

# What is Problem Gambling?

**Gambling is a popular pastime in Australia, including the pokies, lotto, instant scratchies, cards, racing or online betting. Many people have fun gambling now and again, but sometimes it can get out of hand and become a cause for distress and financial hardship.**

Problem gambling is when betting starts to create trouble in your life, such as debt; relationship problems; loss of a job; stress or depression; or it gets in the way of being a good parent. It may start out fine, but gradually feel like it's taking over. This is because gambling can be addictive – it can become a habit that you find hard to control, even though you know it's causing you and your family harm. The pokies are especially addictive.

Lots of people get into difficulties with gambling and there are many types of support available. Whether you just want to cut down a little, or if you have complicated debts and issues that need greater support, you can find the kind of help that works best for you.

## **How do I know if I am in danger of developing a gambling addiction?**

It's sometimes hard to know if your gambling is getting out of hand. A common reaction is to minimise it or deny that it's causing harm. Some people may hide the gambling or start to lie about how much time and money they are spending on it. You might say to yourself "I enjoy this, it's just my way of relaxing"... "I'll stop when I have the next big win..." "It makes me forget my worries..." or "I can stop whenever I want". These are all forms of denial.

**If you can tick yes to any of the following, your gambling may be starting to become a problem.**

Do you:

- Spend more money and time than you intend to on gambling
- Feel guilty and ashamed about your gambling
- Try to win back your losses
- Miss important things like family time, work, leisure activities or appointments because of gambling
- Think about gambling every day
- Have arguments with friends and family about your gambling
- Lie or steal to get money for gambling
- Get into debt because of gambling

## What can I do?

There are many things you can do to prevent gambling problems building up and to get things under control; from self-help strategies, to telephone counselling, online programs, peer support, or face-to-face therapy and treatments. These activities have worked well for many people:

- First of all – talk to someone you trust about your gambling. This will be a first step in finding the best way forward to cut down or stop
- Call the national Gambling Helpline (1800 858 858 – 24hrs) and they can talk to you confidentially or send out self-help tools and information
- Contact a Gambling Help Service. Just one session with a professional counsellor can help you assess your situation and set up a plan to suit your needs
- Have a close friend as an ally who will check in with you and support you to stick to your plan
- See a financial counsellor to look at money going 'in' and 'out' so you can decide if the balance is right and get help to manage any debts

You're not alone. Many people have overcome problems with gambling. The important thing is to do something now to make sure you stay in charge of your money, time and life.



Proudly supported by



## Find out more

Call Lifeline – **13 11 14** or the national Gambling Helpline – **1800 858 858** available 24 hours a day, if you need to speak to someone about problem gambling.

Visit [www.lifeline.org.au](http://www.lifeline.org.au) or [www.gamblinghelponline.org.au](http://www.gamblinghelponline.org.au) to find a range of self-help resources and information.

The assistance of Jen Hamer in producing this fact sheet is gratefully acknowledged.