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Parkinson's drug: sex, gambling link

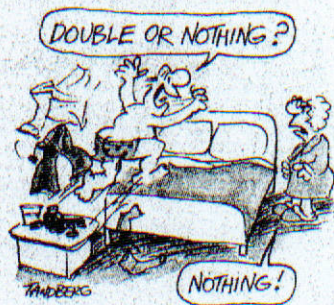
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HEALTH REPORTER

MORE than 100 people who became addicted to gambling and sex after taking a prescription drug used to treat tremors associated with Parkinson's disease are suing two drug companies.

The case will take the form of a class action in the Federal Court.

The group includes Australians who lost hundreds of thousands of dollars and who were involved in family breakdowns as a result of compulsive gambling, allegedly linked to drugs they took between 1997 and last year.

Most claimants became addicted to gambling but a few engaged in compulsive sexual behaviour such as looking at pornography on the internet. They are suing Pfizer Australia over its drug Cabaser and Aspen



Pharmacare, which marketed and distributed the drug Permax in Australia.

Parkinson's is a degenerative neurological disorder that causes a deficiency of dopamine, a chemical neurotransmitter needed for smooth controlled movements.

Cabaser and Permax are among a class of drugs known as "dopamine agonists" which mimic the effects of dopamine in the brain. The chemical is

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Parkinson's treatment linked to sex, gambling

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also known to produce a "rush", and scientists believe it can cause risk-taking behaviour and addictions. A study published in the *Archives of Neurology* last month found that dopamine agonist treatment for Parkinson's disease was associated with a rise in impulse control disorders such as pathological gambling, compulsive shopping and binge eating.

In a test case in July 2008, a Minnesota jury awarded \$US8.2 million, including \$US7.8 million in damages, to a man who became a compulsive gambler after using Mirapex (made by Boehringer Ingelheim Pharmaceuticals) to treat his Parkinson's disease. Other lawsuits are now being considered in Canada, Britain and France.

The Australian class action is being run by law firm Arnold Thomas & Becker, which says in its writ filed with the Federal Court that Pfizer Australia and Aspen Pharmacare Australia breached a duty of care by failing to research possible side

effects of their drugs or by failing to heed research into side effects.

The writ claims the companies engaged in misleading conduct by neglecting to provide adequate warnings of increased risk of compulsive disorders on drug labels, or to doctors or pharmacists.

They also failed to withdraw the drug from sale when it became aware of the increased risk, the writ states.

Families were torn apart by some of the addictions, which caused uncharacteristic behaviour.

Among the claimants are people who lost more than \$500,000 to gambling. At the other end of the scale are pensioners who gambled all their income and accrued large debts.

The compulsive behaviour ceased once they stopped taking the drug.

A directions hearing for the case will be held today.

The drug companies have not yet been served with the writ, so have not filed a response.