

FACT SHEET



NATIONAL CENTER FOR RESPONSIBLE GAMING
Advancing Research, Education and Awareness

GAMBLING DISORDERS

KEY FACTS

- The variety of terms used to describe gambling addiction – pathological gambling, compulsive gambling, problem gambling, probable problem gambling – can be confusing. For now, the emerging consensus in the scientific community is to use the term “gambling disorder,” as proposed for the fifth edition of the American Psychiatric Association’s *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5)*.¹
- Approximately 1 percent of the adult population in the United States has a severe gambling problem.²⁻⁴
- The most recent research estimates that 6 to 9 percent of young people and young adults experience problems related to gambling – a higher rate than among adults.⁵
- Preliminary research indicates that ethnic and racial minorities have higher rates of gambling problems than the adult general population.⁶
- The current diagnosis for pathological gambling includes several criteria similar to alcohol and drug dependence: increasing tolerance (i.e., needs to gamble more money to achieve the desired excitement); symptoms of withdrawal if gambling stopped or reduced; and inability to stop or reduce gambling. Criteria such as chasing losses are unique to gambling disorders.⁷
- People with gambling problems often have many of the same risk factors that predispose individuals to other addictive behaviors: other psychiatric problems such as depression; an unstable home life; and lack of peer or community support.^{2,8}
- According to the National Comorbidity Survey Replication, 96.3 percent of the lifetime pathological gamblers also met lifetime criteria for one or more of the other psychiatric disorders assessed in the survey.²
- Research does not substantiate the belief that some games – such as online poker or slot machines – are riskier than others. People can get into trouble with all types of gambling, from sports betting and the lottery to bingo and casino games.¹¹ Although there is no treatment standard for gambling disorders, therapies such as cognitive-behavioral therapy, motivational interviewing and drug treatments appear to be promising.¹⁰
- People with gambling problems do recover; in fact, approximately one-third seem to recover on their own, without formal treatment.¹¹

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