

When Gambling Becomes a Bad Bet

Many people enjoy buying a lottery ticket, going to a casino, or making a bet on a sporting event. But if gambling gets out of control, it can result in **pathological gambling**, a disorder that can have devastating effects.

An article in the July 11, 2001, issue of *JAMA* discusses the causes and treatment of pathological gambling and its increase in the United States.

WHAT IS PATHOLOGICAL GAMBLING?

Pathological gambling shares many symptoms with drug abuse. Characteristics of pathological gambling include

- Preoccupation with gambling—reliving past gambling experiences, planning the next bet, or figuring out ways to get money for gambling
- Needing more frequent and bigger bets for excitement
- Lying to family members, friends, or others to conceal the problem
- Inability to stop gambling despite repeated attempts to do so
- Trying to “win back” losses
- Restlessness and irritability when trying to stop gambling
- Breaking the law to finance gambling habit

EFFECTS OF PATHOLOGICAL GAMBLING

Some of the consequences of pathological gambling are

- Financial problems that increase with time
- Problems with marriage, long-term relationships, and friendships
- Loss of job or job opportunities
- Legal problems

Pathological gamblers also have high suicide rates and tend to drink alcohol and abuse drugs more than other people.

Sources: American Psychiatric Association, American Psychological Association, Gamblers Anonymous, Gam-Anon, National Council on Problem Gambling, Inc



YOU CAN GET HELP

If you gamble and are experiencing symptoms of pathological gambling, the first step in getting help is to admit you have a problem and make a commitment to do something about it.

A consultation with your doctor is a great place to start. Additional resources are available through the organizations listed below.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- Gamblers Anonymous International Service Office
213/386-8789
www.gamblersanonymous.org
- The National Council on Problem Gambling, Inc
800/522-4700
e-mail: ncpg@ncpgambling.org
www.ncpgambling.org

For family members and friends of people with gambling problems

- Gam-Anon International Service Office, Inc
718/352-1671
www.gam-anon.org

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