

Online Gambling, Gaming Addiction Has Increased During COVID-19: Tips That Can Help

Online gaming and gambling addictions are on the rise during the COVID-19 lockdowns. The social isolation combined with stress and monetary concerns are some factors why.

Internet gaming disorder or gambling disorder are what's called process addictions. They are usually accompanied by other disruptions in home life or on the job.

Process addictions are behaviors that activate the brain's reward center in the way that certain substances do. Taking part in this particular behavior will increase the level of dopamine in the brain, and the pleasure obtained from this behavior reinforces that the person will engage in the behavior again in the future. Disorders involving feeding, eating, shopping, and exercising are all examples of process addictions.

When lockdowns and shutdowns were the new reality in April, the National Council on Problem Gambling warned that people with gambling problems may be affected more severely by the pandemic due to increased individual health risks, shifting gambling preferences, and cuts in funding for services.

Social isolation as a result of **social distancing, financial and economic worries, difficulties with employment**, and other stressors may cause people to initiate online gaming/gambling as a stress reliever or aggravate existing problematic behavior.

With the amount of decreased social interaction that we have due to COVID, people are looking for more ways to interact and also get positive reinforcement for the social interaction they are able to do.

Getting a diagnosis

These disorders may be harder to notice right now simply because we aren't living life as we did before. The best approach is to look at the big picture in terms of what's going on at home and on the job, as well as other responsibilities to make sure that those **roles are being met adequately**. Other issues that come into the picture are low social support from family and friends or very high psychosocial stressors, and they're looking for an outlet that is easy to access. That's usually where the gambling and the gaming problems come in.

How to get help

Telehealth has been a helpful path for diagnosis during the pandemic. There has actually been an **increase in telehealth utilization**, and a lot of these disorders can be at least **diagnosed with a history of what has been happening in a person's life**. Moreover, some people are more comfortable with telehealth than they are in person. So, **for some individuals, it may be a better option**.

There are no known medications approved by the Food and Drug Administration to treat these disorders, but there are therapies for commonly co-occurring mental health issues like depression or bipolar disorder.