Gambling Addiction At A Glance

- Compulsive gambling affects 2%-5% of Americans, can involve a variety of ways and places to bet, and symptoms may differ somewhat between males and females, as well as teenagers versus adults.

- Although men tend to develop a gambling addiction at a higher rate and at younger ages than women, women now make up more than one-quarter of all compulsive gamblers, and women's symptoms tend to worsen faster once compulsive gambling develops.

- As opposed to pathological gambling, problem gambling involves more than one but less than five symptoms of compulsive gambling.

- Although direct causes of compulsive gambling are unusual, the manic episodes associated with bipolar disorder and some medications that treat Parkinson's disease and restless leg syndrome have been associated with the development of this disorder.

- Risk factors for pathological gambling include schizophrenia, mood problems, antisocial personality disorder, alcohol, or cocaine addiction.

- The diagnosis of compulsive gambling involves identifying at least five symptoms that indicate poor impulse control when it comes to gambling, as well as ruling out other potential causes of the behaviors.

- As with any mental-health condition, accurate diagnosis of gambling addiction requires a complete physical and psychological evaluation, including a mental-status examination and appropriate laboratory tests to rule out other possible causes of the symptoms that are being observed.

- The treatment of compulsive gambling usually uses more than one approach, including psychotherapy, medication, financial counseling, support groups, 12-step programs, and self-help techniques.

- Although pathological gambling may resolve with time on its own in many individuals, the devastating effects it usually has on the person's financial, family, legal, and mental-health status indicates that treatment should be attempted anyone who is motivated to get help for this disorder.