

# Recognising the signs of an unhealthy gambling habit

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INVESTIGATES THE ISSUE OF COMPULSIVE GAMBLING.



With so many online betting platforms vying for our attention these days, who couldn't be forgiven for fancying the odd little flutter from time to time? But once the stakes start to rise, knowing when and how to quit the game can often be far from an easy process.

Recent research conducted on behalf of the charity GambleAware found that an estimated 1.4 million people in the UK are currently believed to be experiencing harmful effects from their gambling.

Following a noticeable decline in betting outlay during the Covid lockdowns of 2020/21, the number of people now gambling again has risen to pre-pandemic levels. GambleAware believes that its latest research findings reflect a trend towards a worrying increase, both in terms of the numbers of people betting and the wider societal impact of a 24-hour gambling culture.

## YOUNG MALES AT GREATEST RISK

The study revealed men to be the most likely members of society to suffer from gambling-related harm and that males within the 18-to-34 age bracket were reporting the highest levels of problem gambling habits - a 25% increase on the previous year's research findings. The number of individuals impacted by other people's gambling behaviours is also reportedly on the rise, with up to an estimated 3.3 million members of the adult population now believed to be affected.

The National Gambling Treatment Service (NGTS) is a network of regional organisations that have come together to provide free and confidential support to people struggling with their gambling habits across England, Scotland and Wales. The service is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week and provides telephone, online and face-to-face support for individuals and groups.



“Last year alone, the NGTS helped roughly 8,500 people across the country, however, GambleAware’s figures show that for every person who gets NGTS support each year, there are nearly 160 others who could benefit but don’t get the help they need. for individuals and groups.” - GamCare

### **A RECOGNISED MENTAL HEALTH CONDITION**

Many people who struggle to control their gambling habits see themselves as ‘weak’ or ‘bad’ for being unable to reign in their compulsion to keep on betting. In truth, problem gambling is a form of mental illness and not a deliberate lifestyle choice.

According to the Royal College of Psychiatrists, gambling disorder is a repeated pattern of gambling behaviour where someone:

- feels they have lost control
- continues to gamble despite negative consequences
- sees gambling as more important to them than any other interest.

Compulsive gambling affects people from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds and quite typically has a tendency to remain much more hidden than other compulsive or addictive behaviours. This is precisely what makes gambling such a risky and difficult addiction to confront. By the time the reality of the problem starts to bite, an enormous amount of damage has often already been done, and not simply from a financial perspective. As the stakes begin to rise, so too does the impulse to keep on going in the unshakeable belief that the next bet will turn out to be the big winner.

**“IN TRUTH, PROBLEM GAMBLING IS A FORM OF MENTAL ILLNESS AND NOT A DELIBERATE LIFESTYLE CHOICE”**

**Sharon Hinsull**





So, what has led to such a worrying increase in the number of men now struggling with gambling addiction? In recent years, a proliferation of betting organisations has jumped on board the sports sponsorship wagon, with the majority of premiership and championship football teams now routinely promoting gambling via the company logos emblazoned on their players' shirts. Alongside big-name sponsorship deals comes the relentless advertising that is targeted at sports fans of all genres, deliberately and cynically aimed at enticing spectators into parting with their hard-earned cash via the anonymous convenience of online betting sites and mobile apps. Whilst an upcoming change in the law will very soon see a ban on the celebrity endorsement of gambling advertising in sport, statistics show that those who regularly use sports betting platforms are additionally nearly four times more likely to place money on virtual casino games.

**HOW DO I KNOW IF I HAVE A PROBLEM?**

If you are worried you might have a gambling disorder, answering the following questions may help. Think about your experiences over the last 12 months, and answer the following questions, choosing a score from 0 to 3.

**Have you bet more than you could really afford to lose?**

**Never (0), Sometimes (1), Most of the time (2), Almost always (3)**

**Have people criticised your betting or told you you had a gambling problem, regardless of whether or not you thought it was true?**

**Never (0), Sometimes (1), Most of the time (2), Almost always (3)**

**“ADMITTING TO YOURSELF THAT YOUR GAMBLING HABIT MAY BE RUNNING OUT OF CONTROL CAN FEEL LIKE A VERY SCARY AND DIFFICULT STEP TO TAKE”**

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**Have you felt guilty about the way you gamble or what happens when you gamble?**

**Never (0), Sometimes (1), Most of the time (2), Almost always (3)**

Add up the numbers you chose for each question and score yourself below.

**SCORING:**

**0 = Non-problem gambler**

**1 = Low-risk gambler**

**2-3 = Moderate-risk gambler**

**4+ = Problem gambler**

If you scored four or more, you should seek support from your GP or a gambling treatment provider as your score indicates you may have a gambling disorder. Source: Royal College of Psychiatrists

**DON'T SUFFER IN SILENCE**

Finally admitting to yourself that your gambling habit may be running out of control can feel like a very scary and difficult step to take. But help is out there for you, and no-one is going to judge you, no matter how bad you fear that your situation may have become.

Remember, compulsive gambling is an illness, not a lifestyle choice. There will always be a way back for you when you choose to reach out for help.

ALL  
TERRAIN  
COMFORT

SKECHERS

OUTDOOR

**GOODYEAR**  
PERFORMANCE OUTSOLES

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## HEALTH

### ORGANISATIONS OF SUPPORT

**The National Gambling Helpline** (0808 8020 133) is operated by **GamCare** which provides telephone and live chat support. The Helpline is available 24 hours a day, every day of the year. The service provides brief interventions and is able to make referrals into other treatment options across the network. GamCare also offers a moderated online Forum and daily online group chatrooms to enable those affected by gambling problems to connect with others in similar situations, share their experience and support one another.

**GambleAware** provides information and guidance to help people make informed decisions about their gambling. As well as offering advice on safer gambling, a range of support services is also accessible for those who need it.

Further information on seeking support for a gambling addiction is available via **The NHS - Help for Problem Gambling** and **The Royal College of Psychiatrists**

Should you find yourself struggling to cope with your gambling and feel in need of urgent emotional support, **Samaritans** can be contacted 24-hours a day, seven days a week on 116 123. ❖

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