

## When Online Gambling Becomes a Problem

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Though we don't know the exact numbers, many Caltech students seem to enjoy gambling over the Internet. Being able to gamble in privacy and relative anonymity appeals to many of our students, and a solid understanding of probability theory can help fuel fantasies of beating the odds. For most students of legal age, gambling in moderation is not inherently problematic. For a small minority of students, however, online gambling can lead to significant academic, social, and financial difficulties. This short article will provide some information you can use to help determine if you may have a problem with online gambling.

There are no hard and fast rules for what defines a gambling problem, but some general criteria do seem to apply. Many of these are taken from the DSM-IV criteria for problem gambling, and I've broken them down into objective behaviors and subjective emotional states.

### Objective Behaviors:

- Lying to others to conceal the extent of your involvement with gambling
- Jeopardizing or losing a significant relationship, job, or educational or career opportunity because of gambling (e.g., missing classes, missing house social events, etc.)
- Relying on others to provide money to relieve a desperate financial situation caused by gambling
- Chasing your losses – in other words, continuing to gamble in the hopes of winning back money you've lost
- In extreme cases, committing illegal acts such as forgery, fraud, or theft to finance gambling

### Subjective Emotional States:

- Being preoccupied with gambling (e.g., reliving past gambling experiences, handicapping or planning the next venture, or thinking of ways to get money with which to gamble)
- Needing to gamble with increasing amounts of money to achieve the desired excitement
- You've made repeated unsuccessful efforts to control, cut back, or stop gambling
- You're restless or irritable when attempting to cut down or stop gambling
- You gamble as a way of escaping from problems or to relieve an unpleasant mood, such as helplessness, guilt, anxiety, or depression

Online gambling can also carry some risks beyond the house advantage. Be advised that many Internet gambling sites are located abroad and are not subject to any particular regulations. One recent study\* found that out of 117 gambling sites tested, 39% of them artificially inflated their payouts during the demo period. Once players joined the site and began playing for real money, however, the payout rates declined significantly.

If you're concerned that your gambling may get out of hand or has caused you unforeseen difficulties, confidential help is available. You can set up a consultation with a therapist at the counseling center (395-8331) or Jane Curtis, the health educator (395-2961), and we can help you figure out what to do next. If you'd like to consult with an organization specifically focused on problem gambling, feel free to contact either of the resources below.

- Gamblers Anonymous International Service Office P.O. Box 17173, Los Angeles, CA 90017 (213) 386-8789 - Fax (213) 386-0030, <http://www.gamblersanonymous.org>
- Compulsive Gambling Center, Inc: <http://www.lostbet.com>

\*Reference:

Sévigny, S., Cloutier, M., Pelletier, M., Ladouceur, R. (2005). Internet gambling: Misleading payout rates during the "demo" period. *Computers in Human Behavior* Vol 21(1).