



What is gambling?

Gambling is risking something of value on the outcome of an event when the probability of winning is less than certain.⁸

What is problem gambling?

Problem gambling is characterized by gambling behavior which leads to adverse consequences for the gambler, others, and the community.⁹

What constitutes social gambling?

Social gamblers gamble for entertainment, typically will not risk more than they can afford, often gamble with friends, chase losses briefly, gamble for limited periods of time, and are not preoccupied with gambling.¹⁰

See DSM-5 for clinical definitions

The Massachusetts Council on Gaming and Health: A Resource For Help

The Council's Helpline provides live, confidential, and compassionate support 24-hours a day, 7-days a week:

800-426-1234.

Helpline workers provide:

- Information about problem gambling
- Referrals to self-help groups, treatment providers, and other community resources.

For more information, visit macgh.org or contact us at info@macgh.org or 617-426-4554.

Older Adult Gambling Prevalence

Research shows that older adults tend to gamble to socialize on excursions, to change their routine, get away for the day and relieve feelings of boredom.^{1, 2, 3, 11}

• Recreational gambling rates:

Approximately 28.7% of U.S. adults over the age of 65 gamble recreationally (i.e., they gamble more than 5 times in a year).⁴

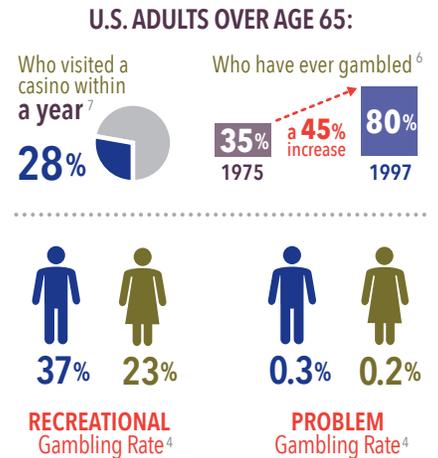
• Disordered gambling rates:

Approximately 0.1–1.9% of older adults meet the criteria for disordered gambling.⁵



Recreational Gambling, Substance Abuse Problems and Mental Health Disorders

Among older adults, those who have a gambling disorder are significantly more likely than recreational and non-gamblers to also have mental health disorders and/or substance abuse problems.



Co-occurring Disorders Among Older Adults by Gambler Type

Base: 10,563 US 60+ adults

	Non-Gambler	Recreational Gambler	Disordered Gambler
Substance Abuse			
Nicotine Dependence	8%	17%	43%
Alcohol Use Disorder	13%	30%	53%
Drug Use Disorder	1%	1%	5%
Mental Health Disorders			
A Mood Disorder	11%	13%	40%
An Anxiety Disorder	12%	15%	35%
A Personality Disorder	7%	11%	43%

Source: National Epidemiologic Survey on Alcohol and Related Conditions (Pietrzak)



Problem/Disordered Gambling and Poor Health Outcomes

Among older adults, those who have experienced gambling problems are significantly more likely than their counterparts who have not experienced gambling problems to have mental disorders, substance abuse problems and/or poor health outcomes.

- Compared to older adults who do not gamble or gamble but are not problem/disordered gamblers, older adult problem/ disordered gamblers are more likely to have the following poor health outcomes:
- Obesity
- Worse overall physical health⁴

Gambling Pros and Cons

Research shows that older adults are at risk to develop problem gambling, but gambling can also be associated with positive outcomes for older adults:¹¹

Some older adult gamblers report:

- Better social support (e.g., someone to talk to about problems)⁵
- Lower levels of depression¹²
- Higher self-rated health^{4, 12, 13}
- Higher cognitive functioning^{4, 12}

Signs of a Gambling Disorder

A person shows signs of gambling disorder if he/she:

- Needs to gamble with increasing amounts of money to achieve the desired excitement.
- Exhibits restless or irritable behavior when attempting to cut down or stop gambling.
- Has made repeated unsuccessful efforts to control, cut back or stop gambling.
- Is preoccupied with thoughts about gambling.
- Gambles when feeling distress (e.g., helpless, guilty, anxious, depressed).
- Chases one's losses/returns another day to get even.
- Lies to conceal the extent of gambling.
- Jeopardizes a significant relationship, job, or opportunity because of gambling.
- Relies on others to provide money to relieve desperate financial situations caused by gambling.

For more information about gambling disorder, please refer to evaluation tools provided by the DSM-5.

Endnotes

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