

# Gambling Addiction



## Contact Us

Please contact us for further information.

Centre for Student Development and Counselling

416-979-5195

[www.ryerson.ca/counselling](http://www.ryerson.ca/counselling)

Authors: Ana Magno and Marian Tingin  
Series editors: Kelly McShane, Amy Brown-Bowers, Amelia Us



Faculty of Arts

Faculty of Arts  
Department of Psychology

Photo credits: [www.freeimages.co.uk](http://www.freeimages.co.uk)

RYERSON  
UNIVERSITY

Everyone Makes a Mark

# What is Gambling Addiction?

Gambling Addiction differs from drug or alcohol addiction in that the addiction is to a behaviour rather than to a substance. On the other hand, there are many similarities between Gambling Addiction and other addiction problems, including some of the symptoms, adverse consequences and treatments. Gambling Addiction, which is also referred to as pathological or problem gambling, typically involves a repetitive pattern of gambling-related behaviours that are associated with significant personal distress and/or negative consequences to the person. Although this disorder does not yet officially exist in diagnostic manuals, the following criteria have been suggested for Gambling Addiction:

- Being preoccupied with gambling
- Needing to gamble with increasing amounts of money to get the same thrill as when you first started to gamble
- Trying to stop gambling but being unable to stop
- Feeling restless and irritable when trying to stop gambling
- Using gambling to escape from personal and life problems
- 'Chasing losses' while gambling
- Lying to people to conceal how much you gamble
- Committing crimes to finance your gambling
- Losing important relationships or jobs due to gambling
- Relying on others financially in order to gamble

## How Common is Gambling Addiction?

When we think of gambling, we often think of casino lottery tickets, but gambling also includes activities such as betting on real or fantasy sports teams with friends, playing dice or card games, and even buying raffle tickets at school or church events. It is difficult to know how many people experience gambling addiction because there is no official clinical definition of the problem.

- Research suggests that while about 80% of young people partake in gambling of some sort, only about 1-4% of them are considered pathological gamblers (Selekman, 2008).
- Around 2.2 million adolescents in North America are problem, at-risk, or pathological gamblers (Pietrzak et al., 2003).
- Men are three times more likely to develop Gambling Addiction than women (Selekman, 2008).

## What are some of the Consequences of Gambling Addiction?

Gambling may seem fun at first, but it can have serious and negative consequences if it develops into an addiction. Gambling can lead to financial issues – adult pathological gamblers accumulate an average of \$40,000 in debt per year (Fong, 2001) – and it is associated with a number of work-related, social and psychological problems.

- Teens with gambling problems often also have other psychiatric disorders such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, depression, and personality disorders. (Fong, 2001)
- Pathological gamblers are relatively more likely to partake in other risky behaviours such as drug use, carrying weapons, and criminal activity.
- People with gambling problems are more likely to have alcohol or other substance abuse problems (Petry, 2006)
- Problem gambling is associated with poor school performance (Fong, 2001)

## How is Gambling Addiction Treated?

There are a number of different treatments that are used to help people with problem gambling, including psychotherapy, self-help groups such as Gamblers Anonymous, and medication. One of the most successful methods of treatment for Gambling Addiction in young people is cognitive behavioural therapy, which focuses on correcting false perceptions about gambling. Other psychotherapies to treat gambling addiction include psychodynamic psychotherapy, which focuses on identifying and resolving underlying psychological conflicts, and family therapy, which focuses on family functioning (Fong, 2001). Though no medications are currently approved to treat problem gambling, some preliminary research suggests that serotonin reuptake inhibitors, opiate antagonists, and anticonvulsants may be helpful.

## Extra Facts about Gambling

- In the United States, legal gambling produces a total of almost \$51 billion per year! (Fong, 2001)
- One study found that 83% of grade eleven students have participated in gambling activities, which is a higher rate than other addictive behaviours such as substance and alcohol use (Selekman, 2008)
- One study found that 75% of children have gambled in their own homes, typically with siblings or other relatives (Fong, 2001)
- In a survey in the United States, 84% of pathological gamblers said they used gambling as an escape from their everyday lives (Petry, 2006)
- Over 70% of people with a gambling problem also have an alcohol disorder and 30% have a drug use disorder (Petry, 2006)

