

Compulsive gambling

Some people become addicted to certain behaviors, rather than to chemical substances. The behaviors stimulate the release of natural substances in the brain that are like opiate painkillers. The person becomes mildly addicted to these natural painkillers in the same way people become addicted to painkilling pills.

One usually healthy example of such addiction (which can occasionally be carried to unhealthy extremes) is compulsive high-level physical-fitness training. One unhealthy example is compulsive gambling.

Compulsive gamblers, like most people with an addiction, are preoccupied with gambling to the exclusion of other activities in their lives. In the United States, the number of compulsive gamblers has risen threefold over the past 20 years.

Gambling compulsions are more common among men. In a characteristic pattern, gambling moves from being an occasional activity to a habitual one, and the size of the wagers steadily increases. Compulsive gamblers may shirk daily responsibilities and loved ones, sell personal property to finance their bets, lie to hide their losses, and engage in illegal activity to support their habit.

Compulsive gamblers often have other psychiatric disorders as well, including panic disorder, depression, bipolar disorder, and substance abuse, particularly alcoholism.

If you know someone who shows signs of being addicted to gambling, attempt to convince him or her to see a doctor for psychotherapy or to attend **Gamblers Anonymous**, which is modeled after Alcoholics Anonymous.

Main Source: Harvard Review