

Problem gambling

Many people gamble without ever encountering a problem. They buy a lottery or raffle ticket, go to the racetrack or an evening of bingo, drop an occasional loonie into a machine. When the draw or the game is over, they go on to other non-gambling activities.

But for some people, gambling takes on more importance in their lives and becomes a problem. Gambling problems can range from minor to quite serious. The gambling may cause only occasional problems in the gambler's life—for example, making it difficult to pay the utility bill or rent some month. Or it may progress and have an ongoing negative impact on the gambler and his or her family—causing excessive debt, marriage problems, even illegal activity.

Here are some signs that a person may have a gambling problem:

- **Spends large amounts of time gambling.**
This allows little time for family, friends or other interests.
- **Begins to place larger, more frequent bets.**
Larger bets are necessary to get the same level of excitement.
- **Has growing debts.** The person with a gambling problem is secretive or defensive about money, and may borrow money from family members or friends.
- **Pins hopes on the “big win.”** The problem gambler believes the big win, rather than changing the gambling behaviour, will solve financial or other problems.
- **Promises to cut back on gambling.** The problem gambler is unable to reduce or stop gambling.
- **Refuses to explain behaviour, or lies about it.**
The person with a gambling problem may be away from home or work for long periods of time, or may make an unusually high number of telephone calls.
- **Feels frequent highs and lows.** If unable to gamble, the problem gambler misses the thrill of the action and may be bad-tempered, withdrawn, depressed or restless. During a winning streak, the gambler is on a high.

- **Boasts about winning.** The person with a gambling problem loves to relive a win but will make light of losses when others express their concern. Wins and losses may also be kept a secret.
- **Prefers gambling to a special family occasion.**
The problem gambler may arrive late or miss family events such as birthdays, school activities and other family gatherings.
- **Seeks new places to gamble close to home and away.** The problem gambler may insist that evenings out or even family vacations be at places where gambling is available.

If you are concerned that you or someone you know may have a gambling problem, help is available. Call 1-866-332-2322.

For more information and to find an addiction services office near you, please call the 24-hour Helpline at 1-866-332-2322.