



Older Adult Problem Gambling

Many adults begin gambling more frequently later in life. Oftentimes, older adults are unaware of the problems excessive gambling may cause and that there is always the potential for addiction.

It is important to recognize the difference between social and problem gambling. Not all gambling is problem gambling. It may be merely an occasional social activity. However, social gambling may lead to problem gambling.

Gambling becomes a problem when it has a negative effect on one's life and the lives of people close to them. Gambling may also be used as a coping mechanism or as a way to supplement a limited income.

Older adults are often widowed and frequently suffer losses of lifelong friends; may be geographically separated from loved ones; or may be simply bored or unhappy with retirement. These changes and stressors may exacerbate the gambler's addiction.

Family and friends often view unusual gambling activities as a "temporary phase" and they often refuse to admit that a problem exists. Some family members are reluctant to confront an elder out of respect or fear. Problem gambling affects all ages, male and female. It is a hidden illness and can be difficult to address, especially with older adults. It is important to analyze the reasons for gambling and be aware of the signs of problem gambling.

Why do older adults gamble?

- To escape from loneliness/depression
- To be active with friends
- To increase fixed incomes
- To provide entertainment and fun
- To forget the past

Signs of seniors having a gambling problem include loss of interest and participation in normal activities with friends and families, blocks of time unaccounted for, missing possessions or assets, and changes in attitude and personality. Gambling problems may also be evidenced by neglect of personal needs (food, utilities and medical), secrecy and avoidance when discussing time and money, and depression.

Seniors with a gambling problem and their loved ones need to know that help is available. The Wisconsin Council on Problem Gambling (WCPG) operates a 24-hour Helpline, a link for treatment, recovery groups and other resources for problem gamblers and their family members. Often, simply a kind and helpful listener can help a senior admit to a problem and seek help. To learn more or find help, call **1-(800)GAMBLE-5**.

If you or someone you know has a gambling problem call:

1-800-GAMBLE-5

Sample guidelines for responsible gambling include:

- Know the risks involved
- Plan ahead and set a dollar limit
- Set a time limit
- Expect to lose
- Do not gamble on credit
- Create balance in your life
- Avoid chasing lost money