



# Inside the pokies - player guide

A Victorian  
Government  
initiative



A Community Support Fund initiative.

## **3rd Edition - May 2009**

### **References**

- 1, 2, 3** Productivity Commission 1999, “Australia’s Gambling Industries”, Report No. 10, AusInfo, Canberra.
- 4** Victorian Department of Justice, “Can you Win, Really Win, on a Poker Machine?” brochure.
- 5** based on the Canadian Problem Gambling Index (CPGI) – Problem Gambling Severity Index (PGSI) component.

### **Acknowledgements:**

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# Introduction

Gambler's Help works to reduce the risk that gambling might become a problem and provides services for those who need treatment.

We do not suggest you never gamble. Gambling, in its many forms, is enjoyed by many in the community without major harm, but for some people gambling does become a problem.

This guide explains exactly what you are up against if you decide to play electronic gaming machines or pokies, as they are commonly known. It explains how pokies actually work and why, in the long run, you will lose money.

It also provides you with information that, if you do decide to gamble, ensures you understand the risks and can gamble as safely as possible.



# Why should I understand the pokies?

Chances are that you will play or have already played a gaming machine. Studies<sup>1</sup> have shown that most problem gamblers are regular pokie players.

Pokies are more easily accessed than most other forms of gambling in the community. They are also user-friendly. Pokie venues can be fun places to visit. There is often free tea and coffee, the staff are helpful and fellow players may become your friends.

However, gambling involves risk and you may not understand that the risks can be more than just the loss of a few dollars here and there. Pokies are often an escape from the troubles of the outside world.

Some people get 'hooked' on gambling and this can have serious consequences. Assets, income, security, lifestyle and relationships are often put at risk. Just over two per cent of Australian adults have gambling problems, however 15 per cent of regular non-lottery gamblers have gambling problems.<sup>2</sup> Problem gambling does not only affect the person who gambles, but may affect an additional five to 10 other people in their lives.<sup>3</sup>

For these reasons it is important that we understand the choices we make when we decide to gamble, and we recognise the warning signs that gambling could be developing into a problem.



## Who runs the pokies?

In Victoria, pokies are operated by Crown Casino, Tatts Group and Tabcorp.

Tatts Group operates the Tatts Pokies network and Tabcorp operates the TABARET network. Together these two networks can have a maximum of 27,500 pokies in clubs and hotels.

An individual club or hotel can have up to 105 poker machines. They need to have a contract with the operator and a licence from the state government before they can put any machines in. The profits are shared between the venue, the operator and the government.

The Victorian Commission for Gambling Regulation polices the gaming laws in Victoria. It issues licences to venues and to gaming staff.

You will see the staff in any gaming venue wearing their licence.

# But who really gets the profits?

The profits are divided among the venue operator, the gaming machine operator (Tatts Group or Tabcorp) and the government.

The profits are shared differently in hotels and clubs, because hotels contribute  $8\frac{1}{3}$  per cent of their profits to the Community Support Fund (CSF).

The CSF funds programs that provide a service to the community. These include Arts, Tourism, Sport, Drug Initiatives and Problem Gambling initiatives such as Gambler's Help.

The table below shows how the profits from pokies are distributed.

	Hotel profits	Club profits
Venue operator	25%	33.3%
Gaming machine operator (Tatts Group)	26.34%	26.34%
(Tabcorp)	33.34%	33.34%
Government taxes (Tatts Group)	31.24%	31.24%
(Tabcorp)	24.24%	24.24%
Community Support Fund	8.33%	0%

Both Tatts and Tabcorp pay the remaining 9.09 per cent profit to the Australian Taxation Office as GST. The gaming machine operators are compensated by paying less State Tax.

# How do pokies work?

A modern poker machine is simply a computer that has been programmed to look and act like an old style machine.

It is just like a computer game but you are playing with real money and there is no skill involved. You simply decide how many lines you want to play and how much you want to bet on each line. The machine spins and works out if you have or haven't won.

**Nothing** you do to the machine will improve your chances of winning no matter what you might think. This guide will tell you why.

# What are credits?

Machines in Victoria are tokenised. This means all machines will take \$1 coins and give you an equivalent amount of credits.

The table below shows how many credits you will get in different value machines.

Machine Value	Credits for \$1 coin
1c	100
2c	50
5c	20
10c	10
\$1	1

It is important to know how much your credits are worth in real money. You can cash out your credits at any time. Depending on how much you want to cash out, coins could be paid to the coin tray, a ticket may be printed, or a venue attendant may have to pay you.

Never feel pressured to gamble all of your money. If you have an early win, cash it out and only gamble what you planned on gambling before you came to the venue. This way you can enjoy gambling but still go home with a win. Also, if you have an early loss, don't try and chase it with more money. Chances are that you will lose even more than you initially planned. The table on the next page shows what credits are worth on different machines (1c, 2c, 5c, etc.)





Credits	Machine value				
	1c	2c	5c	10c	\$1
5	\$0.05	\$0.10	\$0.25	\$0.50	\$5.00
10	\$0.10	\$0.20	\$0.50	\$1.00	\$10.00
20	\$0.20	\$0.40	\$1.00	\$2.00	\$20.00
50	\$0.50	\$1.00	\$2.50	\$5.00	\$50.00
100	\$1.00	\$2.00	\$5.00	\$10.00	\$100.00
150	\$1.50	\$3.00	\$7.50	\$15.00	\$150.00
200	\$2.00	\$4.00	\$10.00	\$20.00	\$200.00
250	\$2.50	\$5.00	\$12.50	\$25.00	\$250.00
300	\$3.00	\$6.00	\$15.00	\$30.00	\$300.00
400	\$4.00	\$8.00	\$20.00	\$40.00	\$400.00
500	\$5.00	\$10.00	\$25.00	\$50.00	\$500.00
750	\$7.50	\$15.00	\$37.50	\$75.00	\$750.00
1,000	\$10.00	\$20.00	\$50.00	\$100.00	\$1,000.00
2,000	\$20.00	\$40.00	\$100.00	\$200.00	\$2,000.00
5,000	\$50.00	\$100.00	\$250.00	\$500.00	\$5,000.00
10,000	\$100.00	\$200.00	\$500.00	\$1,000.00	\$10,000.00
20,000	\$200.00	\$400.00	\$1,000.00	\$2,000.00	\$20,000.00
50,000	\$500.00	\$1,000.00	\$2,500.00	\$5,000.00	\$50,000.00
100,000	\$1,000.00	\$2,000.00	\$5,000.00	\$10,000.00	\$100,000.00

# Understanding the paytable

The paytable is the artwork on the machine that tells you which combinations of symbols pay and how much they pay.

It is important to understand the paytable and rules of a game before you play, as this will give you an idea of whether it is the type of game for you. An example is on page 11.

 5 Lightning = 10,000 credits 1 in 13,312,000 chance
 5 Hearts = 100 credits 1 in 52,000 chance

The paytable will usually tell you what combinations of symbols will pay for 1 credit on a payline.

Look at the paytable carefully, noting the paylines and combinations. There may be game features that you don't understand. If you don't grasp the game rules and features you may be throwing your money away. If you need help understanding the game, reserve the machine and call over a venue attendant. They will help you with any questions that you may have.

It is important to realise that the bigger the win, the harder it is to get. For example, in the game shown on page 11 there is less than a 1 in 13,000,000 chance of getting 5 lightning compared to a 1 in 52,000 chance of getting 5 hearts.

# Gambler's Help Best Bet



5 – 10000

4 – 5000

3 – 1000



5 – 5000

4 – 2500

3 – 500



5 – 2000

4 – 1000

3 – 250



5 – 1000

4 – 250

3 – 50



5 – 750

4 – 125

3 – 30



5 – 500

4 – 100

3 – 25



5 – 400

4 – 50

3 – 25

2 – 10



5 – 300

4 – 40

3 – 20

2 – 5



5 – 250

4 – 30

3 – 10



5 – 200

4 – 25

3 – 10

2 – 5



5 – 150

4 – 20

3 – 10

2 – 5



5 – 100

4 – 25

3 – 10

2 – 5

1 – 2

- All wins left to right only
- All wins on lit lines only
- Coinciding wins are added
- All wins shown in credits
- All wins are multiplied by the credits staked per line

Malfunction voids all pays and plays

Players responsible for ensuring correct credits are registered before play

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# What happens when I press the button?

































When you press the button, the computer inside first checks that the machine is working properly.

To do this it sends a message to a central computer that monitors it. If the central computer replies that it is working properly, it 'spins the reels'.

When the reels are spinning the computer is actually deciding what symbols to display. To do this it does a series of things. To understand what it does we need to know some of the things about the machine.

## The reels


The reels of the machine are actually columns of symbols. You could think of a reel as being a strip of paper with symbols positioned one after the other. The strips for each reel have a different number of symbols and the symbols are in different positions on each reel. The computer numbers the positions on each reel. For example, if reel one of a machine has 32 symbols, then the reel strip will be 32 positions long, numbered from 1 to 32. This allows the machine to know which position and therefore, which symbol, to display on the screen.
































Reel 1	
Position No.	Symbol
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	
6	
7	
8	
9	
10	
11	
12	
13	
14	
15	
16	
17	
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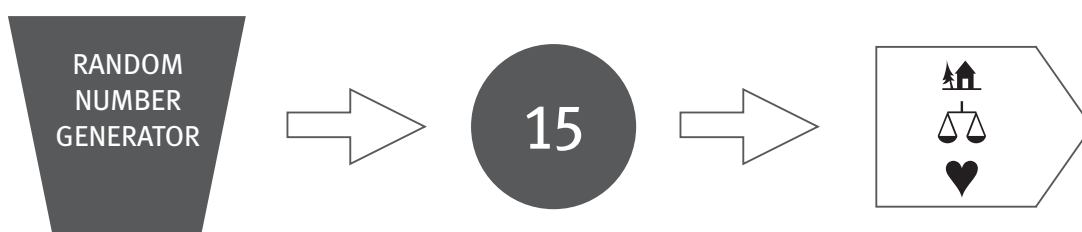
# The random number generator ... or 'a bucket of balls'

The random number generator (RNG) is what the computer inside the poker machine uses to pick the symbol from each of the reels. It works a lot like a lotto draw.

It is as if the RNG puts a numbered ball for each position on the reel into a bucket and then shakes the balls up and picks one at random.

The ball that comes out is the position whose symbol will be displayed on that reel. For example if the computer picks the position for the reel shown on page 12, it would put 32 balls, numbered from 1 to 32, into the bucket and then pick one at random. If the ball is number 15, then the symbol on position number 15, the  symbol, would be displayed. This is then repeated for each of the reels in the game.

Reel 1	
Position No.	Symbol
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	
6	
7	
8	
9	
10	
11	
12	
13	
14	
15	
16	
17	
18	
19	
20	
21	
22	
23	
24	
25	
26	
27	
28	
29	
30	
31	
32	





## The process

1. You press the button.
2. The computer inside the machine checks with a central computer that it is working properly.
3. The computer starts 'spinning the reels'.
4. The computer picks a 'ball' at random out of a 'bucket' that contains all the numbered balls for reel 1.
5. The computer stops reel 1 at the number on the ball it pulled out of the bucket.
6. It pulls a ball at random out of another bucket that contains all the balls for reel 2.
7. The computer stops reel 2 at the number on the ball it pulled out of the bucket.
8. It repeats this process for reels 3, 4 and 5 using separate buckets for each reel.
9. Once all the reels stop, the computer works out if there are any wins on the lines you have gambled on.
10. If there are wins, it pays them otherwise you lose and the computer waits for you to press the button again. All of the balls go back into their buckets for the next game.



## What is return to player?

Return to player (RTP) is the percentage of money played on a machine that will be returned over the total number of combinations on a machine.

In Victoria this is a minimum of 87 per cent. This doesn't mean that every time you play you will get 87 per cent of your money back. It means that if you could play enough spins to cover every possible combination on a machine (about 80 million) then you could expect to get 87 per cent of your money back. This also means the operator can count on 13 per cent of your money. For this reason the operator doesn't 'cheat' and the machines aren't 'rigged', they simply have a built in advantage for the operator—there are many more losing combinations than winning ones.

For practical and legal purposes, RTP in Victoria is calculated annually on a per venue basis—at least 87 per cent of the total amount bet in a gaming venue in a year must be returned to players<sup>4</sup>.

# What are my chances of winning?

Every time you press the play button each line you play will have about a one in 10 chance of winning.

This simply means you have a one in 10 chance of winning at least one credit. Often this will not be enough to cover the total credits you have bet on that spin, so your spin will have an overall loss. For example, if you bet one credit per line and played nine lines, the spin would cost you nine credits. If one line won and paid four credits, you lost five credits on the spin. Why?

Credits before spin	20
Cost of spin	-9
Wins	+4
Credits after spin	=15 (A loss of 5 cents)

# What are my chances of a big win?

Usually your chances of winning the highest prize on a machine are less than one in 10,000,000. That means that you have a better chance of winning Tattsлото or even being killed by lightning.

There are millions of possible combinations on modern poker machines and every spin has an equal chance of bringing up a winning combination. However, your chances of winning a significant prize aren't very good. The operator has an advantage which is programmed into the machine—not only are there many more losing combinations than winning ones, most of the winning ones pay small amounts.

## **Why do my chances of winning differ from game to game?**

Your chances differ because each game has different paytables and game features. Whenever the rules of the game or payable change, the RTP and chances of winning each prize will also change. The same game may also have a different RTP if it is on a linked jackpot, in a different venue or owned by a different operator. This is because RTP can also be changed by the operator to approved variations.

# Understanding probability and odds

The terms ‘probability’ and ‘odds’ are two common ways used to describe how likely it is that a certain event will happen.

In gambling, both terms tell you how likely you are to win, but they do this in different ways.

- Probability is the number of winning outcomes divided by the total number of possible outcomes.
- Odds compare the number of losing outcomes to the number of winning outcomes, in ratio form.

Think of rolling a dice and hoping for a 4 to come up. In this case there are six possible outcomes, one winning outcome and five losing outcomes.

- The probability of rolling a 4 would be shown as  $1/6$ , or one in six.
- The odds of rolling a 4 would be shown as 5:1.

The maths of poker machines is simply an extension of this. Each reel has a number of symbols. The number of symbols depends upon the game, its paytable and its return to player. The reels also have different numbers of symbols, for example reel one may have 32 symbols but reel two may have 39 symbols and reel five may have 40 symbols. Also, symbols often appear more than once on a reel and this changes the likelihood of that symbol being selected. If we go back to our dice and it has two 4s on it instead of only one, the probability of rolling a 4 would change to  $2/6$  (simplified to  $1/3$ ). That is, it would become more likely than if there was only one 4.

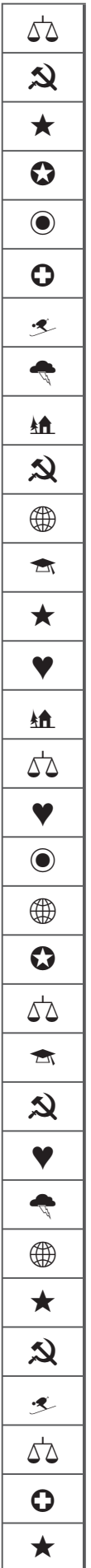
# Probability on a poker machine

To work out the probability of a winning combination of symbols on a poker machine, we need to find out the probability of that symbol appearing on each reel.

For our example, we will look at the chance of getting the top prize (5 lightning) on our Best Bet game. (The payable is on page 11.) Reel one from this game is shown on this page. This reel has 32 positions. That means on every spin there will be an equal chance of getting any of the 32 positions. However many of the symbols are repeated on the reel because even though there are 32 positions, the payable only has 12 types of symbols. This means that most of the symbols will be repeated more than once on the reel.

If we look at the reel strip we find that there are two lightning on the reel strip. This means there is a probability of two in 32, or one in 16, of getting a lightning on this reel on any spin. To find the probability of getting five lightning on any given spin, we need to know the probability of getting lightning on each of the reels. We then multiply these probabilities. If we do this for our Best Bet game, we would get a probability of one in 13,312,000. That's why it is so hard to win the top prizes. The odds are against you.

On Victorian pokies, you can find out about your chances of getting the top five and bottom five winning combinations by pressing the information button (i) on the machine.





## Game features

There are many different game features that can appear on poker machines. Game features include free games, bonus feature or second screen games, scatters and substitutes.

Game features are added to poker machines to give you a feeling that you are getting something for nothing or a second chance to win. However you need to remember that everything that happens on a poker machine is included in the calculations done by the maker of the machine. So even when you believe you are getting free spins, you have paid for these through losses on the machine.

Game features can add to the enjoyment of playing poker machines, as long as you stay in control of your gambling.

### **Double up**

Double up and other 'win gambles' are games in which you can gamble your winnings. Unless you are prepared to lose your winnings quicker it is not advisable to play Double up. It gives the machine another chance to take your winnings. The machine manufacturers understand that many gamblers are willing to take the risk, however unless you are prepared to lose your winnings, don't choose to double up.



# Jackpots

Jackpots are a major part of the experience of gambling on poker machines.

Often jackpots will give you a chance to win a prize or an amount of money that would be difficult or impossible to win by playing on a non-jackpot machine. Jackpot prizes include cars, motorbikes, boats, houses and even a million dollars. However, even the cost of jackpots are priced into the return to player of a game. If a game is connected to a jackpot, your chances of winning prizes on the normal game are reduced slightly as a cost of trying to win the jackpot.

If you want to play in a jackpot, make sure you are playing a jackpot machine. If you are not sure, ask a venue attendant.

# Gambling strategies

Gambling on the pokies can be a fun form of entertainment as long as you stay in control and don't bet more than you planned.

People gamble for many reasons and there are strategies that you can use to make your experience safer and more enjoyable.

It is essential to understand that gaming machines are for entertainment. Like other forms of entertainment such as restaurants, movies and bars etc, you should expect to pay for your entertainment, not get it for free or even be paid money for doing it!

## **Playing to occupy time**

Play a 1c machine that has free spins. Play as low a bet as possible. Make sure that you understand the game rules. If possible, play a machine with free spins that are progressive—you earn the free spins during play, or a machine with retriggerable free spins.

## **Playing for the excitement of second screen features**

Pick a machine with a second screen feature that is triggered often. Examine the paytable to find which machine suits you best. Often when the machine is idle it will demonstrate what the feature looks like.

## **Playing for the chance of winning a jackpot**

Play as low a denomination as possible (5c is better than 10c) and have as low a bet as possible. Make sure you are playing on a machine that is linked to a jackpot—ask an attendant if you are not sure. On a jackpot machine your chances are the same if you bet one credit per spin or 100 credits per spin. Don't play machines with free spins or second screen features as you are only in the jackpot when you press the play button.



## Safe bets

- Leave your ATM card at home.
- Set a gambling limit and stick to it.
- Gamble only for fun.
- Be open with your family and friends about your gambling.
- Put any winnings in your pocket.
- Don't borrow money for gambling.
- Don't chase your losses.
- Be careful about mixing alcohol and gambling.
- If gambling is a problem for you or someone you know, phone Gambler's Help on 1800 858 858.

# Who is Gambler's Help?

Gambler's Help is a free, professional and confidential 24 hour service funded by the Victorian Government.

Wherever you live there is always someone at the end of the telephone. Through Gambler's Help you can talk to trained, experienced people who understand what you are going through. You can talk over the phone, or if you prefer, we can talk face-to-face in a safe, confidential environment. Gambler's Help can support you to come to grips with the problem and to find ways to deal with it.

## Services available:

- Immediate telephone help
- Individual counselling
- Couple and family counselling
- Financial counselling
- Support groups
- Community education
- Multicultural services
- Professional development

**gambler's**help  
**1800 858 858**

[problemgambling.vic.gov.au](http://problemgambling.vic.gov.au)

Free and confidential 24hr service.  
Deaf, hearing or speech impaired  
call TTY 1800 777 706.  
Interpreting services available.



## Warning signs

There are some warning signs that gambling may be developing into a problem for you or someone you know. Ask yourself the following questions<sup>5</sup>.

- Do you bet more than you can really afford to lose?
- Do you need to gamble with larger amounts of money to get the same feeling of excitement?
- Do you go back another day to try to win back the money you lost?
- Do you borrow money or sell things to get money to gamble?
- Do you feel that you might have a problem with gambling?
- Do people criticize your betting or tell you that you have a gambling problem, whether or not you think it's true?
- Do you feel guilty about the way you gamble or what happens when you gamble?
- Does your gambling cause you any health problems, including stress or anxiety?
- Does your gambling cause any financial problems for you or your household?

**If you answered yes to any of these questions,  
you could be heading towards a gambling problem.**

**Call Gambler's [Help](#) on 1800 858 858.  
We can help.**

**gambler's**help  
**1800 858 858**

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