

# When Gambling Becomes a Bad Bet

Many people enjoy buying a lottery ticket, going to a casino, or making a bet on a sporting event. But if gambling gets out of control, it can result in **pathological gambling**, a disorder that can have devastating effects.

An article in the July 11, 2001, issue of *JAMA* discusses the causes and treatment of pathological gambling and its increase in the United States.

## WHAT IS PATHOLOGICAL GAMBLING?

Pathological gambling shares many symptoms with drug abuse. Characteristics of pathological gambling include

- Preoccupation with gambling—reliving past gambling experiences, planning the next bet, or figuring out ways to get money for gambling
- Needing more frequent and bigger bets for excitement
- Lying to family members, friends, or others to conceal the problem
- Inability to stop gambling despite repeated attempts to do so
- Trying to “win back” losses
- Restlessness and irritability when trying to stop gambling
- Breaking the law to finance gambling habit

## EFFECTS OF PATHOLOGICAL GAMBLING

Some of the consequences of pathological gambling are

- Financial problems that increase with time
- Problems with marriage, long-term relationships, and friendships
- Loss of job or job opportunities
- Legal problems

Pathological gamblers also have high suicide rates and tend to drink alcohol and abuse drugs more than other people.

Sources: American Psychiatric Association, American Psychological Association, Gamblers Anonymous, Gam-Anon, National Council on Problem Gambling, Inc



## YOU CAN GET HELP

If you gamble and are experiencing symptoms of pathological gambling, the first step in getting help is to admit you have a problem and make a commitment to do something about it.

A consultation with your doctor is a great place to start. Additional resources are available through the organizations listed below.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

- Gamblers Anonymous International Service Office  
213/386-8789  
[www.gamblersanonymous.org](http://www.gamblersanonymous.org)
- The National Council on Problem Gambling, Inc  
800/522-4700  
e-mail: [ncpg@ncpgambling.org](mailto:ncpg@ncpgambling.org)  
[www.ncpgambling.org](http://www.ncpgambling.org)

For family members and friends of people with gambling problems

- Gam-Anon International Service Office, Inc  
718/352-1671  
[www.gam-anon.org](http://www.gam-anon.org)

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