Gambling in Primary Care Patients Fact Sheet
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Between 5% and 16% of patients in primary care clinics have gambling problems.¹⁻⁴

Compared to patients without gambling problems, patients with gambling problems have:

- Poorer general health ¹⁻⁵
- Greater numbers of physical conditions ⁶
- Increased health care utilization, including:
  - More inpatient hospitalizations ⁶
  - More Emergency Room visits ⁴

Gambling problems are also linked with medical conditions and problems, such as:

- Heartburn ⁴
- Migraines/frequent headaches ⁶
- Backaches ⁴
- Liver disease ⁵
- Heart conditions (tachycardia, angina) ⁵

Gambling problems in primary care patients are related to mental health conditions as well:

- Alcohol problems and binge drinking ¹⁻²,⁶⁻⁷
- Illicit drug use ¹⁻⁷
- Smoking ¹⁻³⁻⁷
- Depression and suicidality ¹⁻⁶⁻⁷

Primary care physicians rarely assess for gambling problems, and few are aware of gambling treatment options.⁸⁻⁵

Fewer than 10% of people with gambling problems receive treatment.¹⁰

Treatment for gambling is 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 primary care patients for gambling problems.** Medical clinics, especially those that serve patients with low incomes, have high rates of gambling problems in their patients.³⁻¹⁴

2. **Provide treatment to patients with gambling problems.** Assessment and brief interventions can reduce gambling markedly, even in medical patients not seeking gambling treatment.¹⁵

References: