

Community Concerns **Dealing With Gambling Addictions in the Military**

US Troops face many hardships, equipment malfunctions, hostile environments and situations, loneliness and separation from loved ones. Amongst these challenges, there is one challenge that many people don't expect: gambling addiction.

Our troops are not afraid of taking risks. They are placed in stressful situations daily. They are America's fighting men and women... But these characteristics are often shared by individuals considered most vulnerable to compulsive gambling.

Risk factors that are likely more present in the military include:

- * Alcohol abuse
- * Depression
- * PTSD—Posttraumatic Stress Disorder
- * Higher rates of risk taking
- * Sensation Seeking
- * Downtime / Boredom, especially when deployed and/or at bases that are isolated geographically or culturally

Those closest to the gambler frequently are unaware of the problem until it is too late. This is because compulsive gambling does not bear the physical symptoms such as breath odor, stumbling when walking or slurred speech often associated with drug or alcohol addiction.

The good news is that compulsive gambling is treatable for those who seek help. The non-profit Wisconsin Council on Problem Gambling (www.wi-problemgamblers.org) operates a 24-hour confidential Helpline (1-800-GAMBLE-5), providing assistance and resources to gamblers, family members and concerned others as well as counselors and other professionals.



It is important to remember that those suffering from compulsive gambling deserve the same compassion and understanding as those struggling with an addiction or any physical or emotional illness.

To determine whether you or someone you know has a gambling problem, consider these warning signs:

- Thinking constantly about gambling—reminiscing about past experiences, planning the next outing or searching for ways to get more money to gamble or pay off debts
- Increasing the stakes to maintain excitement
- Using gambling to escape life's problems
- Gambling to make up for past losses
- Lying about or concealing gambling activities
- Borrowing money from friends, family or work to gamble or pay gambling debts
- Neglecting personal needs or responsibilities
- Losing time from work or school due to gambling
- Arguing with others due to gambling
- Boasting about winning (often minimizing losses and exaggerating wins)
- Feeling unable to control or stop gambling
- Having self-destructive thoughts