

Understanding Gambling Addiction: When Gambling Stops Being Fun

Many people enjoy an occasional flutter, whether it's buying a lottery ticket, placing a bet on a football match, or playing bingo with friends. For most people, gambling remains an enjoyable activity that stays within their budget.

However, for some people, gambling can become difficult to control and begin to affect many areas of life. Gambling addiction is a recognised health condition, and support is available.

What is gambling addiction?

Gambling addiction, sometimes called **problem gambling** or **gambling disorder**, is when gambling becomes hard to stop despite causing problems. It is not simply about losing money. It can affect your mental health, relationships, work, and physical wellbeing.

Someone with a gambling problem may find themselves:

- Thinking about gambling most of the time.
- Spending more money than they intended.
- Chasing losses by gambling more.
- Feeling restless, anxious or irritable when trying to stop.
- Borrowing money or getting into debt because of gambling.
- Hiding gambling from family or friends.
- Missing work or avoiding responsibilities because of gambling.

These problems can happen with sports betting, online casinos, slot machines, bingo, poker, lottery games, gaming apps with betting features, or any other form of gambling.

Why does it happen?

Gambling affects the brain's reward system by releasing chemicals such as dopamine, which can create feelings of excitement and anticipation. Over time, some people find they need to gamble more often or spend more money to get the same feeling.

There is no single cause. Gambling problems are more likely if someone is:

- Feeling stressed, anxious or depressed.
- Going through difficult life events.
- Living with alcohol or drug problems.
- Experiencing loneliness or social isolation.

- Having financial worries.
- Living with ADHD or certain other mental health conditions.
- Having a close family member with a gambling problem.

Anyone can develop a gambling addiction, regardless of age, income or background.

What are the warning signs?

Sometimes gambling problems develop gradually, making them difficult to recognise.

You may want to seek help if you:

- Gamble more than you can afford.
- Find it difficult to stop once you start.
- Feel guilty after gambling.
- Lie about how much you gamble.
- Borrow money to gamble.
- Notice gambling is affecting your sleep, mood or relationships.
- Keep gambling to try to win back losses.

Family members may notice changes before the person gambling does.

How can gambling affect your health?

The impact is often much wider than finances.

People with gambling addiction may experience:

- Anxiety.
- Depression.
- Poor sleep.
- Stress.
- Relationship difficulties.
- Reduced work performance.
- Financial problems and debt.
- Alcohol or drug misuse.

Some people may also experience feelings of hopelessness or think about harming themselves if their gambling feels out of control. If this happens, it is important to seek urgent help.

What treatments are available?

The good news is that gambling addiction is treatable.

Treatment may include:

- Talking therapies such as cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT).
- Specialist gambling support services.
- Support groups where you can meet others with similar experiences.
- Help with debt and financial management.
- Treatment for related conditions such as anxiety or depression if needed.

There is no medication that specifically treats gambling addiction, but medicines may sometimes help if someone also has another mental health condition.

What can you do today?

Small steps can make a difference.

You could:

- Talk honestly with someone you trust.
- Set limits on spending and access to money.
- Remove gambling apps from your devices.
- Block gambling websites using specialist software. ([Control your gambling | Gamstop Online](#))
- Avoid situations that trigger gambling.
- Find other activities that provide enjoyment or help manage stress, such as exercise, hobbies or spending time with friends and family.

Remember that recovery often takes time. Slips can happen, but they do not mean you have failed.

How can your GP help?

Many people worry about discussing gambling because they feel embarrassed or ashamed. GPs speak to people about addiction and mental health every day and are there to help, not judge.

Your GP can:

- Listen to your concerns confidentially.
- Assess how gambling is affecting your health.

- Screen for anxiety, depression or other related conditions.
- Refer you to specialist gambling treatment services.
- Help you access local support and financial advice where appropriate.

If you are concerned about someone else, you can also speak to your GP for advice.

Looking after a loved one

Supporting someone with a gambling problem can be challenging.

Try to:

- Encourage them to seek help.
- Avoid judging or blaming them.
- Protect your own finances where necessary.
- Look after your own wellbeing.
- Seek support for yourself if you need it.

Recovery is often easier when family and friends are involved.

Remember

Gambling addiction is a health condition, not a lack of willpower. The earlier someone seeks support, the easier it can be to regain control.

If gambling is affecting your life, or someone close to you, please don't struggle alone. Speak to a member of our practice team. We can help you find the right support and treatment.

Dr Maya Chowdhury