



North Carolina Problem Gambling Program

1-877-718-5543

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Problem Gambling and Older Adults

Between 1974 and 1994, the percentage of older adults who gambled increased by 30 percent. The most frequently identified social activities among adults over age 65 are bingo and gambling at casinos.

Older Adults and Gambling

- Older adults are often marketed and catered to by casinos with bus transportation, free or discounted meals, an environment that is easy to navigate, mobility devices and special rewards and prizes.
- Gambling provides a distraction to escape the loss of a spouse, friends, independence and the ability to enjoy hobbies or a medical concern.
- Some individuals may have financial problems they are seeking to overcome by gambling.
- Attention from staff at casinos and group trips reduce feelings of loneliness due to living alone.
- Casinos are designed to draw a person in and create an entertaining and inviting experience. Older adults may develop the need for excitement and sense of belonging that casinos offer.

Older Adults and Gambling Addiction

- A 2006 New Jersey study found 23 percent of the state's residents over 55 had a least one symptom of a gambling problem.
- A 2005 Pennsylvania study found 10 percent of those over 65 in a primary care facility in the state were at risk for problem gambling.
- A study published in JAMA Internal Medicine indicates drugs commonly used to treat Parkinson's disease may contribute to compulsive gambling. These medications are dopamine receptor agonists.

Problem Gambling Signs and Barriers to Treatment

- Signs older adults have a gambling problem include: loss of interest and participation in normal activities with friends and families; blocks of time unaccounted for; missing possessions or assets; and changes in attitude and personality.
- Gambling problems could also be evidenced by neglect of personal needs (food, utilities and medical); secrecy and avoidance when discussing time and money; and depression or withdraw.
- In extreme cases, problem gambling can result in financial ruin, legal problems, loss of career and family or even suicide.
- Gambling is a significant financial issue for older adults because they may not have time to rebuild their financial futures.
- Older adults may not understand addiction and could be reluctant to seek help.
- Cognitive impairment may prevent the recognition of a gambling problem.
- There is little to no awareness of problem gambling as an addiction in society, and many older adults do not view it as a possible harmful activity.
- The cycle of gambling to escape grief is difficult to break.
- Parents who are now older adults may be embarrassed at their inability to control their gambling and have a fear of losing the respect of others and their independence.

This information was provided by the National Council on Problem Gambling and knowtheodds.org.



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