

# **STAYING ON TRACK**

A guide to remaining gambling-free

**BOOKLET 6**

**LIFESTYLE BALANCE**

Brought to you by the University of Calgary.  
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This booklet, Lifestyle Balance, is the sixth of eight in the *Staying on Track* series. In this booklet, we cover lifestyles and how to adjust your current routine to suit your new gambling free lifestyle.

## Lifestyle balance

Many people who quit gambling feel like they are losing a big part of their lifestyle. Giving up gambling can result in a sense of loss, especially when you don't add something to take its place. To cope with this sense of loss, it is extremely important to re-balance your lifestyle to include other pleasurable activities. It is also important to take care of the responsibilities that you may have neglected when you were actively gambling. This booklet helps you set goals for a healthier lifestyle.

A healthy lifestyle is one that includes a good balance of pleasurable and productive activities.

## Advantages of a healthy, balanced lifestyle

Too much of one thing can be bad for you. For example, people who are “workaholics” often have high levels of stress in their lives and strained relationships with their families. Although they may achieve a great deal in their work lives, their personal lives usually suffer. Furthermore, they are at risk to abuse substances (e.g., alcohol, drugs, and cigarettes) and develop health problems like high blood pressure and headaches. On the other hand, people who spend all their time in leisure activities may neglect important responsibilities like providing for financial needs. They may “live for the moment” and fail to plan ahead to achieve important personal and professional goals. Such individuals may not cope well with stress because they spend most of their time avoiding it.

A balanced lifestyle helps you to remain *stress-hardy*. People who are stress-hardy are able to cope with minor problems and crises without enormous difficulty. This is not to say that they are immune to stress. Rather, they seem to suffer fewer long-term consequences. People who are not stress-hardy tend to feel physically unwell (e.g., overweight, have sleep problems) and are especially prone to health problems like heart disease and mental illness. They may be attracted to “quick fix” methods of reducing stress like using alcohol or gambling as a way to escape. Many of these quick fixes can end up causing more stress and personal problems in the long run.

Another advantage of a balanced lifestyle is that you have more options for things to do when you get an urge to gamble. Many gamblers relapse because they don't have alternative activities set up to distract them from their urges. For example, if you habitually played the VLTs after work on Fridays, you are likely to get an urge

to gamble on this day. Arranging a new leisure activity for Fridays (e.g., going out for coffee with a friend) might help with your urges to gamble. When the urge hits you, remind yourself you have something else to do. It is also helpful to have other relaxing activities you can do on a moment's notice when unexpected urges come. Examples of these are meditation, exercise, and reading. You are more likely to give in to an urge if you have nothing else planned, and don't have other things you can do quickly to distract yourself from the urge.

## What are your lifestyle goals?

Gambling can take over your life and make you forget the goals you set for yourself before you started gambling. On the next page are four dimensions of a balanced lifestyle: physical health, emotional well-being, relationships, and leisure activities. Take a minute to write down one or two goals for each category. Examples are provided for each category, but you should come up with your own personal goals. When writing out your goals, try to remember that a good goal is one that is:

**Specific** – Be clear about what you want.

**Measurable** – You can see or experience the results.

**“I”- centred** – Involves you making the change.


An example of a poorly defined goal is something like “I want to feel better.” A better goal is “I plan to ask a friend to a movie every two weeks.”

**EXERCISE**

Think of goals relating to physical health you would like to achieve.

**EXAMPLE**

*I want to lose 15 pounds.  
I want to quit smoking by June 1<sup>st</sup>.*



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**EXERCISE**

Think of goals relating to your emotional well-being you would like to see happen.

**EXAMPLE**

I want to acknowledge at least one accomplishment I make every day.



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**EXERCISE**

Think of some relationship goals you can work towards.

**EXAMPLE**

*I want to spend one evening a week out with my spouse doing something fun.*



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**EXERCISE**

List any leisure activities you would like to do more of or try for the first time.

**EXAMPLE**

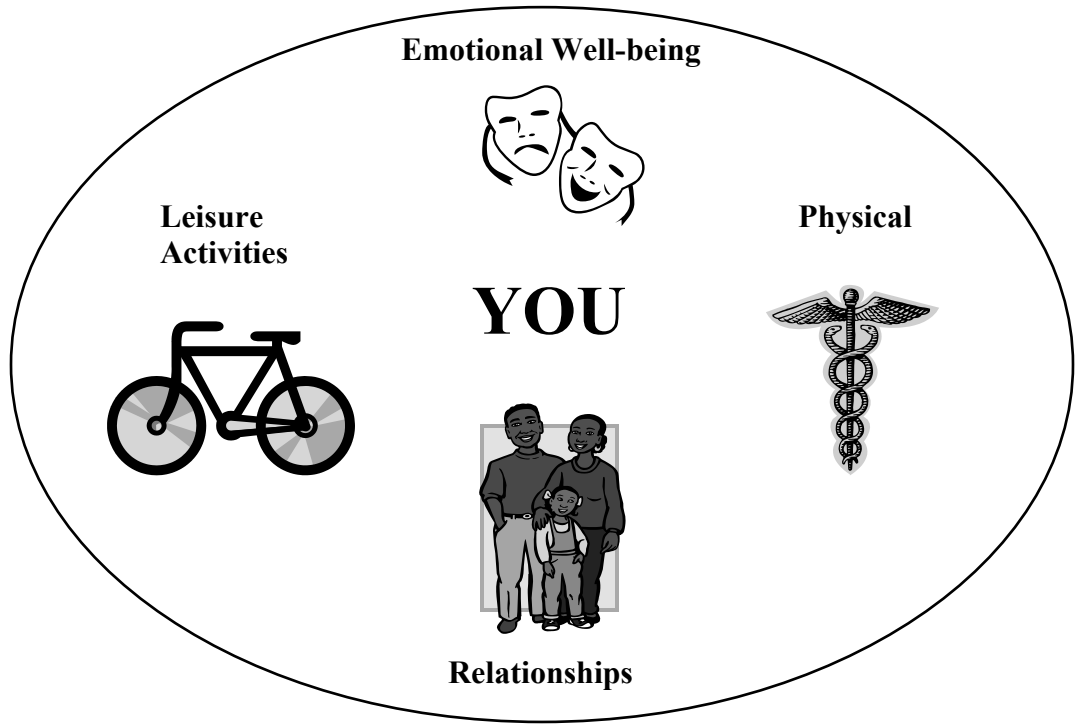
*I want to start bowling again on Thursday evenings.*



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A Healthy Lifestyle is a matter of balancing your physical health, your emotional well-being, the relationships you have, and your leisure life.



## Finding other pleasurable activities to replace gambling

At the beginning of this booklet, we mentioned the importance of finding other activities that give you pleasure and excitement to replace gambling. You can think of gambling as a “negative activity” along with smoking and drinking. Many people who quit gambling find it helpful to substitute more positive activities. Examples of positive activities are running, painting, writing, prayer, and meditation. If you find it difficult to come up with other pleasurable activities, here are a few suggestions:

Ask friends and co-workers what they do to relax or have fun.  
Join a local community centre (the YMCA, for example)  
and sample different classes and programs before you find one you like.  
Complete the Pleasant Activities List at the end of this booklet.

## Maintaining an active, not a passive, lifestyle

A recent survey of problem gamblers revealed some interesting trends in their choice of social and leisure activities. Problem gamblers spent more time in passive sorts of activities like watching TV compared to occasional gamblers and non-gamblers. In fact, problem gamblers spent an average of 20 hours per week watching TV (equivalent to a part-time job!). They also had fewer social interactions and almost no hobbies. When thinking of activities to replace gambling, try to think of active ones. Passive activities are ones that don't exercise your mind or your body.

### **EXERCISE**

On the next page are some examples of active and passive activities, both productive and recreational. Try to add a few of your own to each list.



ACTIVE

- Reading \_\_\_\_\_
- Journaling \_\_\_\_\_
- Playing board games \_\_\_\_\_
- Doing crossword puzzles \_\_\_\_\_
- Painting the house \_\_\_\_\_
- Stretching exercises \_\_\_\_\_
- Running \_\_\_\_\_

PASSIVE

- Watching TV \_\_\_\_\_
- Renting videos \_\_\_\_\_
- Napping \_\_\_\_\_
- Surfing the internet \_\_\_\_\_
- Listening to the radio \_\_\_\_\_
- Sunbathing \_\_\_\_\_

You may ask yourself, how can reading be an active pursuit? It is active because it engages your mind. Watching TV, on the other hand, is one of those “mind-numbing” activities. The danger with passive activities is that they are a little too easy, and can be a quick fix for boredom. Active pursuits take a little more effort, but are usually more rewarding in the end.

Another trend this survey revealed was that gamblers spend less time in social activities like visiting friends, going to church, or being involved in community organizations. Activities are more enjoyable when done with other people. Plus, you may feel a greater commitment to the activity if others are involved. For example, it is easy to make excuses to not go to the gym when you are going alone. However, if you have a buddy to go with, there is less chance you will cancel out. Therefore, when balancing your lifestyle try to include some social activities.

## Quitting other negative behaviours

It is not uncommon for gamblers to “switch addictions.” After quitting gambling, your use of alcohol or drugs may increase. You may even have a substance abuse problem. Smoking is also very common among gamblers. The continued use of cigarettes and alcohol may get in the way of achieving your goals for a balanced lifestyle. Booklet 8 talks about other addictions and provides you with some suggestions for quitting.

Maintaining a balanced lifestyle helps you feel better physically and emotionally. When you feel good physically and emotionally, you are better equipped to stay on track and remain gambling free.



## Pleasant Activities List

The following list was modified from a Pleasant Events List<sup>1</sup>, which was produced by asking people what they do for fun. Read through the list and check off all activities that may help you balance your lifestyle.

- Being out in the country.
- Wearing nice or new clothes.
- Talking about sports.
- Meeting someone new.
- Playing ball.
- Planning trips or vacations.
- Buying things for self or someone you care about.
- Going to the beach.
- Doing art work
- Rock climbing.
- Reading the Bible.
- Playing golf.
- Decorating my room or house.
- Going to a sports event.
- Reading a "how to do it" book or article.
- Reading stories, novels, poems or plays.
- Going out with friends.
- Going to lectures or hearing speakers.
- Breathing clean air.
- Thinking up a song or music.
- Boating
- Restoring antiques, refinishing furniture.
- Watching TV.
- Talking to myself or a friend.
- Camping.
- Working in politics.
- Working on machines.
- Thinking about something good in the future.
- Completing a hard task.
- Laughing.
- Solving a problem, puzzle, cross-word.
- Being at weddings, baptisms, confirmations.
- Having lunch with friends.
- Playing tennis.
- Driving long distances.
- Woodworking, carpentry.
- Writing stories, novels, plays or poetry.
- Being with animals.
- Riding in an airplane.
- Hiking.
- Having a frank and open conversation.

- Working on my job.
- Going to a party.
- Going to church functions
- Speaking in a foreign language and learning.
- Going to service, civic, or social club meetings.
- Going to a business meeting or a convention.
- Being in a sporty car.
- Playing in a band.
- Making soup.
- Combing, brushing or washing my hair.
- Acting.
- Taking a nap.
- Canning, freezing, making preserves, etc.
- Solving a personal problem.
- Taking a bath or shower.
- Singing to myself or in a group.
- Making food or crafts to sell or give away.
- Playing pool or billiards.
- Being with children.
- Playing chess or checkers.
- Doing craft work
- Putting on makeup, fixing my hair, etc.
- Designing or drafting.
- Visiting people who are sick or in trouble.
- Cheering.
- Bowling.
- Teaching someone.
- Using my strength.
- Travelling.
- Going to office parties.
- Attending a concert, opera, or ballet.
- Playing with pets.
- Going to a play.
- Looking at the stars or moon.
- Being coached.
- Coaching.
- Watching wild animals.
- Gardening.
- Reading essays or technical, academic, or professional literature.
- Dancing.
- Sitting in the sun.
- Riding a motorcycle.
- Just sitting and thinking.
- Going to a fair, circus, zoo or park.
- Planning something.
- Listening to the sounds of nature.
- Dating, courting, etc.
- Having a lively talk.

- Racing in a car, motorcycle, boat etc.
- Listening to the radio.
- Having friends come to visit.
- Playing in a sports competition.
- Introducing people I think would like each together.
- Giving gifts.
- Going to school or government meetings, court sessions, etc.
- Playing basketball.
- Buying something for my family.
- Photography.
- Giving a speech or lecture
- Reading maps
- Gathering natural objects
- Working on my finances.
- Making a major purchase.
- Helping someone.
- Being in the mountains.
- Getting a job advancement.
- Hearing jokes.
- Talking about my children or grandchildren.
- Meeting someone new.
- Talking about my health.
- Seeing beautiful sights.
- Eating good meals.
- Improving my health (having my teeth fixed, getting new glasses, changing my diet, etc.).
- Going to, or being in the city.
- Wrestling or boxing.
- Hunting.
- Playing in a musical group.
- Hiking.
- Going to a museum or exhibit.
- Writing papers essays, articles, reports, memos, etc.
- Doing a job well.
- Fishing.
- Loaning something.
- Pleasing employers, teachers, etc.
- Going to a health club, sauna bath or gym.
- Learning to do something new.
- Going to a "Drive-in"
- Praising someone.
- Being at a gathering.
- Being with my parents.
- Horseback riding.
- Kicking leaves, sand, pebbles, etc.
- Playing lawn sports

- Going to school reunions, alumni meeting, etc.
- Seeing famous people.
- Going to the movies.
- Kissing.
- Being alone.
- Budgeting my time.
- Cooking meals.
- Outwitting a “superior”.
- Feeling the presence of the Lord in my life.
- Doing a project in my own way.
- Doing ‘odd jobs’ around the house.
- Laughing.
- Being at a family reunion or get-together.
- Going to a restaurant.
- Seeing or smelling a flower or plant.
- Inviting someone out.
- Using cologne, perfume, or after-shave.
- Talking about old times.
- Getting up early in the morning.
- Having peace and quiet.
- Doing experiments or other scientific work.
- Visiting friends.
- Writing in a diary.
- Playing football.
- Saying prayers.
- Giving massages or backrubs.
- Doing yoga.
- Talking with people on the job or in class.
- Being relaxed.
- Playing board games
- Doing heavy outdoor work
- Reading the newspaper.
- Being in a body-awareness, sensitivity, encounter, therapy, or “rap”group.
- Playing ping-pong.
- Brushing my teeth.
- Swimming.
- Running, jogging, or doing gymnastics, fitness, or field exercises.
- Walking barefoot.
- Playing Frisbee or catch.
- Doing housework or laundry; cleaning things.
- Listening to music.
- Knitting, crocheting, embroidery, or fancy needlework.
- Petting, necking.
- Amusing people.

- Going to a barber or beauty shop.
- Having house guests.
- Being with someone I love.
- Reading magazines.
- Sleeping late.
- Starting a new project.
- Going to the library.
- Preparing a new or special food.
- Bird watching.
- Shopping.
- Watching people.
- Building or watching a fire.
- Selling or trading something.
- Finishing a project or task.
- Fixing things.
- Working with others as a team.
- Bicycling.
- Telling people what to do.
- Being with happy people.
- Playing party games.
- Writing letters, cards, or notes.
- Talking about politics or public affairs.
- Going to banquets, luncheons, potlucks.
- Talking about my hobby or special interest.
- Watching attractive women or men.
- Smiling at people.
- Playing in sand, a stream, the grass, etc.
- Talking about other people.
- Being with my husband, wife or partner.
- Going on field trips, nature walks.
- Expressing my love to someone
- Caring for houseplants.
- Having coffee, tea, a coke, etc., with friends.
- Taking a walk.
- Collecting things.
- Playing handball, paddleball, squash, etc.
- Sewing.
- Remembering a departed friend or loved one, visiting the cemetery.
- Doing things with children.
- Beachcombing.
- Eating snacks.

*Adapted from MacPhillamy, D.J., & Lewinsohn, P.M.,(1982).  
Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology.*

