



Elderly Problem Gamblers

Q: Are elderly gamblers a growing problem?

A: Yes. The current casino debate in Massachusetts is a reminder that many of the patrons who keep the casinos floating are elderly. Research shows that an estimated 7 million people in the U.S. are problem gamblers. 5% to 10% of elderly gamblers will become addicted, according to Casino Watch, twice as likely as younger gamblers. The elderly are the fastest growing group of gamblers. Those older than 65 who have gambled jumped from 35% in 1975 to 80% in 1998. A study of elderly women revealed that they gambled 249% of their monthly income. The gambling-addicted elderly stop taking medications, steal money, gamble with credit cards, mortgage and utility money, or even skip meals.

You may know an elder who gambles more than they intended, or who feels guilty about the way he or she gambles. They want to stop betting money, but feel like they can't. They hide betting slips, lottery tickets, gambling money or other signs of betting. They argue over how they are handling money, or they borrow money and don't repay it. These are all likely signs of "problem" gambling.

The American Psychiatric Association says that signs of problem gambling include:

- Preoccupation with gambling (reliving past gambling experiences, planning the next venture or thinking of ways in which to gamble)
- Needing to gamble with increasing amounts of money in order to achieve the desired excitement
- Trying to control, cut down or stop gambling unsuccessfully
- Feeling restless or irritable when attempting to cut down or stop gambling
- Using gambling as a way to escape problems or bad moods (helplessness, guilt, anxiety, depression)
- Returning to gamble after losing money gambling
- Lying to conceal the extent of involvement with gambling
- Committing illegal acts, such as forgery, fraud, theft or embezzlement to finance gambling
- Jeopardizing or losing a significant relationship, job, educational or career opportunity because of gambling
- Relying on others to get out of debt

If you have a problem gambler in your family, don't play the odds. Try playing these numbers instead: 1-800-426-1234. That's the hotline for the Mass Council on Compulsive Gambling, which provides live, confidential responses 24-hours a day, 7-days a week. The Council offers information for self-help programs, and treatment options, for people experiencing a problem with their own, or a loved one's, gambling.