



# When gambling becomes a problem...

Information for the prevention  
of gambling problems



## Introduction

Gambling in the Grand Casino in Basel is meant to give pleasure and provide a varied way of spending leisure time. Playing games is a fundamental form of human pastime. Playing games trains certain skills and induces a feeling of well being.

However, in some cases, gambling can get out of control, become independent and take on all proportions of an illness. This morbid type of gambling is referred to as an addiction to gambling and, for the persons concerned and their dependants it can cause great embarrassment and suffering.

The aim of this brochure is to inform the reader about possible risks that can arise from gambling.

The brochure will help the reader decide whether he or she is in danger of becoming addicted to gambling and advice on ways to control gambling behaviour and on whether to seek help.

# What is compulsive gambling?

## How do I recognise that I have a gambling problem?

Contrary to normal gambling, pathological gambling is characterised by the player's loss of control, dishonesty about the problem, negative effects on the family and work relationships, and continual "chasing" to recover losses. Gambling becomes the centre of life and rules over every aspect of it. The transitions from problematical to pathological gambling are not clearly defined. In the following overview, the individual changes in gambling behaviour are made clear.

## How does compulsive gambling develop?

### 1. A positive beginning

In this phase gambling is a positive and exciting experience. On the way to a gambling problem, initially the player often wins, which reinforces his or her self-confidence. The player risks only small or moderate stakes. Financial losses are acceptable and the maximum amount is fixed in advance. Gambling is limited to leisure time and it provides excitement, pleasure and relaxation.

### 2. The critical habituation phase

#### **Problematical gambler with fluid transitions to compulsive gambling**

The gambling intensity increases in this phase. More high risk strategies with higher stakes are chosen because the "kick" would otherwise be missing. Losses exceed wins and the typical chasing begins. Debts increase and money is mainly regarded as gambling capital. In the family and at work, the problems take the form of unreliability and neglect of responsibilities. Wins are seen as the result of the gambler's own skills rather than chance. The significance of losses is played down and the repayment of debts is deferred. Despite these problems, the gamblers still have some control over their behaviour, can put an end to a winning game and go home.

### **3. The compulsive gambling stage**

#### **Pathological gambler**

The gambler has completely lost control over his behaviour and is unable to abstain. All available funds are invested as stakes. Gambling has become the central theme in life and influences all thoughts, actions and feelings. Professional, other obligations and interests are neglected. Excessive gambling and finding money become the main activity of the day. It becomes increasingly necessary to resort to illegal means (theft, embezzlement). Personality changes (mood instability, increased irritability, self-contempt, depression combined with thoughts of suicide) and loss of social position, (destruction of the family, poverty, unemployment, and criminal offences) characterise the addiction to gambling stage. The gambler is in a vicious circle of increasingly serious problems which he tries to solve by even more gambling.

### **How common is compulsive gambling?**

Between one and two adults in a hundred suffer from compulsive gambling, a further four to nine in a hundred show signs of problematical gambling. Men are more often concerned by the problem than women. The proportion of endangered adolescents is even higher and almost every seventh adolescent can be considered in danger of becoming a compulsive gambler. The increasing use of internet with its various gambling possibilities is greatly increasing this tendency. Compulsive gambling is not a problem which concerns a few outsiders but anyone, regardless of education or social origins can be affected.

## Who is particularly endangered?

Whether or not you will become a compulsive gambler, depends mainly on three conditions:

- Personal predisposition (heredity, family, constitution);
- Triggering conditions such as stress or special crises in life;
- Long-term conditions which sustain or intensify the problem.

Generally speaking, psychological factors play a decisive role in the development of compulsive gambling. Excessive gambling behaviour can occur as a result of psychosocial conflicts, and is often founded among persons with low self-confidence and a lack of self-esteem. Wins increase self-esteem and compensate for every day frustrations.

Many compulsive gamblers have serious problems with relationships and meeting their commitments, and they have an insufficient capacity to resolve conflicts.

## What can be the consequences?

Compulsive gambling does not develop overnight. The process continues insidiously, sometimes over years. As with other addictions, there is an increase in the intensity, the stakes and the preoccupation with gambling. The gambling compulsion not only has serious consequences for the player but also for the social environment. The following are commonly observed:

- Debts;
- Emotional stress and suicidal tendencies;
- Destruction of the family;
- Procurement of money for gambling;
- Expenses for the economy due to loss of working capacity and treatment costs;
- Unemployment;
- Personality changes.

## Preventive measures

Gambling can provide pleasure as well as excitement and relaxation. What can be done to keep it that way?

Nine rules minimize the risk of losing control:

- Before you start playing, fix an upper limit for losses, in other words define, what the maximum is that you are willing or able to lose? The sum should be in a reasonable relation to your income.
- Take only this fixed sum with you.
- Consider carefully whether you want to take a credit card or cheque card with you in addition to the cash.
- Stop playing when you have lost the pre-defined sum of money.
- Do **not** chase after the lost money. Do **not** risk more to balance losses.
- Do **not** choose a high-risk type of game. Do **not** play at more than one machine at once.
- Go gambling with friends or family-members who will prevent you from continuing to play if necessary.
- If you win, take your gains home.
- Never believe that you can get the better of the system. Gambling depends entirely on luck and has nothing to do with your skill.

## Where can I find help?

The straightest contact is any member of the casino personnel. They are professional and well trained and will help you to find assistance.

In addition, in some cases, it is necessary to find professional help in order to stop the "downhill spiral" and live a dignified life again. The casino personnel can arrange a contact with the Assistance and Advice Service for Gambling Problems of the Basel University Psychiatric Clinic.

Or you can contact following services directly:

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Assistance and Advice Service for Gambling  
University Psychiatric Clinic  
Wilhelm Klein-Strasse 27  
4052 Basel  
Tel: 061 325 50 92  
[www.upkbs.ch](http://www.upkbs.ch)

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Counselling "Die Dargebotene Hand" (the proffered hand)  
Tel: 143  
[www.143.ch](http://www.143.ch)

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Multicultural counselling for those affected and their families:  
Multikulturelle Suchtberatungsstelle beider Basel (MUSUB)  
Nauenstrasse 49  
4052 Basel  
Tel: 061 273 83 05  
[www.musub.ch](http://www.musub.ch)

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Further information or help can be found on the Internet:

Information und contacts: [www.sos-spielsucht.ch](http://www.sos-spielsucht.ch)  
Advisory service for debtors: [www.plusminus.ch](http://www.plusminus.ch)



## Information on self-exclusion

If, over the course of time, gambling in the casino gives you less and less pleasure and even causes you professional or personal difficulties, then maybe you have come to the conclusion that you should stop gambling. Despite your good intentions to limit your gambling, you are not able to reduce or put on an end to your casino visits without help. In such cases, additional measures are often useful, to help prevent further negative consequences.

A voluntary ban (or self-exclusion) is a highly effective supportive measure in cases of problematic or even compulsive gambling behaviour. It forbids you to enter all casinos in Switzerland. If you do try to enter a casino during the ban, you will be turned away.

## How do I apply for a voluntary gambling ban?

Contact the casino personnel and ask for a confidential meeting. There you can ask for a self-exclusion. You will be given the appropriate forms to sign and you will be informed about counselling facilities and other measures which can be taken.

## Under which circumstances can I lift a ban on gambling?

You can apply to the casino for the lifting of a voluntary or imposed gambling ban after one year at the earliest. You will be asked to take part in a meeting during which you must explain and document, why the reasons which led to the gambling ban are no longer valid. You are requested to present a current income certificate and an extract from the legal proceedings register. After the documents and the conclusions of the meeting have been evaluated, a decision will be taken as to whether or not the gambling ban can be lifted. If the ban is lifted, you will again be allowed to enter any casino in Switzerland.

# Questionnaires to assess the severity of compulsive gambling habit

Is gambling a problem for you? Test yourself.

To begin with, a comprehensive test consisting of just two questions. It is assumed to be a quick test which gives quickly a first impression.

## Quick test:

Your experience with gambling:

Please answer the following two questions by putting a cross by the answer which applies to you.

Have you ever felt the urge to play for ever-increasing stakes?

Yes  No

Have you ever lied to people who were important to you about the extent of your playing?

Yes  No

## Evaluation:

If you have answered one or even both questions with a "yes", you should go on to answer the next questionnaire (SOUTH OAKS GAMBLING SCREEN) to have the certainty whether you have a gambling problem or not. Or contact directly any of the services mentioned above.

## South Oaks Gambling Screen (SOGS)

The following 16 questions from the South Oaks Gambling Screen (SOGS) can give you a first indication of whether you have a gambling problem or not. This questionnaire is the most frequently used test internationally.

1. Please indicate which of the following types of gambling you have done in your lifetime. For each type, mark one answer "not at all", "less than once a week" or "once a week or more".

	not at all	less than once a week	once a week or more	
a	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Played cards for money
b	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Bet on horses, dogs, or other animals
c	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Bet on sports
d	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Played dice games for money
e	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Went to casinos
f	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Played the numbers or bet on lotteries
g	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Played bingo
h	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Played the stock / commodities market
i	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Played any kind of gambling machines
j	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Played any skill games for money
k	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Played scratch card games or similar
l	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Some form of gambling not listed above

2. What is the largest amount of money you have ever gambled with on any one-day?

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Never gambled        | <input type="checkbox"/> CHF 101.- up to 1'000.-    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> CHF 1.- up to 10.-   | <input type="checkbox"/> CHF 1'001.- up to 10'000.- |
| <input type="checkbox"/> CHF 11.- up to 100.- | <input type="checkbox"/> More than CHF 10'000.-     |

3. Check which of the following people in your life has (or had) a gambling problem.

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Father / Mother                          | <input type="checkbox"/> Brother / Sister |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Grandfather / Grandmother                | <input type="checkbox"/> My child(ren)    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> My spouse / partner                      | <input type="checkbox"/> Another relative |
| <input type="checkbox"/> A friend or someone important in my life |   |

4. When you gamble, how often do you go back another day to win back money you have lost?

- Never
- Some of the time (less than half of the times)
- Most of the time (more than half of the times)
- Every time

5. Have you ever claimed to be winning money gambling, but weren't really? In fact you lost?

- Never
- Yes, less than half the time I lost
- Yes, most of the time

6. Do you feel you have ever had a problem with betting or money gambling?

- No
- Yes, in the past, but not now
- Yes

7. Did you ever gamble more than you intended to?

- Yes
- No

8. Have people criticized your betting or told you that you had a problem, regardless of whether or not you thought it was true?

- Yes
- No

9. Have you ever felt guilty about the way you gamble, or what happens when you gamble?

- Yes
- No

10. Have you ever felt like you would like to stop betting money on gambling, but did not think that you could?

- Yes
- No

11. Have you ever hidden betting slips, lottery tickets, gambling money, note of debts, or other signs of betting or gambling from your spouse, children or other important people in your life?

Yes  No

12. Have you ever argued with people you live with over how you handle money?

Yes  No

13. If you answered "yes" to question 12: Have money arguments ever centered on your gambling

Yes  No

14. Have you ever borrowed from someone and not paid them back as a result of your gambling?

Yes  No

15. Have you ever lost time from work / school due to betting money or gambling?

Yes  No

16. If you borrowed money to gamble or to pay gambling debts, who or where did you borrow from? (check "Yes" or "No" for each)

	Yes	No	
a	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	From household money
b	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	From your spouse / partner
c	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	From relatives or in-laws
d	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	From banks, loan companies, or credit unions
e	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	From credit cards
f	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	From "loan sharks"
g	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	You cashed in stocks, bonds or other securities
h	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	You sold personal or family property
i	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	You borrowed on your checking accounts (passed bad checks)
j	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	You have (had) a credit line with a bookie
k	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	You have (had) a credit line with a casino

**Evaluation:**

Scores on the SOGS are determined by scoring one point for each question that shows the "at risk" response indicated and adding the total points:

Question	Answer	Point
1, 2, 3	Not counted	
4	Most of the time (more than half of the times) Every time	_____
5	Yes, less than half the time I lost Yes, most of the time	_____
6	Yes, in the past, but not now Yes	_____
7	Yes	_____
8	Yes	_____
9	Yes	_____
10	Yes	_____
11	Yes	_____
12	Not counted	
13	Yes	_____
14	Yes	_____
15	Yes	_____
16a	Yes	_____
16b	Yes	_____
16c	Yes	_____
16d	Yes	_____
16e	Yes	_____
16f	Yes	_____
16g	Yes	_____
16h	Yes	_____
16i	Yes	_____
16 j, k	Not counted	
		Total: _____
0	=	No problem with gambling
1 – 4	=	Some problems with gambling
5 or more	=	Probable pathological gambler

If you have 5 or more points, you should contact the casino personnel in order to arrange for suitable measures to reduce your risk potential. Or contact directly any of the services mentioned above.





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