Signs and symptoms of problem gambling

Gambling addiction is sometimes referred to as the "hidden illness" because there are no obvious physical signs or symptoms like there are in drug or alcohol addiction. Problem gamblers typically deny or minimize the problem. They also go to great lengths to hide their gambling. For example, problem gamblers often withdraw from their loved ones, sneak around, and lie about where they’ve been and what they’ve been up to.

Do I have a gambling problem?

You may have a gambling problem if you:

- **Feel the need to be secretive about your gambling.** You might gamble in secret or lie about how much you gamble, feeling others won’t understand or that you will surprise them with a big win.
- **Have trouble controlling your gambling.** Once you start gambling, can you walk away? Or are you compelled to gamble until you’ve spent your last dollar, upping your bets in a bid to win lost money back?
- **Gamble even when you don’t have the money.** A red flag is when you are getting more and more desperate to recoup your losses. You may gamble until you’ve spent your last dollar and then move on to money you don’t have- money to pay bills, credit cards, or things for your children. You may feel pushed to borrow, sell or even steal things for gambling money. It’s a vicious cycle. You may sincerely believe that gambling more money is the only way to win lost money back. But it only puts you further and further in the hole.
- **Family and friends are worried about you.** Denial keeps problem gambling going. If friends and family are worried, listen to them carefully. Take a hard look at how gambling is affecting your life. It’s not a sign of weakness to ask for help.

Test yourself - If you wonder whether you have a gambling problem or are addicted to gambling, you can ask yourself the 10 questions below. If you answer ‘yes’ to one or more questions, you should stop and seek help. If you answer ‘yes’ to more than five questions, you have developed a gambling addiction.

1. Are you preoccupied with gambling? Do you become ‘absent’ when you gamble/think about gambling?
2. Do you need to gamble more often and with increasing amounts of money in order to achieve the desired excitement/affect?
3. Have you made repeated unsuccessful efforts to cut back or stop gambling?
4. Are you restless or irritable when attempting to cut down or stop gambling?
5. Do you gamble as a way of forgetting or escaping from day-to-day problems?
6. After losing money gambling, do you often return another day to get even?
7. Do you lie to family members and acquaintances to conceal the extent of involvement with gambling?
8. Have you committed illegal acts (such as theft, forgery, or embezzlement etc.) to finance gambling?
9. Have you jeopardized or lost a significant relationship, job or educational opportunity because of gambling?

10. Do you rely on others to provide money to relieve a desperate financial situation caused by gambling?