



Division of Addictive Diseases

Two Peachtree Street, NW, Suite 22.275, Atlanta, Georgia 30303-3142 ~ 404-657-2331

Problem Gambling: Warning signs and help available

The vast majority of individuals can gamble without experiencing ill effects, yet roughly 4% of the general population has had a gambling problem¹. It is important to know the warning signs of problem gambling and where to go to obtain help should you or someone you know have indicators of a gambling problem.

Signs of a gambling problem

- Gambling more than intended
- Continually talking about gambling
- Spending more money or time gambling than you can afford
- Gambling more in order to win back losses
- Borrowing, stealing, or selling things to get money for gambling or to pay gambling debts
- Having financial difficulties such as not being able to pay bills due to gambling
- Gambling to escape problems or boredom, or to relieve anxiety or depression
- Being criticized by others for your gambling
- Hiding signs of gambling activities such as lottery tickets or betting slips
- Missing work, school or other commitments due to gambling

Diagnostic criteria for pathological gambling

The American Psychological Association² requires having 5 of 10 clinical features which tap into 3 dimensions believed to be indicative of pathological gambling: disruption, dependence and experiencing a loss of control, including the following:

- a preoccupation with gambling
- needing to gamble with larger amounts of money to achieve arousal
- failed attempts to control gambling behavior
- irritability when limiting gambling activities
- gambling to escape problems
- “chasing” losses
- lying about gambling behavior
- participation in illegal activities to gamble or pay gambling debts
- experiencing negative impacts on relationships or employment due to gambling
- having a reliance on others to alleviate financial issues resulting from gambling

Help is available

Visit the GSU Problem Gambling Research and Intervention Project’s web site (www.GeorgiaGamblingHelp.org). There you will find numerous resources regarding the treatment of problem gambling, such as:

- A list of local Gamblers Anonymous and Gam-Anon meeting times and locations.
- A directory of treatment providers specializing in the treatment of problem gambling

- Assessment tools to determine if you are in need of a professional assessment
- Self-help workbooks

Gambling responsibly¹

If you do gamble, there are steps you can take to reduce the risk of out of control gambling.

- **Don't think of gambling as a way to make money:** Even if you experience a win, the odds are not in your favor. Over time you will lose money.
- **Only gamble with money that you can afford to lose:** Only gamble with money that you set aside for entertainment, like going to the movies or to a show. Never use money that you need for basic necessities, such as rent, bills, groceries, tuition, etc.
- **Set a limit:** Decide how much money you can afford to lose before you gamble. When you have lost that amount of money, STOP. If you win – great, but keep in mind that you will likely not win the next time.
- **Set a time limit.** Determine how much time you can afford to spend gambling before you begin. When you reach that time limit, stop gambling.
- **Never chase losses.** If you lose money, don't bet more to try to win it back. This usually leads to even bigger losses.
- **Don't gamble when you are depressed or upset:** It is hard to make good decisions about gambling when you are feeling down.
- **Don't gamble when your judgment is impaired:** Gambling when you have been drinking or are under the influence can lead to uncontrolled betting, thus increasing the risk of developing a gambling problem
- **Balance gambling with other leisure activities:** Make sure you continue to participate in enjoyable activities other than gambling.

LIE-BET TOOL TO RULE OUT PATHOLOGICAL GAMBLING³

This 2-item measure has been found to be reliable and valid at discriminating between pathological and non-problem gamblers. A response of “Yes” to either question indicates additional assessment may be necessary.

- 1) **Have you ever felt the need to bet more and more money?**
- 2) **Have you ever had to lie to people important to you about how much you gambled?**

¹Emshoff, J., Anthony, E., Lippy, C., & Valentine, L, Mooss, A., Perkins, A., & Zorland, J.. (2007). *Gambling Report for the Georgia Department of Human Resources*. Atlanta, GA: Georgia State University, Department of Psychology.

² American Psychiatric Association. (2000). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (4th ed. text revision). Washington DC: Author.

³Johnson, E. E., Hamer, R., Nora, R. M., Tan, B., Eistenstein, N., & Englehart, C. (1988). The lie/bet questionnaire for screening pathological gamblers. *Psychological Reports*, 80, 83-88.