

MISE
SUR
TOI

ONLINE
GAMBLING:
AN INFORMED
CHOICE
IS A BETTER
CHOICE.



INTRODUCTION

Gambling is now a completely normal and fairly widespread leisure activity. About two thirds of Quebec adults gamble regularly as a family or social activity without ever becoming addicted. Some people, however, lose control over their gambling habits, which creates serious problems in many aspects of their lives. A number of them may even develop a gambling disorder or become compulsive gamblers.¹ About **1.3%** of Quebec adults—approximately **82,000** people—are at risk of developing such a problem, while **0.7%**, or **41,000**, are compulsive gamblers who need treatment.² Compulsive, or pathological, gambling usually goes hand-in-hand with sad stories of family breakups, job loss, bankruptcy and suicidal episodes. The consequences of pathological gambling are as devastating for everyone associated with the gambler as they are for the gambler themselves.

Technology has put gambling online, and all the standard games of chance, including lotteries, casino games and sports betting, are now available to anyone with an Internet

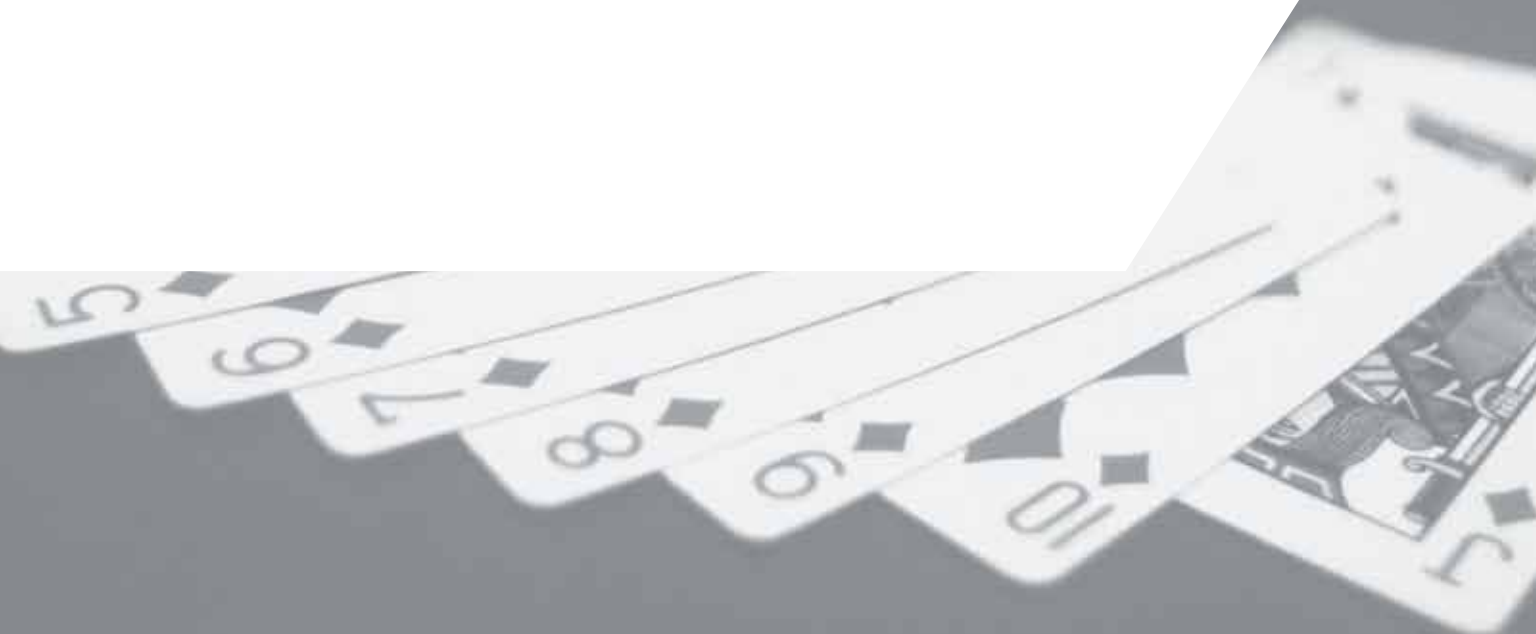
connection and the ability to transfer money electronically.

Although the phenomenon is relatively recent, the number of gambling sites has grown significantly. There are currently **2,358** gambling websites, compared to only about **15** in 1995.³ And in fifteen years, global betting online has increased from **\$3 billion to \$24 billion**. Access to online gambling has been made even easier by increased Internet access in our homes and via mobile technology. And yet, while the market continues to grow, the regulatory environment remains ambiguous with regard to both website control and gambler protection.

This publication is intended to provide information about the nature of online gambling, the risks to which people are exposed, and the associated dangers. It also contains tips on how to minimize the risk of developing a gambling problem, a checklist of warning signs and information on services available for those who need them. All information and advice is based strictly on current scientific data.

Mise sur toi hopes that a better understanding of the phenomenon of online gambling will help Quebecers avoid the dangers associated with the practice and know what to do in case of a problem. Because a game should remain a game.

**The *Mise sur toi*
Board of Directors**



ONLINE
GAMBLERS



Online gambling may be the least popular form of gambling in Quebec and around the world, and yet an estimated **14 to 23 million** people try their luck at it every year. The most recent epidemiological study in Quebec shows that between **1.1%** and **1.8%** of the population gambles online. Poker is by far the most popular online game, with the lottery, sports betting and casino games trailing well behind.

The average online gambler is a regular Internet user who is male (**82%** of online gamblers are men), single, slightly more educated than the average Canadian and whose income and debt level are also higher than the Canadian average. While people of all ages gamble online, the practice is most common among young people, particularly students.⁴

Online gamblers and offline gamblers

Studies show clearly that, compared to offline gamblers, online players gamble more excessively and are proportionately more likely to develop a pathological problem.⁵

Compared to offline gamblers, online gamblers:

- gamble more frequently and bet on a greater number of games of chance;
- spend four times more, according to 2007 statistics for Canada;
- accumulate more debt;
- are proportionately more likely to become compulsive gamblers: **4.5%** compared to **1.1%** in Canada in 2007.

Despite the apparent relationship between online gambling and gambling problems, we cannot conclude that online gambling necessarily causes the complications. It is possible that some features of online gambling may encourage excessive gambling and

exacerbate a problem or addiction. And the higher percentage of online gamblers who develop a problem can also be explained by the fact that they visit more gambling websites, since pathological gamblers tend to gamble frequently and bet on a wide variety of games.

When asked what they like most about gambling online, people mention the practicality of being able to gamble in the privacy and comfort of their own home. Among the things they like least are the absence of real social interaction among players, the tendency to spend more money and the lack of website security when it comes to financial transactions.

People have to be very careful when gambling online. Only **15%** of gambling websites currently in operation are considered to be in compliance with the security standards established by the authorities that regulate e-commerce. Online gambling is less secure than offline gambling because there is a lot of room for questionable practices. Some sites are even downright dishonest: winnings go unpaid or gamblers' deposits are not returned. Online gamblers may also be swindled by the site operators, Internet pirates or other players. And the so-called anonymity of online gambling is really a sham, for online gamblers can always be identified and their activities monitored.⁶

THE RISKS OF ONLINE GAMBLING

The nature of online gambling can make it more attractive than offline gambling and also put people at greater risk of addiction. The Internet makes gambling instantly available; it invites the gambler into a virtual environment and allows the use of extremely effective means to attract and retain gamblers.⁷ These are all significant incentives that encourage people to gamble more, longer and more often. Online gamblers should always exercise caution.

Easy to use: just one click away

Online gambling takes very little planning or effort on the part of the gambler. Everything can be accessed 24/7 from the comfort of home. That makes it a practical, time-saving and economical option. Unfortunately, online gambling can also be an all-too-readily available escape for people who are in distress or experiencing problems in their lives.

The illusion of virtual reality

Online gambling can immerse people in a virtual world and remove them from reality. This affects their awareness of the passage of time and their ability to assess how much they are actually betting and losing. With interactive online gambling, the absence of an accurate take on reality combines with a false sense of control, exposing people to the danger of gambling too much and too long. And unlike offline gambling, online gambling is a solitary, anonymous practice in which people are sheltered from the comments that friends or other gamblers might make.

Online promotion methods

Technology has played an important role in the development and promotion of online gambling. With recent technical advances, websites can attract and retain gamblers using entertaining interfaces and recurring promotions. Gamblers are seduced by environments that provide enjoyable sensory stimulation. But the rapid pace and option of betting on several games at once means there's little time for thinking, which increases the risk of incurring losses and debt.⁸

Gambling websites use all kinds of promotional strategies. One is the demo session or free trial, in which payout rates are much higher than when playing for real money. Such offers encourage gamblers to believe they can improve with time and win money more easily. Gamblers also receive encouraging messages, giving them the impression that they are unique and exceptional individuals upon whom fortune is smiling. Such messages reinforce the illusion of easy potential winnings.⁹

EASE OF USE

Accessible

24/7; an easy escape for people with mental or emotional problems.

Practical

Opportunity to gamble in the comfort of one's own home.

Inexpensive

No transportation costs, no travel time, just the regular monthly Internet bill.

SIMULATED ENVIRONMENT

Virtual

Creates a sense of immersion in a virtual world and dissociation from reality, particularly concerning the sense of time.

Interactive

Gives the gambler a greater, yet completely false, sense of control.

Anonymous

Allows gamblers to take more risks and be sheltered from critical comments.

PROMOTIONAL PRACTICES

Sensory stimulation

Lights, colours and sound effects create an attractive, stimulating environment.

Quick pace

Players bet, win and lose more quickly.

Promotional strategies

Free demo sessions with inflated payout rates create the illusion of easy winnings.

Incentive messages

Give players a false sense of control and the feeling that they are "special" (e.g. "You are one of our smartest players.").



CASINO

GAMBLING RESPONSIBLY

Online gambling presents risks for all gamblers, compulsive or not. If you choose to bet and gamble online, please be vigilant and behave responsibly.¹⁰

TIP 1.
Remember that it's easier to lose track of time and contact with reality when you gamble online.

If you choose to bet and gamble online:

- Set a time limit before you start to play:
 - Determine the maximum amount of time you will play and don't exceed it.
 - Keep your eye on the clock, preferably having it display on your computer screen.
- Set a betting limit before you start to play:
 - Decide how much money you can lose without affecting your budget and stick to the limit.
 - Determine your betting limit for the session. If using a credit card, deposit the amount to your credit card account and limit your betting to that amount.
 - Never bet money you don't have.
 - Tell a friend or family member about the limits you have set and allow this person to question you on the subject.
- Don't lose touch with reality:
 - Make sure you have other leisure activities besides Internet gambling.
 - As often as possible, play online in the company of someone else.
 - Avoid spending too much time alone in front of the computer. It's better to have the computer on which you play set up in a common area of your home.
 - Don't play if your faculties are affected by alcohol or illicit substances.

TIP 2.
Remember that online gambling creates a false sense of control over chance.

If you choose to bet and gamble online:

- Take regular breaks to keep a clear head and stay on top of how much you are spending.
- Remember that chance plays a significant role in all online betting games, and the odds of winning or losing are never predictable.

TIP 3.
Remember that online gambling sites offer players little or no protection.

If you choose to bet and gamble online:

- Choose certified sites that feature:
 - responsible gaming practices
 - deposit limits
 - self-exclusion options
- If there are minors at home, choose sites that have an age limit.

HOW TO RECOGNIZE A GAMBLING PROBLEM

Unfortunately, some people do lose control and become compulsive gamblers. The warning signs are easy to recognize and can help you determine whether you, or someone you know, are at risk of becoming a problem gambler.¹¹

You (or someone you know) could have a gambling problem or be at risk of developing one if:

You have difficulty controlling your gambling:

- You often gamble longer than you intended to, or you spend more than you planned, even down to your last penny.
- You have tried unsuccessfully to quit or cut down on your gambling.

You feel the need to keep your gambling secret:

- You are increasingly inclined to hide the fact that you gambled or you lie about how much you bet.

You gamble even when you have no money:

- You use gambling as a means to make money to cover your financial needs.
- You have gambled money intended for paying bills.

Gambling is affecting your well-being:

- You have felt remorse after gambling.
- Your gambling losses have made you feel depressed and even suicidal.

Your family and friends are concerned about you:

- The important people in your life are generally in a good position to recognize whether you have a gambling problem.
- You must take the time to think about your gambling habits and get help if you need it.



INFORMATION AND ASSISTANCE

While compulsive gambling is a treatable disorder, only **8%** of Canadian online gamblers who experience problems seek help. It's not easy to ask for help and undergoing treatment can be very demanding: it takes a serious commitment, a good support network and expert intervention. The process begins with recognizing that there's a problem. Friends and family can then offer assistance in finding information and provide support throughout the treatment period.

For more information about responsible gambling: misesurtoi.ca

To get help:

Gambling assistance and resources

jeu-aidereference.qc.ca

Montreal and area: 514 527-0140

Toll free in Quebec: 1 800 461-0140

1 866 SOS-JEUX

Gamblers Anonymous

gamblersanonymous.org

Montreal and area: 514 484-6666;

Toll free in Quebec: 1 866 484-6664

Comments about this publication or requests for additional copies should be addressed to *Mise sur toi*.

Montreal and area 514 982-5524

Toll free in Quebec 1 888 660-0644;

info@misesurtoi.ca

A downloadable version of this brochure

is available at misesurtoi.ca

Version française disponible sur demande.

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