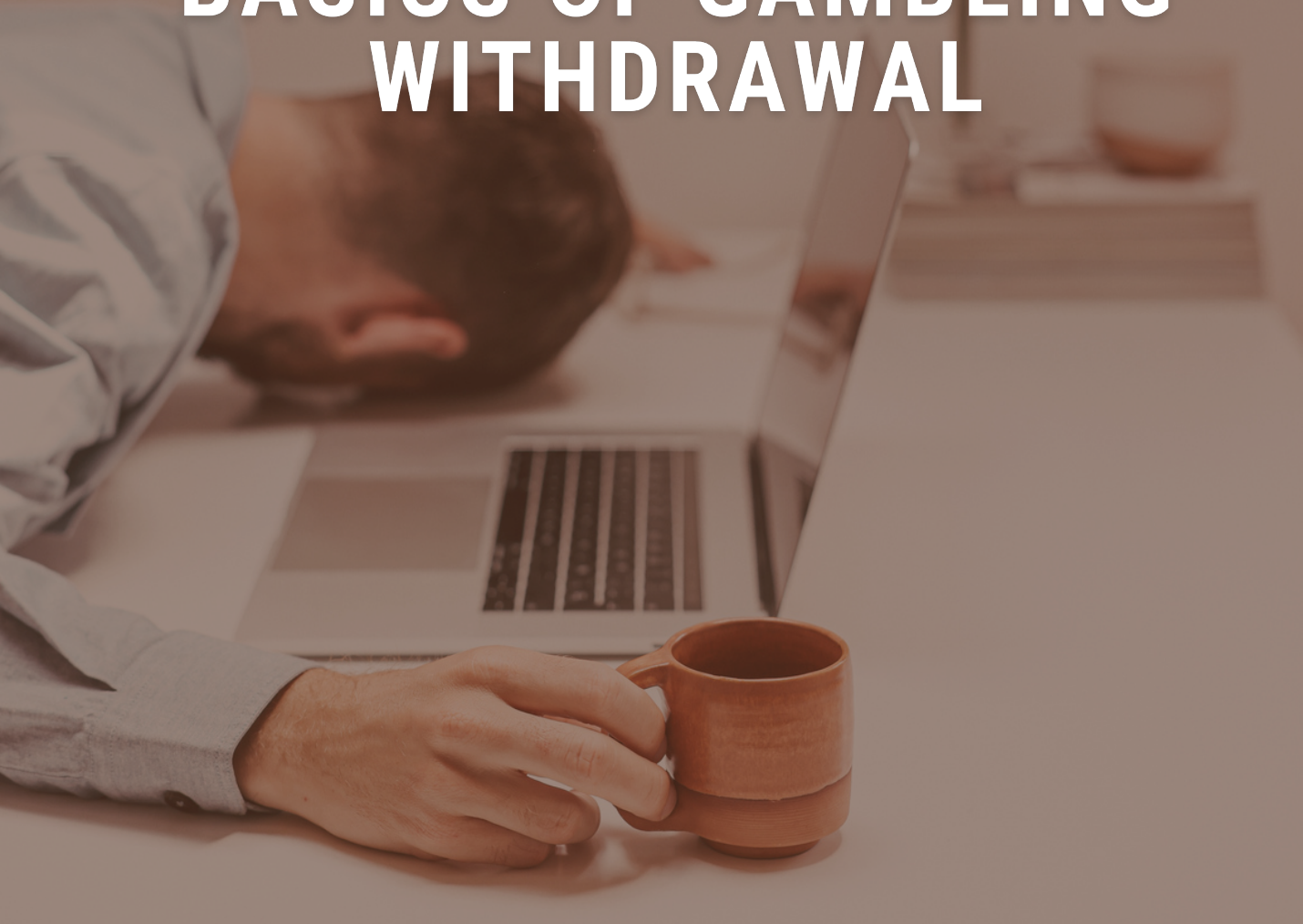




UNDERSTANDING THE BASICS OF GAMBLING WITHDRAWAL



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A hand holding a King of Diamonds playing card. The card is white with red and gold details, featuring a crown and a shield. The background is a dark, textured surface.

INTRODUCTION

The whirlwind nature of gambling can make for a thrilling and exciting way to spend your spare time. However, what draws you to it— the high stakes, attractive rewards, and fun time - are the very things that increase your risk of developing a serious addiction.

In its most basic form, problem gambling occurs when there is a shift from recreational gambling to an inability to control the urge to gamble. Because it often has few physical signs, compulsive gambling is an invisible addiction. As a result, many compulsive gamblers shroud their addictions in secrecy and suffer in silence.

In this eBook, we will explore the basics of gambling withdrawal, including the signs and symptoms, the stages of withdrawal, the role of dopamine, and some practical tips for successful withdrawal management.



Signs and Symptoms of Gambling Withdrawal

Just like chemical substance addictions, those suffering from compulsive gambling disorder can go through serious withdrawal. Identifying the signs and symptoms of gambling withdrawal can help you manage them.

Studies on behavioral addictions have found that there are a range of different withdrawal symptoms. These symptoms are grouped as physical symptoms or emotional symptoms. You might experience some, all, or none of the symptoms listed here when you quit gambling.



Emotional Gambling Withdrawal Symptoms

1. Depression

Depression is one of the most common symptoms of gambling withdrawal. Depression is a common and serious medical illness that negatively affects how you feel, the way you think and how you act. It causes feelings of sadness and/or a loss of interest in activities once enjoyed. Depression can lead to a variety of emotional and physical problems and can decrease a person's ability to function at work and at home.

Signs of depression include:

- Feeling helpless and hopeless. Paradoxically, some people gamble to feel like they're in control, only to lose that feeling shortly after.
- Loss of interest in daily activities.
- Changes to sleep patterns. Sleep is essential for mental wellbeing and sleep disruptions can be indicators of other problems.

2. Cravings to Gamble

Cravings occur because the brain knows that the easiest and quickest way to get the “thrill” sensation your body is yearning for is by gambling. Cravings for an addictive behavior are much more intense than something like everyday food cravings. You have powerful memories linked to gambling which makes it seem even more appealing.

The types of cravings and their intensity differ from one person to another. Cravings typically involve a trigger, which immediately causes obsessive thinking.

3. Anxiety

Anxiety is “an emotion characterized by feelings of tension, worried thoughts and physical changes like increased blood pressure.” Anxiety prevents you from confronting your issues. It alters your perceptions and makes you think that things are much worse than they are.

Anxiety is normal everyday experience, but it becomes a disorder when it’s extreme, long lasting and difficult to control.

4. Insomnia

Insomnia is a sleep disorder that is characterized by difficulty falling and/or staying asleep. Insomnia can cause depression, poor health, decreased concentration and lack of motivation.





Physical Symptoms of Excessive Gambling

Emotional withdrawal symptoms can also present themselves as physical symptoms. Anxiety or depression can cause sleep deprivation. Sleep deprivation can cause pale skin, weight gain/loss, acne and dark circles under the eyes. Physical gambling withdrawal symptoms consist of but are not limited to the following:

- Sweating
- Headaches
- Racing heart
- Palpitations
- Muscle tension and/or Soreness
- Tightness in the chest
- Difficulty breathing
- Tremors
- Nausea

Thankfully, you are not likely to experience all of these nor will you experience them at the same time. There are two stages of gambling addiction withdrawal, each with its own set of symptoms.



Stages of Gambling Withdrawal

There are two stages of gambling withdrawal; Acute Withdrawal and Post-Acute Withdrawal. As the name suggests, the Acute Withdrawal Stage usually occurs in the first two weeks after gambling cessation. It typically lasts for a few weeks. This stage is characterized by physical symptoms and the intensity of the symptoms differs from one person to another. During this stage you might experience sweating, nausea, and perhaps even tremors. It's recommended to face with the help of a professional.

Withdrawal symptoms tend to be the most intense during the first week and will weaken over time. The Acute Withdrawal Stage is the best time to build up your psychological "tool kit" and master the art of handling the symptoms. This can reduce the chances of relapse.

The second stage of withdrawal is the Post-Acute Withdrawal Stage. It's commonly referred to as Prolonged Withdrawal Syndrome. Compulsive gamblers are more likely to experience this stage if they have been gambling for a long time.



Post-acute withdrawal stage symptoms linger on after acute withdrawal symptoms have faded away. These symptoms are predominantly psychological and emotional in nature. Because many of the physical symptoms have passed, you may feel a false sense of security that you've got things under control. During this stage of false security, you are at the greatest risk for a relapse.

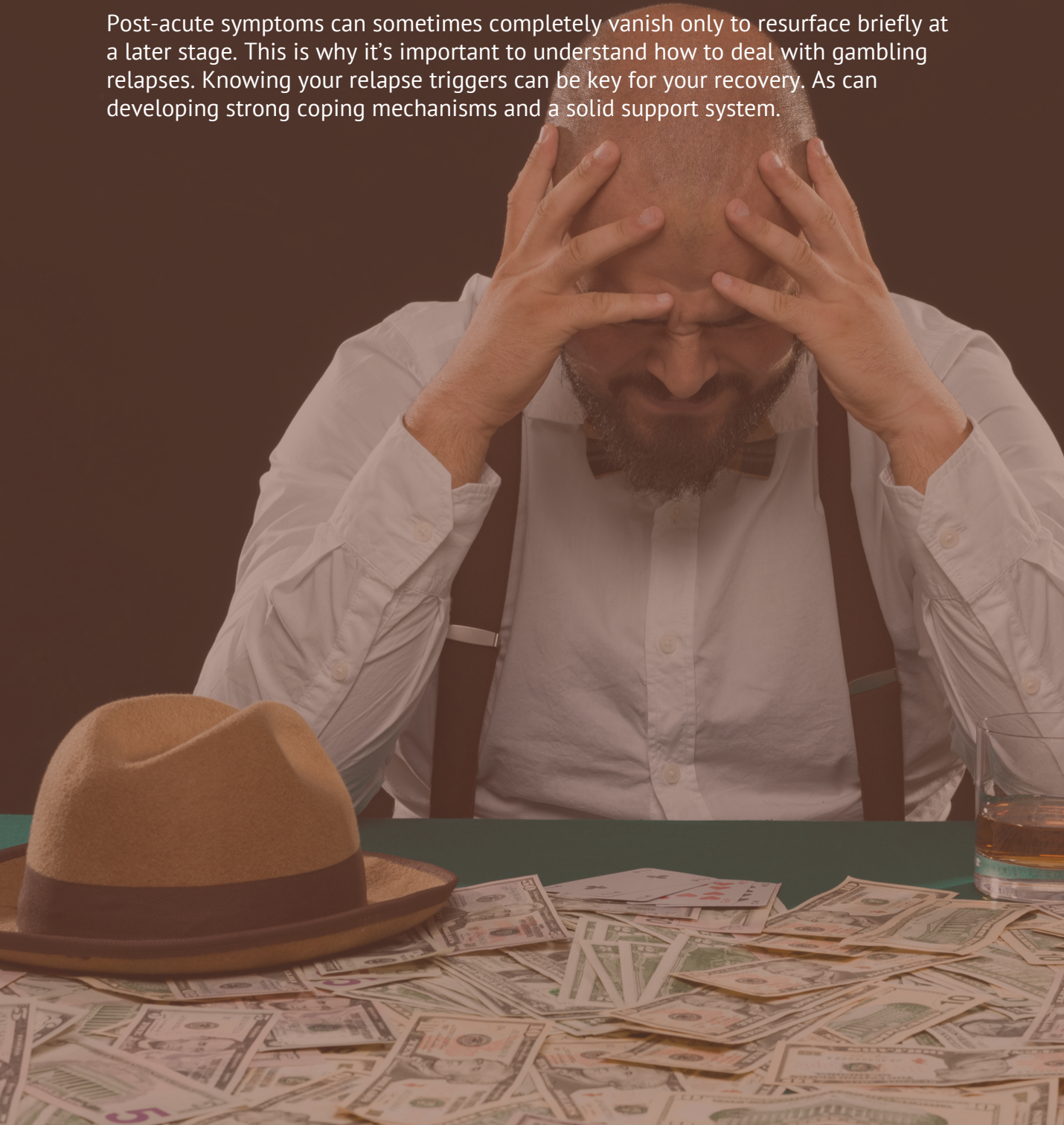
Common Post-Acute Gambling Withdrawal Symptoms include:

- Mood swings
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Tiredness
- Inability to concentrate
- Disturbed sleep
- Cravings
- Irritability

Post-acute withdrawal can last for up to 2 years, or more, and is more like a "rollercoaster" of symptoms. This can result in an emotional rollercoaster of highs and lows as well. It can often seem like your life is spiralling out of control. To the untrained eye, a recovering gambler may seem to have everything in order during this stage. In reality, they could be experiencing alternating periods of dysfunction and near-normality.

It's also helpful to know the science behind addiction, cravings and withdrawal. It can often feel like you have no control over your urges and in many cases, that is true. Your brain's chemical composition is out of balance and that's why you're experiencing withdrawal symptoms.

Post-acute symptoms can sometimes completely vanish only to resurface briefly at a later stage. This is why it's important to understand how to deal with gambling relapses. Knowing your relapse triggers can be key for your recovery. As can developing strong coping mechanisms and a solid support system.



The Role of Dopamine in Gambling Withdrawal

What is Dopamine?

Your body and brain have a variety of chemicals that regulate how you feel at any given moment. These neurotransmitters and hormones can make you feel the highest of highs and the lowest of lows. Arguably, the most powerful of these chemicals is Dopamine.

Dopamine is a neurotransmitter most commonly associated with extreme highs, pleasure, and rewards. Gambling addictions, exercise and other thrilling activities can all kickstart a flood of dopamine. A rush of dopamine to the head and you're gloriously happy.

It's no wonder we all—to some degree—spend our lives seeking out things that thrill and excite us. Dopamine is heavily involved in the reward center of the brain. In other words, when you work out ways to stimulate dopamine production you feel rewarded.

The chase for that next dopamine rush is what pushes some people towards making decisions that would otherwise seem unwise. We're all subjects of our brain's own desire to be rewarded— in fact we need at least some dopamine to survive. But for some people, the need for reward can result in compulsive behavioral addictions, such as compulsive gambling.



Dopamine & Gambling Withdrawal

The withdrawal you experience from gambling can be as powerful and challenging as any substance addiction. Your addiction is as real as any other when it comes to your brain chemistry, and your withdrawal feels as real as any other withdrawal experience.

Gambling can release a "thrill" in your brain that triggers the reward system to release up to 10 times more dopamine than a natural rewarding experience would produce. Over time your mind and body develop a gambling tolerance and you reap few benefits of that thrill. You're likely already experiencing this, even though you might not know it

As your gambling tolerance increases your behavior also becomes more extreme. Your brain has become accustomed to dopamine and it has ceased to make you feel the rush that it used to. This may reduce the amount of "pleasure" you experience from gambling. When this happens, your brain will yearn for more dopamine to trigger its reward system, leading you to higher risk situations.

Taking the First Steps

When you stop gambling, gambling withdrawal can occur because your brain is deprived of dopamine. While the absence of this stimulant is the cause of many gambling withdrawal symptoms, this is not a permanent state.

Withdrawal might feel like a challenge, but behind the scenes your brain is attempting to reconfigure itself to its old state. It's busy rewriting itself to get its thrills elsewhere and to get enjoyment from other things in life. Undoing your altered mental wiring takes time, and so withdrawal takes time too.

You'll likely experience depression when you quit gambling. Dopamine is a powerful drug that your brain cannot simply leave behind overnight. Your brain needs time and the best approach to recovery is patience.

When you're feeling ill and exhausted during withdrawal, the idea of gambling to feel like yourself again can be very compelling. The only true way to deal with your withdrawal symptoms is to properly confront and address your addiction.





Succeeding With Gambling Recovery

How to Cope With Gambling Withdrawal

Gambling withdrawal can be a challenging process, but it is often an unavoidable part of recovery. If you are mentally prepared for withdrawal you can flourish during your recovery.

Learn to focus on recovery and make it a priority. Be kind to yourself and take things one day at a time. Every day will be different, some days you will have lots of energy and enthusiasm and some days will be harder.

Though the symptoms can be intense, remember that they are not permanent, they will eventually fade away. Feeling the urge to gamble is totally normal and needs to be dealt with in a healthy way. The following suggestions can help you cope with gambling withdrawal.



1. Eat a Balanced Diet

Start with improving your diet and nutrition. A balanced diet can help reduce symptoms like mood swings. Avoid or limit stimulants like sugar and caffeine. Ensure that your diet consist of a balanced mix of vegetables and fruits. Tempting as it may be, shy away from junk foods which often make you feel worse (physically and emotionally) after you eat them. Stay hydrated by drinking about 1 to 2 liters of water daily.

2. Exercise

Stay active and engage in physical activities like exercising and yoga. Exercise quickens the healing process for both the body and the brain. It improves the immune system and helps restore a healthy balance to neurotransmitter levels. Exercising is also helpful in keeping your mind focused and can help to reduce anxiety and stress levels.

3. Identify and Avoid Triggers

Identifying high-risk situations that trigger anger, compulsive need to win, boredom, sadness, loneliness and stress can help you prevent or avoid them. These triggers are often prompted by some form of environmental, emotional or physical stimuli. Avoid people from you past who are linked to your old gambling life. Being in control of your emotional state will help you to make better decisions.

4. Get Support

Don't go it alone, get help. Your support network can help you keep you on track, give you with a shoulder to lean on, a listening ear and that encouraging word to help you stay focused. Reach out to a gambling addiction treatment specialist who knows the unique challenges that you're facing. Commit to a gambling-specific addiction treatment center where you can really focus on recovery.

5. Stay Busy

Always plan ahead. Schedule and find something to do so you're not tempted to kill the time with gambling. Keeping busy will distract and prevent you from dwelling on distractive thoughts. Consider jogging, socializing or volunteering, or reading magazines and books of interest. Be determined to distract yourself by finding activities that can take your mind off gambling.

6. Master Coping Strategies

There is no universally ideal treatment option or coping mechanism. Identify the reasons that led you to gambling and why you kept on gambling. Often, gambling is a way of coping with other traumas in your life and addressing these is the key to overcoming them. Dealing with stress, depression and anxiety and better managing your mental health can reduce your desire to gamble.

7. Speak to a Specialist

Gambling addiction specialists can guide you through every step of recovery. Their professional guidance and gambling-specific treatment programs are designed to help you address the root of your addiction, how to manage it, and to develop the strategies to refrain.

Know That This Too Shall Pass

When you're suffering from withdrawal, you might think of doing anything to make it stop. Chasing the thrill of the next win will only make it worse. If you make a commitment to taking control of your life and seeking professional help, your withdrawal symptoms will pass in time. You will begin to feel better.

CONCLUSION

If you or a loved one is struggling with gambling addiction, you are not in this alone. We understand that it can feel overwhelming when trying to find the right people and the right kind of treatment to help with gambling addiction.

We at Algamus are extremely prepared and well-equipped to treat any kind of gambling addiction, and have been treating individuals and seeing incredible results for the past 30 years. Recovering from a gambling addiction is so much more than giving up gambling. We work with each of our clients to get to the root of their addiction to ensure a sustainable recovery.

Our individualized, [residential treatment program](#) consists of a variety of treatment methods, including cognitive behavioral therapy, group therapy, yoga and meditation, and more. We walk alongside our clients throughout the entire process, and maintain contact with them even after they have graduated from our facility.

If you have questions about gambling, or would like to find out more about our gambling treatment program, [contact our gambling counselors](#) today.

ABOUT ALGAMUS

Algamus is one of the few gambling-specific addiction treatment centers in America. We've helped thousands of individuals face their addictions and regain control of their lives.

We offer a variety of treatment methods including individual counseling, group counseling, yoga and meditation, ecotherapy, and more.

If you feel like you've been digging a hole that's getting harder to get out of or if you can't stop chasing the next win to set everything right, contact us.

Call us anytime at: 941-260-0405

Or visit our website: www.algamus.org

