

Problem Gambling

Frequently Asked Questions

Problem gambling, are you or a loved one at risk?

Gambling disorder is an uncontrollable urge to gamble despite negative consequences or a desire to stop. Ask yourself the following brief biosocial gambling screen questions:

1. During the past 12 months, have you become restless, irritable, or anxious when trying to stop/cut down on gambling?
2. During the past 12 months, have you tried to keep your family or friends from knowing how much you gambled?
3. During the past 12 months, did you have such financial trouble as a result of your gambling that you had to get help with living expenses from family, friends, or welfare?

A positive response to any of the three questions suggests a person may be at-risk for problem gambling.

How many people in California are affected by problem gambling?

Approximately one million California adults experience significant problems related to gambling. Problem gambling behavior does just affect the gambler, but also affects 8-10 others around them such as loved ones, spouses, children, parents, or even co-workers.

What kind of people become problem gamblers?

Problem gambling does not discriminate. It can affect anyone regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, religion, income or even type of gambling: online betting, card rooms, tribal casinos, lottery, horseracing, bingo, raffles, etc.

What are the signs of problem gambling?

Problem gamblers often feel as if they have lost a sense of purpose. They feel shameful and tend to withdraw from family and friends. Problem gambling is sometimes referred to as the “hidden disease” because the signs are not easy to see like those related to drugs and alcohol, and are often mistaken for something other than gambling. Signs can include missing work, lying, depression, anxiety, and mood swings all related to the uncontrolled gambling behavior.

Does problem gambling affect your health?

Problem gamblers who entered treatment have poorer overall health. They smoke more than one pack a day, more likely to be obese, avoid regular exercise, and likely put off medical care due to financial problems. New research shows problem gambling can cause sleep problems and memory issues, and it can negatively influence chronic illnesses like high blood pressure and heart disease.

Is help available to treat problem gambling?

Californians who suffer from the effects of problem gambling behaviors are not alone. There is hope and help available for both the gambler and loved ones (parents, spouses, and partners age 18+). There are several no-cost and confidential options through a program called California Gambling Education and Treatment Services (CalGETS). For more information about problem gambling, call 1-800-GAMBLER or visit the Office of Problem Gambling’s website (problemgambling.ca.gov).