

# Gambling is just plain fun for those players who are in control

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People who are in control of their gambling habits play for fun and like the idea of possibly winning big. They set limits on how much money and time they can spend, and they are likely to gamble on the internet. But gambling is just one of several leisure activities these players undertake. In contrast, gambling is a form of escapism for problem players and often their only social activity, say Richard Wood of GamRes Ltd. in Canada, and Mark Griffiths of Nottingham Trent University in the UK. The results appear in Springer's *Journal of Gambling Studies*.

Their study is among the first to explore the strategies, attitudes and motivations of so-called "positive players" who are not at risk of becoming problem gamblers. Wood and Griffiths analyzed the results of an online survey completed by 1,484 positive players and 209 problem players.

Most previous harm-minimization research has focused on the negative aspects of problem [gambling](#) and uses a "stick" approach (i.e. don't play like this or else!). However, this study has helped to detail what non-problematic "positive play" looks like. This "carrot" approach (i.e. play like this and you are more likely to have a positive experience) may resonate with a wider range of players who ignore messages that focus on [problem gambling](#), which they see as largely irrelevant to them.

Wood and Griffiths also found that the internet was by far the most popular medium, where up to 93 percent of the positive players in their

study regularly gambled. This suggests that [online gambling](#) is not, by default, inherently riskier than gambling in more traditional ways. The National Lottery – and especially its online version – leads the popularity stakes, ahead of scratch cards (65.5 percent), sports betting (32.7 percent) and electronic games such as slot machines (28.5 percent).

Wood and Griffiths also found gambling is a form of entertainment for positive gamblers, who enjoy the dream of winning big. Those who play more also have more personal strategies in place to control their pastime. Nine out of ten respondents almost always decide on a spending limit before starting to gamble. Others decide beforehand how much money they can reasonably afford to lose, and also set a limit on their play time. Positive players also often only take a set amount of money with them when going to gamble in bars or casinos, and make a point of leaving their bank cards at home.

By contrast, problem gamblers play to find relief for a particular mood they are in, be it boredom, stress or feeling upset. It's about the actual experience of playing rather than the chance to win. In many cases it's their only [social activity](#). Problem players are less likely than positive players to gamble on their own, such as on the internet, and were often likely to do so in a social setting along with family and friends.

"This might mean that the advice often given that social play is safer than gambling alone should be reconsidered," elaborates Wood.

"Positive players take personal responsibility for their pastime by using various strategies to ensure that they only gamble what they can afford to spend," adds Griffiths.

**More information:** Wood, R.T.A. Griffiths, M.D. (2014). Understanding Positive Play: An Exploration of Playing Experiences and Responsible Gambling Practices, *Journal of Gambling Studies* [DOI:](#)

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