

## Frequently Asked Questions about Problem Gambling

### ***What are problem and pathological gambling?***

Problem gambling is a general term used to describe persistent gambling which results in financial, emotional, marital, legal, psychological, and/or other difficulties. In extreme cases, problem gambling can result in financial ruin, legal problems, loss of career and family, or even suicide. Pathological gambling is a diagnostic term described by the American Psychiatric Association which requires individuals to meet certain criteria to receive the diagnosis. The essential features include a continuous or periodic loss of control over gambling, a progression in gambling frequency and amounts wagered, and preoccupation with gambling and obtaining money to gamble. Both terms describe gambling in a manner that results in a negative impact on a person's life.

### ***How widespread is problem gambling in the U.S.?***

Most adults who choose to gamble do so responsibly. However, 2 million (1%) of U.S. adults are estimated to meet criteria for pathological gambling in a given year. Another 4-8 million (2-3%) would be considered problem gamblers; that is, they do not meet the full diagnostic criteria for pathological gambling, but meet one or more of the criteria and are experiencing problems due to their gambling behavior.

### ***What kind of people become problem gamblers?***

Anyone who gambles can develop problems if they are not aware of the risks and do not gamble responsibly. Even people with a long history of responsible behavior can develop a gambling problem. When an individual is gambling problematically, that person cannot control their gambling and will often fail to meet their responsibilities. When gambling behavior interferes with finances, relationships and the workplace, a serious problem exists.

### ***Can you be a problem gambler if you don't gamble every day?***

The frequency of a person's gambling does not determine whether or not they have a gambling problem. What is more important are the consequences gambling has on the gambler's life.

### ***Can you be a problem gambler if you only buy lottery tickets?***

Lotteries, scratch-offs cards and bingo, though they may help raise money for charities or education, are forms of gambling and can become problematic if they cause damage to a person's life.

### ***How much money do you have to lose before gambling becomes a problem?***

The amount of money lost does not necessarily determine when gambling becomes a problem. While financial problems are often observed, excessive gambling often impacts other aspects of a person's life. If someone's gambling conflicts with their priorities, there may be a problem. For example, too much time spent gambling means less time spent with family and friends, and may impact performance on the job.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION:

The Gambling Clinic A Center for Self-Change  
The University of Memphis  
901-678-STOP (7867)  
website: [www.thegamblingclinic.memphis.edu](http://www.thegamblingclinic.memphis.edu)  
email: [gambling@memphis.edu](mailto:gambling@memphis.edu)

