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# 1

## Playing Options

*We start with a brief look at the various places where you can play poker, and see the pros and cons of each.*

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## Introduction

So, you made it! Retirement has finally arrived and you're now officially old. No more getting up at 6.30am and battling through rush-hour traffic to get to work. No longer do you have to be nice to people you'd rather not be nice to. Now, at last, you can please yourself and do just what you want to.

### Hot tip



You can take the game of poker as far as you want. Most will see it as no more than an interesting diversion. However, if you are determined enough, you can become extremely proficient and make a lot of money.

Of course, you may not be a senior citizen at all, you may just have time on your hands at certain times of the day and need some way of filling it.

Whichever applies to you, the question is what are you going to do? You can take up a hobby such as fishing or woodwork. You can sit down and write that novel you always wanted to but could never find the time for. Well, here's another suggestion – how about playing poker.

Poker is one of the most fascinating of all the card games and, if played well, can be extremely rewarding. Not only can you while away many hours enjoyably playing this game, you can also make serious money at it. Win or lose, it has other advantages as well. For example, poker requires concentration, thought and discipline, all qualities that old people tend to lose. If nothing else, playing poker regularly will keep your mind sharp and alert.

This book has been written for people just like you – people who would like to give poker a try but don't know where to begin. It won't make you an expert – only experience and dedication can do that – but by the time you reach the last page, you will already be a better player than most.

We concentrate on the most popular variant of poker – Texas Hold'em, and also give you a good grounding in Omaha and Seven-Card Stud. Plus, you will learn about poker tournaments, which is where really serious money can be won. No poker book these days would be complete without a mention of online poker (which provides many advantages to the senior citizen). You will find this here as well.

# Where to Play

Having decided to give it a go, your first decision is where to play. Here, you have four options: 1) casinos, 2) dedicated poker rooms, c) online and d) poker parties.

## Casinos

The first thing to say here is that unless you live near to a really large casino, the chances are that your options will be very limited. In the average casino, the emphasis is more on Roulette, Blackjack and Slot Machines as these produce far more profit for the casino operator than does poker.

The reason for this is that in poker, the casino's profit comes from the rake. This is a percentage (typically 10 to 15%) taken from each pot. Furthermore, there is usually a cap on the rake that prevents the casino taking a disproportionate amount from any one pot. For example, 15% of a \$2000 pot is \$300; however, due to the cap, the casino will take a much smaller amount. Therefore, the games mentioned above make much more for the casino.

As a result, in most casinos, there may only be one or two poker tables. Usually, you will have to wait a considerable amount of time before a seat becomes available at one.

Another problem for the beginner (who should only be playing at the low-limits) is that casinos aren't interested in the low profits that low-limit tables generate. Thus, you may find yourself playing for stakes that are too high for your level of expertise and experience.

Playing at a live poker table can also be an intimidating experience for the beginner. Make a foolish mistake and you are going to feel foolish.

However, at the very large casinos, such as the ones you will find in Las Vegas and Atlantic City, there will be many tables at both high and low limits. Some of these casinos also provide free poker lessons, which are an invaluable introduction not only to the mechanics of playing poker but also to playing it in a live casino.

### Beware



If you are new to this game, do not sit down at a table unless you are comfortable with the table stakes.

### Don't forget



If you get the opportunity, take advantage of the free poker lessons offered in the larger casinos.

**Hot tip**

Another advantage of online poker for the advanced player is being able to play several tables at once.

## ...cont'd

### Dedicated Poker Rooms

If you live in a city or near one, the chances are that you will find an establishment dedicated to poker and nothing else.

The big advantage these provide is choice. There will be a good number of tables available and at various limits, which should enable you to find a game commensurate with your ability and experience.

In all other respects, however, it will be little different than playing in a casino.

### Online

The Internet has fuelled the biggest surge ever seen in the game of poker simply by making it instantly available to anyone who owns a computer. Millions of people are now playing who would never have even considered it previously.

We cover the subject of online poker in some depth in Chapter 7 so won't go into it too much here. Briefly, though, it offers many advantages over the traditional casino or poker room.

Instant availability, as we've already mentioned, is one. Moreover, it's available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Convenience is another – with an appropriate setup, you can play from simply anywhere. This is particularly handy for the elderly or infirm who would find it difficult, or even impossible, to travel to a casino.

Mention must also be made of the fact that online poker rooms offer much better value than their land-based counterparts. The rake taken by the latter is typically in the region of 10 to 15%; online poker rooms, however, rarely take more than 5%. For regular players, this can add up to literally thousands of dollars saved over a period.

There's also the issue of choice. Online poker rooms offer dozens, even hundreds of tables from the micro-limits up to high-roller limits. Live poker rooms simply cannot match this.

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## Poker Parties

For those who just like the occasional game and have no desire to play in a casino or online, the poker party is the perfect solution.

These are usually as much a social event as a game of poker and can be great fun. So let's see what you need to set up a poker party.

You can of course simply sit around the coffee table with 3 or 4 pals, a box of matchsticks and a dog-eared pack of cards. However, apart from not doing your back any good, this is not going to be much of an experience. How authentic you want your party to be will depend on how much you're prepared to spend and how much trouble you're prepared to go to.

We'll start with a cheap and cheerful setup. The first thing you'll need will be a decent pack of plastic-coated cards. These are much nicer to handle than cheaper linen ones.

Then you'll need something to play on. The cheapest option here is a printed poker table cover. Simply spread it over a suitably sized table and, hey presto, you've got something that resembles a poker table. Another, slightly more expensive, option is a solid foldable cover, as shown below:



### Hot tip



If you want the ultimate poker party, there are companies that will supply a professional poker table, a skilled dealer and all the accessories (all you have to do is win enough to pay for it all).

**Hot tip**

The best quality poker chips are made from clay and give a satisfying chink. Cheaper ones are plastic and sound like they are.

**...cont'd**

The next requisite is a set of chips. Chip sets are available in various sizes (number of chips) and denominations, so make sure you get one that a) provides enough chips for the number of players you will have and, b) has suitable denominations for the stakes you will be playing at. It's no good having chips that range from \$10 to \$1000 if you're only playing for low-limit stakes.



Apart from the beer and nibbles, that's all you need for a basic poker party. If you want something better, however, read on.

With regard to authenticity, the table is the most important factor. So instead of settling for a simple table cover, you can buy a proper poker table. Here, again, you have various options.

**Hot tip**

For most people, a fold-away table will be the best option as they can be put away when not in use.

If space is an issue, you can opt for a simple fold-away table, which can be brought out only when required. You can also buy poker tables with a reversible top. These will serve as a dining table with the top one way, and a poker table with the top reversed.

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Poker table with fold-away legs

If you've got a couple of thousand dollars to spare, you can buy a table that is as near to the ones you'd find in a casino as makes no difference. An example is shown below:



Having acquired a decent table, you will now need to add some poker accessories to it. First in the list is a shuffling shoe. Not only does this eliminate the possibility of the dealer cheating, if you get an automatic model this will speed the game up considerably.



Hot tip



Cheating can be an issue in home poker games. By using an automatic shuffling shoe, the possibility of the dealer cheating is much reduced.

Hot tip



A tournament director will not only make it much easier to set up a tournament, it will also make it run much more smoothly.

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If you're planning on holding a tournament, you might also consider buying a tournament director. While not essential, you will find that a director is a great aid. It can be a program running from a laptop or PC strategically placed where all the players can see it, or a hardware device that sits on the table itself.

Tournament directors simplify the procedure of setting up a tournament considerably by enabling you to set the parameters of the tournament. For example: stakes, number of blinds periods, length of the blind periods, break periods, etc. For a comprehensive list of poker terms, please see the Glossary, p177–186.

In operation, all this information is displayed by the director so that players know exactly what is going on. It will also issue audible alerts when a blind period is finished.

Texas Freeze Out		
\$50.00 Buy-in, \$50.00 to Rebuy (Through Round 6, Max 1 per player), No Add-ons		
Round 1	7:04	Next Break 57:04
Entries 45		<b>Chip Leaders</b> Aaron P \$2,215 Andrew C \$2,100 Andrew T \$1,875 Andrew D \$1,800 Brent F \$1,700 Brian S \$1,650 William P \$1,500 Corey C \$1,500 Clay L \$1,500 Chris G \$1,500 Carlos A \$1,500 Craig T \$1,200
Players In 45	No Limit Texas Hold 'Em  <b>Blinds</b> \$10 / \$20	Next Round: No Limit Texas Hold 'Em
Rebuys 0		Blinds: \$15 / \$30
Chip Count \$67,500		
Avg Stack \$1,500		
Total Pot \$2,250.00		
1st Place: \$905   2nd Place: \$515   3rd Place: \$290   4th Place: \$225 5th Place: \$180   6th Place: \$135		

Screenshot from a software director, and a hardware director

