



Problem Gambling

Introduction

Over the last decade, legalized gambling in Canada has grown - rapidly!
So has problem gambling!

Should people with mood disorders be especially concerned?

Probably yes! There is certainly strong evidence to support a greater risk.
Truthfully, we are just not sure. However, we intend to find out.

The report: *Mood Disorders And Problem Gambling: Cause, Effect, Or Cause For Concern?* looks at the research linking mood disorders and problem gambling. We undertook this review because of the rapid growth of gambling, the frequent link between mood disorders and gambling problems, the high rates of suicide and a nagging concern that people with mood disorders may be a unique 'at-risk' group who need to take more caution in engaging in gambling activities. (For a copy of the report, visit www.mooddisorderscanada.ca and click on Publications ~ Archives)

The Mood Disorders Society intends to pursue a research agenda in partnership with leading specialists in mood disorders and problem gambling. We want to look at problem gambling from the vantage point of those living with mood disorder.

Gambling in Canada is BIG business

- According to Statistics Canada there were over 100,000 places to make a bet in Canada in 2001.
- In 2002 an estimated 18.9 million adults wagered \$11.3 billion on government-run lotteries, video lottery terminals, and casinos. Gamblers spent an additional \$440 million on horse racing.
- Spending rates on gambling have increased four-fold over the last decade.
- The average Canadian adult gambler spent \$447 in 2001. Participation and spending rates increase with household income.
- In 2001 gambling activity in Canada employed an estimated 47,500 persons as either regulators or operators of gambling for government or within gaming management companies.
- Over 83% of the adult population gambled legally last year most without problems.
- Canadians have accepted legalized gambling in part because it is government owned, operated and regulated. Canadians trust that governments will look after the needs of all its citizens.

Problem gambling is growing

- According to the [2002 Statistics Canada Canadian Community Health Survey](#) 1.2 million adult Canadians or one in twenty were at risk of experiencing problems or were problem gamblers.
- Problem gamblers are more likely to have higher rates of alcohol dependency and substance abuse.
- Of the 85% of problem gamblers who recognized they had a problem, over half had tried to stop gambling, but were unable to do so.

- The more often people gamble the more likely they are to have problems (particularly if their game of choice is casino games or video lottery terminals).
- Problem gambling causes serious, financial, social, emotional, and physical harm not just to the person gambling but to their family as well.
- Youth are twice as likely as adults to develop a gambling problem.
- Only a fraction of those with problems seek professional help.

Problem Gambling and Mood Disorders

- Using the 2002 Canadian Community Health Survey, researchers found that one-quarter of problem gamblers suffered a major clinical depression at some point in their lives.
- In the same survey one-fifth of problem gamblers had contemplated suicide in the last year.
- In a recent Quebec study more than half of the 75 people whose suicides were linked to gambling problems had a major mental illness - primarily depression.
- In numerous studies researchers found over three quarters of people who sought treatment for gambling problems experienced a major depressive disorder.
- Researcher found that many people gamble to cope with feelings of loss, to avoid difficult situations or when they are depressed and / or feeling anxious.
- Research suggests that depression and anxiety is not relieved by gambling and in fact appears to make things worse.
- Gambling, mood disorders and drinking is a very volatile mix. It appears that when these three elements combine gambling problems are more severe, emotional and physical health is worse and the risk of suicide goes up.

If you have a mood disorder and you choose to gamble - take care!

What makes people vulnerable to gambling problems?

- Mistaken beliefs about the odds of winning at gambling.
- A 'big win' early in the person's gambling history.
- A history of drug, alcohol, gambling, or overspending problems.
- A family history of drug, alcohol, gambling, or overspending problems.
- A history of mental health problems, particularly depression, stress, or trauma.
- Loneliness, chronic boredom, or lack of leisure activities.
- A habit of using gambling or substances to cope with negative feelings or events.
- A tendency toward impulsive behavior.
- Financial problems.

What are the warning signs of a gambling problem?

Sadly, many people hide their gambling from others. There are no physical signs like slurred speak that help you spot a problem. However, there are many signs that a person may have a gambling problem. For example, you can tell someone's gambling is getting out of control if they:

- Spend large amounts of time gambling;
- Begin to place larger bets, and bet more often;
- Have growing debts;
- Promise to cut back on gambling, but cannot seem to do it;
- Refuse to explain their behaviour, or lie about it;

- Feel frequent highs and lows;
- Boast about winning. Hiding their losses.
- Prefer gambling to a special family occasion;
- Seek new places to gamble close to home and away, like on vacation;
- Pin their hopes on the "big win" believing that a big win will solve financial or other problems.

Tips for gambling responsibly

Anyone who gambles may be at risk of developing problems - under the right set of circumstances. The only way to remove the risk completely is not to gamble at all. However, if you choose to gamble there are ways that you can lower the risk.

Consider the following steps to keep your gambling safe.

- Set limits on the amount of money and time spent gambling. **STICK TO THEM.**
- Leave your credit and bank debit cards at home. Don't bring along "extra" money.
- If you are losing, don't chase your losses.
- If you are winning, remember the odds are against you keeping your winnings. Quit while you are ahead. Winning happens by chance.
- Balance gambling with other leisure activities.
- Treat gambling as entertainment, not as a way to make money or pay debts.
- Gamble sober.
- Don't borrow money to gamble.
- Gamble only with money you can afford to lose, part of your entertainment budget
- Take breaks regularly, so you don't get too focused on gambling. Remember you need to eat and drink and sitting too long in one position is not good for your circulation.
- Don't gamble alone. Play with friends who don't have a problem with gambling.
- Don't gamble if you are upset, depressed, angry or in other ways emotionally at risk.
- If you find yourself breaking any of these guidelines, stop gambling at once, and give yourself some time away from the games to get some distance and think about what you are doing.

(Source: [CAMH Problem Gambling Project](#)).

What is harmful gambling?

- Losing track of time and spending more hours in play than you intended.
- Spending more money than you planned or can afford to lose.
- Ignoring work and family responsibilities because of gambling.
- Borrowing money or using household expense money to gamble.
- "Chasing your losses" in an attempt to win back your money.
- Seeing gambling as a way to 'earn' money believing that your 'investment' will eventually pay off.
- Gambling is the most important activity in your life over all other interests.
- Using gambling to cope with your problems or avoid things.
- Your gambling is causing conflicts within your family and friendships.
- Letting your health suffer.

(Source: [CAMH Problem Gambling Project](#)).

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Many gamblers have trouble accepting that they may have a problem with gambling. The following survey is a widely used and reliable tool for assessing gambling problems. It will help give you a good idea if you have a problem that needs corrective action.

Thinking about the last 12 months... Have you bet more than you could really afford to lose?

- Never Sometimes Most of the time Almost always

Still thinking about the last 12 month, have you needed to gamble with larger amounts of money to get the same feeling of excitement?

- Never Sometimes Most of the time Almost always

When you gambled, did you go back another day to try to win back the money you lost?

- Never Sometimes Most of the time Almost always

Have you borrowed money or sold anything to get money to gamble?

- Never Sometimes Most of the time Almost always

Have you felt that you might have a problem with gambling?

- Never Sometimes Most of the time Almost always

Has gambling caused you any health problems, including stress or anxiety?

- Never Sometimes Most of the time Almost always

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

- Never Sometimes Most of the time Almost always

Has your gambling caused any financial problems for you or your household?

- Never Sometimes Most of the time Almost always

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

- Never Sometimes Most of the time Almost always

Score your answers using the following scale:

- Never = 0 points
- Sometimes = 1 points
- Most of the time = 2 points
- Almost always = 3 points

Now add up all of your points:

The higher the score the greater the risk that gambling is a problem

- A score of 0 = Non-problem gambling.
- A score of 1 or 2 = Low risk gambler and means that the individual is gambling at levels that may or may not be leading to negative consequences.
- A score of 3 to 7 = Moderate risk gambling which has or may lead to negative and indicates a level of risk that should be explored, particularly if the person gambles frequently and/or has three or four of the vulnerability factors listed below.
- A score of 8 or more = Problem gambling with negative consequences and a loss of control.

Problem gambling:

A score between 8 and 27 on the CPGI means that the individual is gambling at levels that are leading to negative consequences. They may have lost control of their gambling behaviour. The higher their score, the heavier their gambling, and the more vulnerability factors they have (see list below), the more severe their problem is likely to be. These individuals should definitely be encouraged to examine their gambling behaviour and its consequences.

Some vulnerability factors to consider

- Mistaken beliefs about the odds of winning at gambling
- A 'big win' early in the person's gambling history
- A history of drug, alcohol, gambling or overspending problems
- A family history of drug, alcohol, gambling or overspending problems
- A history of mental health problems, particularly depression, stress or trauma
- Loneliness, chronic boredom or lack of leisure activities
- A habit of using gambling or substances to cope with negative feelings or events
- A tendency toward impulsive behavior
- Financial problems

Finding Help for Gambling Problems

If you, or someone you care about, are having problems with they're gambling - get help! Across Canada there is free, private and confidential service available to help you sort out what is going on and link you to the information or support you need.

Problem Gambling Helplines in Canada

Yukon 800

Confidential and open 24hrs a day. 1-800-661-0408

British Columbia Problem Gambling Information and Referral Service

Confidential and open 24hrs a day. 1-888-795-6111

Alberta Gambling Helpline

Confidential and open 24hrs a day. 1-800-665-9676

Saskatchewan Problem Gambling Helpline

Confidential and open 24hrs a day. 1-800-306-6789

Manitoba Problem Gambling Helpline

Confidential and open 24hrs a day. 1-800-463-1554

Ontario Toll Free Problem Gambling Helpline Number

Confidential and open 24hrs a day. Available in English & French. 1-888-230-3505

Quebec - Gambling: Help and Referral

Confidential and open 24hrs a day. 1-800-461-0140

New Brunswick Problem Gambling Helpline - 1-800-461-1234 (24 hrs)

Nova Scotia Department of Health - Problem Gambling Helpline

1 888-347-8888 or call 1-888-347-3331 (hearing impaired)

Prince Edward Island

No helpline is currently available contact [Prince Edward Island Addiction Services](#)

Newfoundland and Labrador Helpline

Confidential and open 24hrs a day. 1-888-737-466

Problem Gambling Resources in Canada

[Addictions Foundation of Manitoba](#)

[Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission \(AADAC\)](#)

[British Columbia Partnership for Responsible Gambling](#)

[Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse \(CCSA\)](#)

[Centre for Addiction and Mental Health \(CAMH\) - 1-888-647-4414](#)

[North American Association of State and Provincial Lotteries](#)

[Nova Scotia Department of Health - Problem Gambling Services](#)

[Ontario Problem Gambling Research Centre](#)

[Problem Gambling: A Canadian Perspective](#)

[Responsible Gambling Council \(Ontario\)](#)

[Chinese language self-help workbook on problem gambling](#)