

Gambling Addiction

A gambling addiction can turn from an occasional bet on a game to maxing out credit cards and putting your family into debt. This is an addiction like drugs, alcohol, or sex, and can have negative effects on relationships, financial health, job performance, and health, and can even lead to thoughts of suicide. So, let's talk about some of the signs of a gambling addiction and how to help someone who is suffering from it.



According to the [Mayo Clinic](#), the signs and symptoms of gambling addiction include:

- Being preoccupied with gambling. Constantly planning gambling activities and how to get more gambling money.
- Gambling larger and larger amounts of money to get the same thrill.
- Not being able to cut back or stop gambling and feeling irritated when you try.
- Gambling to escape problems or feelings of depression or anxiety.
- Chasing losses – gambling more, trying to win your money back.
- Lying about the extent of your gambling to friends and family.
- Asking others to bail you out of financial trouble because you gambled your money away.

Exactly what causes someone to gamble compulsively isn't well understood. Like many problems, compulsive gambling may result from a combination of biological, genetic, and environmental factors. Most casual gamblers will set a limit for how much they are willing to lose and stick to it. But people with a compulsive gambling problem will continue to gamble to win their money back. This behavior becomes increasingly destructive over time. Certain risk factors can contribute to the issue.



- **Mental health issues.** People who gamble compulsively often have substance misuse issues, personality disorders, anxiety, or depression. Compulsive gambling may also be associated with bipolar disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, or attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder.
- **Age.** Compulsive gambling is more of a problem with younger or middle-aged people. Gambling during teenage years can lead to compulsive gambling.
- **Gender.** Compulsive gambling is more common among men than women. Women who gamble typically start later in life and become addicted more quickly.
- **Medications that treat Parkinson's disease and restless leg syndrome.** Drugs called dopamine agonists have a rare side effect that may result in compulsive behaviors in some people, including gambling.

If you feel that you are having gambling issues, reach out to your health provider or a mental health expert to get some help. Will power alone won't be enough to overcome compulsive gambling. Some treatment options include:

- **Therapy.** Behavioral therapy uses a process of exposure to the behavior you want to unlearn and teaches you skills to reduce your urge to gamble. Cognitive behavioral therapy focuses on identifying negative, irrational, and unhealthy beliefs and replacing them with more positive, healthy ones.
- **Medications.** Antidepressants and mood stabilizers may help with issues that go along with compulsive gambling, such as bipolar disorder, depression, and anxiety. Medications called narcotic antagonists, useful in treating substance misuse, may help treat compulsive gambling.
- **Self-help groups.** Some people find that talking with others who have a gambling addiction is helpful. Ask your healthcare provider for recommendations about local support groups, such as [Gamblers Anonymous](#).