

In recent years, gambling among older adults has become an increasingly popular past time.

In fact, a recent study showed that gambling was identified as the most frequently activity by older adults, with bingo being the most popular, followed by casino gambling. Most people are able to engage in these activities for fun and without negative consequences. There are a small percentage of people, however, who may develop serious problems as a result of problem or compulsive gambling.

Senior Problem Gambling Can Be Defined As:

“Gambling that causes problems for an individual and his or her friends and family. Seniors may not be able to stop or control the gambling behavior. In addition, problem gambling occurs when the senior is so preoccupied with the gambling that it affects health, financial status, relationships and general well-being.”

— Kit Clark



The Impact of Gambling on Older Adults ... **Mary's Story**

Mary was having a hard time adjusting to living alone after her husband of 50 years passed away.

She heard about a casino bus trip from a friend at her weekly bridge game, and went that day along with a few of her friends. Mary had such a good time, she began visiting with friends once a month, then once a week, then eventually whenever she could, whether with friends or alone. She loved the thrill of the casino, the risk of the games, and feeling involved in life again. Yet, she was spending more and more money each time she went to the casino.

Mary's oldest daughter, Jane noticed that some of the family heirlooms had gone missing, and that her mother seemed tired and agitated all of the time. When approached about it, her mother became very defensive and upset. Jane knew something was very wrong, her mother had never acted this way. She pleaded with her mother to make a change, and with some information she received from her family doctor, was able to get Mary the treatment she needed.

Mary's story is common among people experiencing gambling problems.

Losing her husband, dealing with loneliness, and the desire to have an active social life lead to Mary's gambling problem. Some other factors may include:

- Trying to improve on a fixed income when retirement funds don't provide enough money.
- The change in attitude about gambling for people socialized during the depression. Once unwilling to play due to the lack of money and stigma attached, many older Americans now embrace gambling as an entertaining way to use disposable income and free time.
- Easier access to gambling through the internet or sponsored trips, for those with otherwise limited mobility or access.
- Other factors can include; boredom, loneliness, isolation, depression, abuse, health problems and financial problems.



WARNING SIGNS

Here are some possible warning signs of problem gambling:

- ▶ Withdrawal from friends and family
- ▶ Gambles with money meant for necessities (food, rent, medicine)
- ▶ Gambling on credit
- ▶ Missing personal or household items
- ▶ Borrowing from friends and family
- ▶ Gambling alone
- ▶ Already struggling with some form of addiction
- ▶ Lying about or hiding gambling
- ▶ Only talks about wins, not losses
- ▶ Betting more than he/she can afford to lose
- ▶ Appears unhealthy

Most people are able to gamble for fun, without causing any serious consequence to themselves.

Tips to reduce your risk:

1. Always gamble for fun, treat winning as a bonus.
2. Make gambling an event with friends and family, not alone.
3. Decide on the amount you will gamble ahead of time, and spend only that much.
4. Never borrow money to gamble, or gamble on credit.
5. Limit the number of times you gamble and the time you spend each occasion.

Do you think you or someone you know may be dealing with a gambling problem?

The following questions may help to determine if a problem is present:

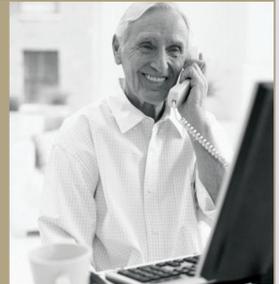
1. Since you started gambling, have you felt more depressed, either after gambling or in general?
2. Have you ever been surprised by the amount of time that has passed when you've finished gambling?
3. Have you ever spent more money than you planned on when gambling?
4. Have you ever hidden your gambling activities, for example, where you were or how much you won or lost?
5. Has gambling filled a void in your life and helped you feel less lonely?

If you can answer yes to one or more of these questions, it may be a sign of a gambling problem, and an opportunity to seek further information.

**Adapted from the Windsor Problem Gambling Screen for Adults*

RESOURCES

Here are some local resources you may find helpful ...



Massachusetts Council on

Compulsive Gambling

We understand the problem. We can help.

Helpline: 1-800-426-1234

Our website: www.masscompulsivegambling.org offers many resources such as self-help meeting lists, treatment center contact information, web and print materials, as well as a *Your First Step to Change*, our self-assessment test, to help you or a loved one to determine the presence of a gambling problem.

We also have many books, journals, articles and informational videos relating to problem gambling in older adults available at our office.

Kit Clark Senior Services

1500 Dorchester Ave, Dorchester
617-825-5000 • e-mail: jfrancis@kitclark.org

Kit Clark Senior Services offers a wide variety of day programs, health services, food services and community assistance for senior adults. Kit Clark offers an Addictions Recovery plan, helping seniors 50 years and older who are concerned about their own or others use of alcohol, drugs or gambling habits. The center also offers addictions assessment, individual and group counseling, and support groups.

Gamblers Anonymous

213-386-8789 • website: www.gamblersanonymous.org

Bettors Anonymous

978-988-1777 or 781-662-519
website: www.bettorsanonymous.org

Gam-Anon

For family members or friends of problem gamblers
781-352-2571 • website: www.gam-anon.org

Prevention Tools for Older Adults

(North American Training Institute)

website: www.nati.org/prevention_tools/olderadults.aspx