

A Quick Guide to Safer Gambling for Older People

Source:
Responsible Gambling Council
www.responsiblegambling.org/

Playing the Game

Many people gamble. They play slot machines or bingo, buy scratch tickets or lottery tickets or they go to the racetrack. And most people don't get into trouble with gambling – but some do. How do you keep your gambling safer? And how do you spot a potential problem? Your 'gambling style' can provide valuable clues.

High-Risk or Low-Risk?

Some people who gamble lose the sense that it's only a game. They may start to see gambling as a way to make money.

Or they think they have special luck or abilities. When they lose, they bet more and more to try to win back what's been lost. These practices can increase the risk of a gambling problem.

People who gamble in a low-risk way see gambling as a form of entertainment. For them, a gambling loss is the cost of entertainment – just like the cost of a restaurant bill or a theatre ticket.

What happens when you add retirement to the mix?

When you retire, things change: you have more free time and you probably have a new budget. During any life transition, it's easy to lose your bearings and to feel out of touch. The research tells us that gambling at times like these can raise the risk of getting into trouble. The risks are even greater if you have gambled a lot in the past.

A significant percentage of seniors are or are at risk of becoming problem gamblers.

For these people, gambling losses can have a substantial impact on their finances and their lives. When you are older and, perhaps, on a fixed income, there's no way to recoup what you've lost.

Gambling tips from people who have been there. Older adults and their families who had firsthand experience of a gambling problem have provided some solid advice:

“Don't look at gambling as your main source of entertainment.” Keep your life balanced with different activities. Some of the older adults we spoke to found themselves gambling more often simply because they had more time on their hands.

“Take stock of your gambling.”

Every once in a while, give yourself a gambling reality check. Many of the older adults with a gambling problem said ‘it can creep up on you.’ Make sure you aren’t gambling in a high-risk way and be aware of the signs of a problem. If you want some help, there are many places to get it.

“It’s your money – take care of it.”

The older adults we spoke to were very clear: it’s our money, we worked hard for it and we’ll spend it how we like. But they also told us that spending too much money on gambling can lead to a loss of control and can affect how you feel about yourself. If you choose to gamble, decide how much you can afford to lose. If you reach that point – it’s time to call it a day.

If you choose to gamble, keep it low-

risk: No matter what age you are, the principles of safer gambling are always the same.

- Set money and time limits and stick to them
- Only use money you can afford to lose
- Take frequent breaks
- Balance gambling with other activities
- Don’t borrow money to gamble
- Don’t try to win back what’s been lost
- Be particularly careful when you are upset, stressed or depressed

Take Stock: General Signs of a Potential Gambling Problem

Each person’s experience is different, but here are some signs of a potential gambling problem. The more circles you check, the greater the chance of a problem.

Do you ever...

- Gamble to escape boredom or problems?
- Borrow money, sell things or use savings to gamble?
- Skip family functions or other obligations to gamble?
- Lie about how much time or money you’ve spent gambling?

- Gamble to win back losses?
- Need to gamble with larger amounts of money, or for a longer period of time, to get that same feeling of excitement?
- Argue with your spouse, partner or family about money & gambling?
- Hide bills, ‘past due notices’, winnings or losses from your partner or family member?
- Feel that a ‘big win’ will solve all of your problems?
- Bet until the last dollar is gone?
- Neglect to sleep or eat properly in order to keep gambling?

She thinks a lot about her granddaughter’s future.



That’s why she wants to win big at the casino.

Seniors are among the hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers who become problem gamblers.

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NYS HOPELINE

1-877-8-HOPENY

- The NYS HOPEline is a telephone support and referral line that is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Trained masters level clinicians are available to answer your questions and help find you problem gambling treatment and/ or self-help in your area. Anonymous and confidential support is available. Call the toll-free HOPEline at 1-877-846-7369.
- See: <http://nyproblemgambling.org/>