

## **GAMBLING ADDICTION - a patient's guide**

Editorial Team

### **Overview**

It is estimated that six percent of the population will have a gambling problem during their lifetime

Gambling is believed to be rising due to the increasing opportunities for gambling

Problem gambling can lead to financial and relationship problems, and attempted suicide in some cases

Pathological gambling is more prevalent among men, ethnic groups and lower socioeconomic groups

Treatment involves education, individual counselling, and group therapy

There are several different treatment programmes available

### **Gambling addiction**

Gambling is a form of entertainment for many people, but in some cases gambling can become an addiction leading to financial problems, relationship stress, and even attempted suicide.

Gambling is believed to be on the increase as more opportunities for gambling arise. Examples include casinos, sports betting, slot machines in pubs and bars, telephone betting and gambling over the internet. There are also more Gamblers Anonymous groups in areas with legal gambling opportunities.

Gambling addiction is officially defined as 'a loss of control over gambling and a driving need for the "rush" gambling provides.

Problem gambling may be any behaviour which disrupts your life either physically, mentally, socially or emotionally.

Studies have shown rates of suicide attempts among pathological gamblers from 17 to 24 percent.

Pathological or compulsive gambling is an addiction characterised by a need to gamble more often, to bet more money, and an inability to stop gambling without becoming unhappy.

Gambling problems are more prevalent among men, ethnic groups, and lower socioeconomic groups. Gambling addicts are also more likely to smoke and abuse alcohol compared to non-problem gamblers.

Patients with gambling problems believe their health is worse than those without disorders, and may have more anxiety, depression and stress-related problems.

Gamblers often fail to seek professional help. A New Zealand study found just 27 of 50 patients interviewed had seen a doctor in the past year and just one had

told their doctor about their gambling addiction. Doctors are now being encouraged to ask about gambling behaviours in patients at-risk of gambling.

**Some signs of problem gambling:**

Constantly thinking about and preparing for gambling sessions

Gambling more often and playing higher stakes to "win back" lost money

Gambling during work or when you are expected at home

Gambling to escape from stress and pressure

Getting into debt from gambling and lying to borrow money to gamble

Using illegal means to finance gambling

Neglecting family and other responsibilities

**What can be done?**

The most successful treatment programmes are believed to involve both individual professional counselling and group therapy.

Treatment involves education for the gambler and their family, individual therapy, group therapy, relapse prevention, and budget planning.

There has been little research into the effectiveness of treatment programmes but studies have shown abstinence rates which range from eight percent to 55 percent one year following a treatment programme.

**Getting help**

Your doctor will be able to help refer you to a recovery programme for counselling. There are several programmes available for gambling addiction.