

Here's What You Should Know About Online Gambling

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Transcript

Dr. Iris Balodis: Did you know that during the Super Bowl over \$16 billion dollars is bet in just a few hours? That's nearly the same as what McDonald's makes in an entire year. Behind those numbers are real people. And for some, gambling can turn into a disorder that affects mental health, finances, and relationships.

Many Canadians gamble recreationally. Approximately 80% of people across the country report engaging in some form of gambling. Whether that be buying a lottery ticket, playing at the casino, or betting on sports. Over the past few years though, gambling has become incredibly accessible. With technology like smartphones and tablets, you can gamble at any time and almost anywhere.

When people watch sports now, they are literally invested in the game. Gambling is no longer just about who wins the game. You can bet on the colour of the national anthem singer's outfit, a celebrity cameo in an ad, or whether a winning coach will wear a hat. This type of betting shows how the line between entertainment and gambling is now blurred.

Advertisements show how people who are gambling are having fun with their friends. Everyone's laughing, cheering, there's confetti, nobody's losing, and they're in control, and winning is to be expected. The problem is that gambling for many is not as fun and glamorous as often depicted. Many people experience problems with gambling and are alone and terrified. Most people aren't aware of the suicide rates in those with problem gambling. Studies range in showing between 17 and 39% of those with problem gambling report suicide ideation.

So, how can we best understand problem gambling? We need to have a better understanding of the interplay between a player and a gambling product. We're only beginning to understand psychological features that are manipulated in games. Features like losses disguised as wins, near misses, or illusions of control. These tap into our decision-making neurocircuitry. These have a profound effect on how the brain responds to risks, but perhaps more importantly, how we anticipate and expect rewards.

Compared to other addictive disorders, public awareness of gambling disorder and problem gambling remains low. Like alcohol and tobacco, gambling is highly addictive and it's a public health issue. Gambling disorder or GD is recognized as an addictive disorder. Gambling disorder signs are very similar to those for substance-based disorders and include things like feeling preoccupied and strong urges to gamble, gambling more or longer than intended, trying to cut back or stop but being unsuccessful. Social or work-related problems such as losing relationships

or being too tired to perform at work, continued gambling despite experiencing harms. This could include financial harms, but also harms such as frequent arguments with loved ones about gambling behaviour. Also, a distinctive feature of gambling disorder is chasing losses, where an individual attempts to recoup gambling losses by further gambling.

Treatment barriers for problem gambling include shame, perceived stigma, and a preference for autonomy. Since gambling disorder is recognized as an addictive disorder, cognitive behavioral therapy has emerged as the gold standard for treatment. If you or someone you know has been struggling with gambling, speak with a health professional who can help you understand your options and access support.

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