gambling, gambling addiction, or gambling disorder – is a behavioral health disorder just like a substance addiction. It is defined by someone having difficulty cutting back or stopping their gambling behavior despite seeing negative consequences to their actions, like straining relationships or losing jobs.

Gambling disorder is a recognized behavioral health disorder, and not a character flaw or personal weakness. Often those who have it need professional help to recover and get their life back on track.

Facts about problem gambling:

- Gambling addiction affects approximately one percent of the U.S. population.
- The fastest growing form of gambling in the world is online gambling. According to a report issued by the American Gaming Association (AGA), nearly 3,000 Internet gambling sites offer wagering on sports, casino games, poker, bingo, lottery and other games.
- Studies looking at the connection between brain functioning and addiction show that gambling activates the brain in many of the same ways that a drug does.
- Those who live with problem gambling are likely to also have another behavioral health disorder, like depression or substance use.

When is gambling a problem?

Many people can gamble during the super bowl or March Madness or buy a lottery ticket a couple times a year without any negative consequences. They don't experience the three C's of addiction: Craving, Continuing and Control.

Individuals with a gambling addiction cannot resist the urge to gamble; they crave the feeling of placing a bet. Next, they continue to gamble even when there negative personal, financial or other consequences. Finally, a person loses control over their gambling- they cannot stop the cycle.

People might begin to gamble for different reasons – for fun, for stress relief, for financial gain. Life stressors might lead some people to continue gambling because it can become an escape to avoid their problems. In fact, when gambling becomes an addiction their problems increase and worsen.

Help is on the way: The good news is that consistent, effective treatment for problem gambling works. Gambling addiction is not a character flaw and it is not a matter of willpower. Group and individual therapy as well as educational support can help people overcome their gambling problems.

Treatment Can Help

Behavioral therapy and cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) can be very effective in treating problematic gambling and gambling addiction. Behavioral therapy focuses on breaking the cycle that leads to gambling and coping with the urge to gamble.

Those who live with problem gambling might also experience other mood or behavioral health disorders such as depression or substance use. Getting fully evaluated by a clinical professional can ensure that all of your behavioral health needs are being addressed.

The first step in dealing with a gambling addiction is recognizing the problem. Speak with a behavioral health professional or your doctor to connect with professionals who specialize in gambling addiction. Support groups and self-help materials can also be useful supports.

Resources

Gamblers Anonymous <http://www.gamblersanonymous.org/ga/>

National Center for Responsible Gambling <https://www.ncrg.org/>

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, available 24 hours everyday: 1-800-273-8255

Crisis Text Line, available 24 hours a day by texting "HOME" to 741741