Gambling is a popular leisure activity that is enjoyed by many. There are lots of ways to gamble including playing the lottery, bingo, betting on sports, casino games or playing machines.

45% of people aged 16 and over will have taken part in some form of gambling activity during the last four weeks. The most popular form of gambling is playing the National Lottery, and for many people this is the only gambling they do. The most popular form of betting activity is on football and online gambling is on the increase.

(Source: Gambling Commission)

**What is gambling?**

In the Gambling Act 2005, gambling is defined as betting, gaming or participating in a lottery. This distinguishes between activities which need to be licenced and other activities that don’t. Different forms of gambling include:

* Arcades (those for adults and those for families)
* Betting (online, at an event or high street bookmaker)
* Bingo (online or in a bingo hall)
* Casino (online or at a casino)
* Lotteries (raffles, tombolas, sweepstakes etc)
* Gaming machines (fruit machines, fixed odds betting terminal etc)

**Safer (Responsible) Gambling**

Keeping gambling safe is all about setting limits. This could be as simple as deciding before you start how much money and time you will allow for the next time you gamble. Many people can stick to these self-imposed limits. For others they may need help in keeping to their plan.

Some tips to help you control your gambling:

* When you go somewhere to gamble, consider how much money you have with you and how much you can access. Maybe leave the debit and credit cards at home and take only the cash you know you can afford to lose.
* Online, you can set limits for each of your accounts. Try not to have multiple accounts as this makes it much harder to manage what you spend.
* When online or in person, why not set an alarm to remind you when you should stop. It might even be the prompt you need to walk away when you are winning.

Self-Exclusion

If you think you are spending too much time or money gambling, whether online or in a gambling premises, you can ask to be self-excluded. This is when you ask the company to stop you gambling with them for a period of time, lasting for at least 6 months. It is up to you to stick to a self-exclusion agreement, but the company should make reasonable efforts to stop you. When you make a self-exclusion agreement the gambling company must close your account and return any money in it.

The Gamble Aware website contains more information about how to self-exclude: <https://www.begambleaware.org/safer-gambling/how-to-self-exclude/>

Before you transfer any money into a gambling account you should check that the organisation is licensed by the Gambling Commission. Licensed gambling business must show they are licensed and provide a link to the Gambling Commission license register: <https://secure.gamblingcommission.gov.uk/PublicRegister>

**When does gambling become a problem?**

Problem gambling can affect anyone. It can happen at any age, to men or women and to people from any ethnic background. Studies have shown that you are more likely to develop a problem if you have a family history of problem gambling and if you started gambling at an early age.

Gambling addiction is sometimes referred to as a hidden illness because there are no obvious physical signs or symptoms like there are with drug or alcohol addiction. Problem gamblers also typically deny or minimise the problem, even to themselves. Gambling addiction can be referred to as problem gambling or compulsive gambling. You are unlikely to know that someone has a gambling problem unless they tell you.

The impact of someone else’s gambling problem can be very stressful for friends and family members. Being a problem gambler can harm your health and relationships and leave you in serious debt.

There are some signs to look out for if you are worried about your own or someone else’s gambling:

* Spending more time and money on gambling than you can afford
* Finding it hard to manage or stop gambling
* Having arguments with family and friends about money and gambling
* Losing interest in usual activities or hobbies like going out with friends or spending time with family
* Always thinking or talking about gambling
* Lying about your gambling or hiding it from other people
* Chasing losses or gambling to get out of financial trouble
* Gambling until all your money has gone
* Borrowing money, selling possessions or not paying bills in order to pay for gambling
* Needing to gamble with larger amounts of money or for a longer time to get the same buzz
* Neglecting work, school, family, personal needs or household responsibilities because of gambling
* Feeling anxious, worried, guilty, depressed or irritable.

There is evidence that gambling can be successfully treated in the same way as other addictions.

**Self-help tips for problem gambling**

Do:

* Pay important bills, such as your mortgage, on payday before you gamble
* Spend more time with family and friends who don’t gamble
* Deal with your debts rather than ignoring them – have a look at A.D.V.I.C.E’s previous information on [dealing with debt](https://safety.networkrail.co.uk/healthandwellbeing/a-d-v-i-c-e/)

Don’t

* View gambling as a way to make money – try to see it as entertainment instead
* Bottle up your worries about your gambling – talk to someone
* Take credit cards with you when you go gambling

The Law

The Gambling Commission has announced recent changes that mean it won’t be possible to use credit cards to make bets online anymore. Gamblers will need to use a debit card or cash deposited into an account. The Government is planning a wider review of the Gambling Act which will look into areas such as advertising, sponsorship and online gambling.

For help with gambling, try the following helplines and websites. Many of these sites offer a short self-assessment so you can assess whether you have a gambling problem.

National Gambling Helpline: 0808 8020 133

<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-body/gambling-addiction/>

<https://www.gamcare.org.uk/>

<https://www.gamblersanonymous.org.uk/>

<https://www.begambleaware.org/>

<https://www.gordonmoody.org.uk/>

<https://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/mental-health/problems-disorders/problem-gambling>