

# Compulsive Gambling Is A Bad Deal



There are few of us who haven't impulsively purchased a gas station scratch-off or dropped a few quarters into a slot machine in hopes of hitting a big payoff. The lure of turning a few dollars into life-changing riches is one that plays on our dreams.

For many, gambling is the bridge of hope that leads nowhere but crushing personal debt, broken marriages, depression, or even suicide for those who cannot control it. It is a destination of nightmares for compulsive gamblers.

## What is Compulsive Gambling?

Compulsive gambling is an impulse control disorder in which an individual feels an uncontrollable urge to gamble. The behavior patterns associated with compulsive gambling are similar in scope and severity to physical addiction to drugs and/or alcohol.

## Why do People Become Compulsive Gamblers?

Although the causes of compulsive gambling are not fully understood, research suggests that neurotransmitters related to pleasure, reward, stress, and addiction play a role in compulsive gambling. Some, but not all, compulsive gamblers have lower than average levels of norepinephrine – a neurotransmitter that is released by stress, tension, and excitement. It is thought that compulsive gamblers are rewarded by the “rush” involved with the risk/reward of betting money when this chemical is released.

Dopamine and serotonin are also thought to play a role in the development of compulsive gambling. Dopamine is a neurotransmitter related to pleasure and reward. Serotonin is a brain chemical responsible for regulating mood and behavior.

## Am I at Risk?

Risk factors linked to compulsive gambling may include heavy alcohol consumption, a competitive and/or workaholic personality, taking up gambling at an early age, and a family history of gambling problems. Men are more likely than women to be compulsive gamblers. None of these factors, however, are necessary to developing a problem with compulsive gambling.

## How do I know if I'm a Compulsive Gambler?

The American Psychiatric Association has identified 9 criteria to identify and diagnose compulsive gambling. If an individual displays 4 or more of the following, then he/she is considered to be a compulsive gambler.

## 9 Signs of Compulsive Gambling

1. Needs to gamble with increasing amounts of money in order to achieve the desired excitement.
2. Is restless or irritable when attempting to cut down or stop gambling.
3. Has made repeated unsuccessful efforts to control, cut back, or stop gambling.
4. Is often preoccupied with gambling (e.g., having persistent thoughts of reliving past gambling experiences, handicapping or planning the next venture, thinking of ways to get money with which to gamble).
5. Often gambles when feeling distressed (e.g., helpless, guilty, anxious, depressed).
6. After losing money gambling, often returns another day to get even (“chasing” one's losses).
7. Lies to conceal the extent of involvement with gambling.
8. Has jeopardized or lost a significant relationship, job, or educational or career opportunity because of gambling.
9. Relies on others to provide money to relieve desperate financial situations caused by gambling.

*This information is not intended to replace the medical advice of your doctor or healthcare provider. Please consult your health care provider or EAP for advice about a personal concern or medical condition.*