

Myths & Facts about Gambling Addiction and Problem Gambling

MYTH: You have to gamble every day to be a problem gambler.

FACT: A problem gambler may gamble frequently or infrequently. Gambling is a problem if it causes problems.

MYTH: Problem gambling is not really a problem if the gambler can afford it.

FACT: Problems caused by excessive gambling are not just financial. Too much time spent on gambling can lead to relationship breakdown and loss of important friendships.

MYTH: Partners of problem gamblers often drive problem gamblers to gamble.

FACT: Problem gamblers often rationalize their behavior. Blaming others is one way to avoid taking responsibility for their actions, including what is needed to overcome the problem.

MYTH: If a problem gambler builds up a debt, you should help them take care of it.

FACT: Quick fix solutions may appear to be the right thing to do. However, bailing the gambler out of debt may actually make matters worse by enabling gambling problems to continue.

Do I have a gambling problem?

You may have a gambling problem if you:

- **Feel the need to be secretive about your gambling.** You might gamble in secret or lie about how much you gamble, feeling others won't understand or that you will surprise them with a big win.
- **Have trouble controlling your gambling.** Once you start gambling, can you walk away? Or are you compelled to gamble until you've spent your last dollar, upping your bets in a bid to win lost money back?
- **Gamble even when you don't have the money.** A red flag is when you are getting more and more desperate to recoup your losses. You may gamble until you've spent your last dollar, and then move on to money you don't have- money to pay bills, credit cards, or things for your children. You may feel pushed to borrow, sell, or even steal things for gambling money. It's a vicious cycle. You may sincerely believe that gambling more money is the only way to win lost money back. But it only puts you further and further in the hole.

▪ **Family and friends are worried about you.** Denial keeps problem gambling going. If friends and family are worried, listen to them carefully. Take a hard look at how gambling is affecting your life. It's not a sign of weakness to ask for help. Many older gamblers are reluctant to reach out to their adult children if they've gambled away their inheritance. But it's never too late to make changes for the better.

Do's and Don'ts for Partners of Problem Gamblers

Do

- Seek the support of others with similar problems; attend a self-help group for families such as Gam-Anon.
- Explain problem gambling to the children.
- Recognize your partner's good qualities.
- Remain calm when speaking to your partner about his or her gambling and its consequences.
- Let your partner know that you are seeking help for your own sake because of the way gambling affects you and the children.
- Understand the need for treatment of problem gambling despite the time it may involve.
- Take control of family finances; review bank and credit card statements.

Don't

- Preach, lecture, or allow yourself to lose control of your anger.
- Make threats or issue ultimatums unless you intend to carry them out.
- Exclude the gambler from family life and activities.
- Expect immediate recovery, or that all problems will be resolved when the gambling stops.
- Bail out the gambler.
- Cover-up or deny the existence of the problem to yourself, the family, or others.

Addictions Tip Sheet –

Warning Signs of Gambling Addiction

Problem gambling is gambling that causes problems in a person's life. A person whose gambling is out of control may feel their situation is hopeless, but the good news is that problem gambling is considered a very treatable disorder. There are highly educated social workers with specialized training in gambling addiction that individuals can turn to for help.

This list of gambling addiction warning signs is provided by The Problem Gamblers Help Network of West Virginia, USA.

1. Talks only about wins, not losses.
2. Gambles more often, for longer periods, for more money.
3. Hides gambling losses from family members.
4. Lies about gambling directly or by omission.
5. Uses gambling as a means to cope.
6. Gambles in spite of negative consequences, such as large losses or family problems.
7. Has unexplained absences of household or personal items.
8. Withdraws from friends or family.
9. Started gambling with groups but now gambles alone.
10. Gets bored if not gambling, i.e., says there is nothing else to do.
11. Uses gambling as primary form of recreation and socialization.
12. Has unsuccessful attempts to cut back or quit.
13. Borrows money from friends and family.
14. Is unable to meet living expenses previously met.
15. Depletes financial reserves: Cashing in savings, retirement, pensions, and insurance plans to get money to gamble.
16. Gambles on credit: credit cards, bank loan, second mortgages, "kiting" checks.

Tips to Cure Gambling Addiction

A gambling addiction is as serious as any other addiction. It can destroy one's life and have serious repercussions on their family and friends. It needs to be treated, and quickly. However, there are many things that you can do yourself, to help prevent and overcome this addiction, here are a few:

Tell someone. The first step into curing such a problem, is to admit you have one. Not only admitting it to yourself, but to actually confide in someone you trust. Your telling someone else is the ultimate confirmation needed to start addressing the problem more seriously, and you will also have the comforting feeling that you are not alone into this, as you have a person you trust with you.

Location, Location! If you know you have a gambling problem, don't go to places where you can freely gamble away all your money. Avoid casinos, and the likes. As well, block all gambling sites on your computer or have a loved one do it for you, so that you cannot have access to a gambling site. As well, get a pop up blocker, so you don't see those gambling ads that pop up all over the web when surfing.

Clear your mind. What mostly causes such an addiction is an underlying issue or problem, and the addiction is used to 'get away from it all'. Therefore, a good way to overcome the addiction is to address and resolve any personal or professional issues that may be stressing you out and causing you concern. Once your mind is clearer, you will see gambling for what it truly is, a waste of your hard earned money.

Get a hobby, a good wholesome one that is! Distract yourself with an activity that will completely take your mind off gambling. Do something outdoors, where you get some fresh air, unwind, and let loose. You will see, if you keep yourself busy, doing something good for you, gambling will be a distant thought.

The help must remain constant. Anyone that has dealt with an addiction know that it is a constant, ongoing battle, that always lingers in the back of your mind. To avoid relapses, you need to keep a certain routine to continuously fight the temptation. This can include, speaking to your confidant every week or so about your progress, listening to self hypnosis tapes on a regular basis, or visiting a gambling anonymous support forum, whether it be online or locally. This way, you will get the support that you need regularly, so that you remain on the right track.