

What is Gambling Disorder?

When gambling becomes a problem, its impact is far-reaching. In addition to lost finances, a person's relationships, career, and health are likely to suffer. **Gambling disorder** is defined by an inability to stop gambling, despite ongoing problems caused by the behavior.

Signs of Problem Gambling

- Gambling with more and more money in order to feel a sense of excitement
- Inability to stop gambling, despite losses, distress, and other problems
- Cycle of losing money and chasing losses
- Lying about gambling habits and losses
- Relying on friends and family for money to continue gambling
- Constant thoughts of gambling, including how to get more money for gambling
- Gambling in an attempt to manage uncomfortable emotions

Related Problems

People with gambling disorder are more likely to experience a range of other problems. These problems may contribute to gambling disorder or be caused by it.

Social Problems

criminal activity / incarceration
divorce
domestic violence
financial hardship
job loss

Health Problems

alcohol / substance abuse
anxiety disorders
depression
poor physical health
suicide

Treatments

Psychotherapy. Some types of therapy have been shown to decrease problematic gambling. Therapy helps patients recognize the impact gambling has on their life, learn new skills to manage emotions, and change the thoughts and behaviors that lead to gambling.

Medication. In some cases, medications have been found to reduce impulsivity, the urge to gamble, and gambling behavior. Medications usually work best when combined with psychotherapy.

Other Information

Gambling problems usually begin in adolescence or young adulthood, especially for men. Women typically begin gambling later in life, but problems escalate faster.

Gambling disorder runs in families. Those who have a parent with gambling disorder are 3 times more likely to have the disorder themselves.

Many people experience withdrawal-like symptoms when attempting to quit gambling. These symptoms may include irritability, anger, depression, hopelessness, and shame.