

Chances Are...

Chances are that you are part of the 66% of adults who make a wager of one kind or another throughout the year. Like most people, you do it for fun and don't risk more than you can afford to lose. You bet on the Super Bowl or World Series or the Academy Awards. But for some people, gambling is much, much more than just having fun.

For years, Las Vegas and Atlantic City were the two big cities known for their gambling casinos. Today, casinos can be found all over the United States. Lotteries exist in all but two states in the union. Race tracks, slot machines, video gaming and bingo abound. Soon, interactive TV will let viewers stop action on sporting events and wager on every aspect of the game. Just around the corner is "cashless gambling" - using a credit or debit card to seal a bet. Already, video poker has been termed the "crack cocaine of gambling" and underscores the fact that gambling can turn into an addiction.



Those who gamble purely for entertainment are called social gamblers. Problem gamblers will compromise, disrupt, or damage personal, family or work activities. The pathological gambler has periodic loss of control over how often he gambles and how much money he wagers. He also may obsess over gambling and where to come up with the money to bet with. He will hide his addiction until he cannot function without gambling and begins to exclude all other activities. Like any other addict, he will continue his behavior regardless of the consequences. This is because he is seeking the action, or the rush, (not the money), which gives a feeling of arousal and euphoria comparable to the high from cocaine or other drugs. His family members will most likely experience a lot of illness, and maybe some violent behavior in response to the gambling. Spouses of gambling addicts are three times more likely to commit suicide than the general population. As an employee, he will have lots of family stress, be financially irresponsible, have poor job performance, and possibly commit fraud or steal from an employer. Not all compulsive gamblers show the same signs and symptoms (there are differences in gender, age, and cultural backgrounds), but most will:

- Use gambling to cope with underlying emotional pain.
- Rely on the excitement to feel good.
- Bet more and more money to win back losses.
- Believe that they can get out of debt with a big win.
- Lie about money and hide their gambling from their family and friends.
- Become emotionally, mentally, and physically distressed.

It is important to remember that compulsive gambling is a progressive disease (like any other addiction) and it is reversible and treatable. Your EAP can help.