



## Recovery from Compulsive & Problem Gambling

If you have picked up this brochure most likely you or someone you love is struggling with compulsive or problem gambling. *You're not alone.*

An estimated 2.5 million Americans are compulsive gamblers and another 5 to 8 million are problem gamblers. Although there are no easy solutions, recovery from compulsive or problem gambling is possible. *Help is available.*

### Compulsive & Problem Gambling

**Compulsive gamblers** have an uncontrollable urge to keep gambling even when it causes severe work, financial, legal, or relationship problems. They often lie or hide their behavior, continually chase bets, and may steal or commit fraud to support their addiction.

**Problem gamblers** display many of the same symptoms as compulsive gamblers, but are not completely out of control. If gambling disrupts your work, relationships, or finances then **you have a gambling problem.**

### Symptoms

Many compulsive gamblers began with social gambling. As the addiction progresses, they begin to gamble more and more frequently, generally with greater risks. Signs of compulsive or problem gambling include:

- Preoccupation with gambling
- Unsuccessfully trying to cut back or quit
- Getting a rush from taking large gambling risks
- Feelings of guilt or remorse after gambling
- Hiding or lying to conceal gambling behavior
- Taking greater and greater gambling risks
- Borrowing or stealing money to gamble
- Loss of employment, failed relationships, or legal problems due to extreme financial distress

Compulsive gambling is an *impulse-control disorder*. This means you are not able to control your behavior, even when it is harmful to yourself or others. You most likely feel a sense of excitement before gambling, pleasure during, and finally guilt or remorse after. For most compulsive gamblers, it isn't about the money, but the excitement.

### Other Resources

National Council on Problem Gambling  
[www.ncpgambling.org](http://www.ncpgambling.org)  
24-hour, confidential, national hotline  
1-800-GAMBLER (426-2537)  
Text 800GRAM

Gam-Anon  
[www.gam-anon.org](http://www.gam-anon.org)

Gamblers Anonymous  
[www.gamblersanonymous.org](http://www.gamblersanonymous.org)

>INFOCUS  
RECOVERY

## Compulsive & Problem GAMBLING



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## Treatment & Recovery

Realizing you have a gambling problem is the first step and often a very difficult one. Admitting you have a problem with gambling is *essential* to a successful recovery. While there is no agreed upon definition of “recovery” from compulsive or problem gambling, the term is generally used to refer to the ongoing process of abstinence, avoiding relapse, and improving your overall mental health.

Treatment for gambling addiction depends on the severity and underlying causes of the addiction, but often includes psychotherapy, medication, self-help groups or an inpatient, residential, or outpatient treatment program.

## Psychotherapy

Cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) focuses on teaching problem gamblers how to fight gambling urges and to deal effectively with unpleasant emotions instead of using gambling as an escape. This type of therapy also helps the gambler to solve their gambling related financial, work, and relationship problems. In CBT, gamblers learn how to replace unhealthy thoughts and behaviors with positive, healthy ones. Group therapy can also be useful as gamblers get advice, feedback, and support from others dealing with similar problems.

## Medication

Antidepressants and other mood stabilizing drugs can be used to treat compulsive gamblers. Although these drugs do not address the gambling addiction itself, they often help to treat contributing factors such as depression or anxiety. Some narcotic antagonists, which are used in treating substance use disorder, and some antidepressants may be effective in helping to treat compulsive gambling.

## Inpatient, Residential and Outpatient Programs

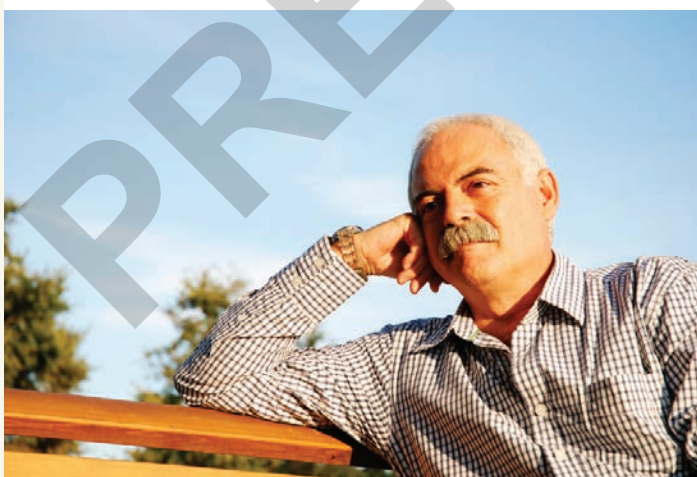
For compulsive gamblers and those with a more severe gambling problem, a formalized treatment program may be necessary.

### Inpatient or Residential Programs

**Inpatient programs** provide treatment in a hospital setting. **Residential programs** take place in a non-hospital setting such as an addiction treatment center or psychiatric treatment center. Inpatient or residential treatment facilities provide round the clock care that may last for a week or up to an extended stay of more than 30 days.

Professional addiction counselors use a variety of techniques to address issues relating to or underlying the gambling compulsion. Family members are often encouraged to attend group therapy sessions as part of the recovery process.

After leaving an inpatient or residential treatment facility, many programs offer aftercare programs and support groups to help maintain abstinence and avoid relapse. Inpatient treatment must often be followed by outpatient care in order to sufficiently address an individual's issues, and to provide the support needed for ongoing recovery.



Do you:

- gamble money you don't have?
- keep your wagering a secret?
- borrow money to gamble?
- gamble to pay off gambling debts?

### Outpatient Programs

For many with less severe gambling programs, outpatient treatment offers an effective alternative to inpatient care. Like inpatient or residential programs, outpatient programs are designed to help develop abstinence skills and interrupt patterns of addictive behavior. Unlike live-in programs, one is generally able to continue with normal activities, such as work or school, while receiving treatment.

Outpatient programs provide counseling and various other services. They may meet on a weekly basis or, for more intensive programs, several times a week for several hours at a time. Counseling sessions will often include family members for moral support.

If you think an inpatient, residential, or outpatient treatment program may be right for you, make sure to find a program that offers a treatment plan specifically designed for gambling.

### Self-Help Groups

For many compulsive and problem gamblers, support groups such as Gamblers Anonymous are helpful. The GA program is self-supporting and therefore requires no membership fees, just a *desire* and *willingness* to *quit gambling*. Built around a twelve-step platform, the program emphasizes abstinence and acceptance of the gambler's powerlessness over gambling.

## Support for family and friends

It's important for friends and family of compulsive or problem gamblers to find support. They are most likely dealing with a variety of emotional, and possibly even financial issues as the result of their loved one's gambling, but **they are not alone**.

The 12-step peer group for friends and family of compulsive and problem gamblers – Gam-Anon – is confidential and open to anyone that is affected by someone else's gambling. In these meetings, individuals often find help and feedback from others dealing with situations similar to their own.

You cannot make someone stop gambling. Only they can do that. But you *can* take care of yourself emotionally and financially. It may be necessary for you to take over the family finances to ensure the gambler does not relapse and to protect your own finances and credit.

### You Can Do It

Gambling addiction is not easy to overcome, but **you can do it**. Through inpatient, outpatient and self-help programs, the battle against gambling addiction can be won.

