

Gambling in Older Adults Fact Sheet

by Nancy M. Petry, Ph.D.

Gambling is a popular activity among older adults.

- Up to half of older adults gamble, and over 25% wager regularly.^{1,2}
- The most popular forms of gambling in older adults are bingos, lotteries, scratch tickets, card games, and slot machines.³

Even regular recreational gambling is associated with some harm in older adults.

- Older adults who gamble regularly have increased rates of smoking and alcohol problems.⁴
- Older adult recreational gamblers are more likely to be obese than their non-gambling peers.⁴

Some older adults develop gambling problems.

- In the general population, less than 1% of older adults have a gambling problem.⁴
- However, up to 12% of older adults at bingo halls or other gambling venues have problems.^{3,5,6}

Gambling problems in older adults relate to financial, legal, psychological and medical concerns.

- Older adults are usually on fixed incomes. Compared to younger adults, older adults make poorer decisions when they choose between amounts and probabilities of rewards,⁷ making losses more likely and more damaging in this age group.
- Six percent of older adult problem gamblers commit illegal acts to support their gambling.⁴
- Compared to non-gamblers, older adult problem gamblers are nearly 7 times more likely to be smokers, 6 times more likely to have an alcohol problem, and 3.5 times more likely to have a drug use problem.⁴
- Older adult problem gamblers also have more than a 4-fold increased risk of anxiety and depression relative to their non-gambling peers.⁴ Up to 1/3 of persons with a gambling disorder attempt suicide.⁸
- Older adults with gambling problems have higher rates of medical problems, including angina and arthritis.⁴ Problem gambling is also associated with development of heart disease in persons aged 55 and older.⁹

Despite the prevalence of gambling and related problems in older adults, less than 10% of persons with gambling problems receive treatment.¹⁰

Treatment for gambling can be very effective.

- Over half of persons treated for gambling substantially reduce their gambling.¹¹⁻¹³
- Psychiatric distress and symptoms decrease markedly with gambling treatment.^{11,13}

Suggested action steps:

1. Screen older adults for gambling problems. Bingo halls and other gambling venues, as well as medical clinics that serve those with low incomes, have high proportions of persons with gambling problems.^{3,5,6,14}

2. Provide interventions to older adults identified with gambling problems. Assessment and brief interventions can reduce gambling markedly, even in persons not specifically seeking treatment.¹⁵

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