

STAYING ON TRACK

A guide to remaining gambling-free

BOOKLET 7

GETTING BACK ON THE WAGON

Brought to you by the University of Calgary.
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This booklet, Getting Back on the Wagon, is the seventh booklet on relapse prevention in the ***Staying on Track*** series. In this booklet, your motivation, the process of quitting, and how to handle a slip are discussed at length.

Understanding your motivation

This booklet is designed to help you understand the process of quitting an addiction. Ideally you will be successful on your first attempt to quit gambling. However, many people make several attempts to quit before they are successful. By understanding the process of quitting you will learn where you are in the quitting process and how to handle a slip if one occurs.

You need motivation to overcome addictions such as gambling. An important part of getting and staying motivated is remembering why you quit gambling in the first place. Researchers have found that people who quit gambling do so for a number of reasons. The following list describes some of the most frequently reported reasons for stopping gambling.

REASON FOR STOPPING	EXAMPLE
Financial concerns	Missed having spending money, money getting tight, always losing.
Negative emotions	Stress, panic, guilt and depression.
Family influence	Tired of disappointing family, broken marriage.
Incompatible with desired self-image or goals	Feeling ashamed, wanting to be a better role model for family.
Lack of financial resources	Lost everything, no income.
Hitting rock bottom	Had a break down, suicidal.

Your reasons for stopping gambling may include some of the above or may reflect other issues such as: legal difficulties, work-related problems, fear of future consequences, spiritual/religious influences, confrontation by others, changes in lifestyle, or physical health reasons. Some people even quit gambling because they realize the reality of the odds. They recognize that they are not going to “get ahead”, it is not a way to make money, or that they are losing money in the long run.

EXERCISE

Make a list of your top reasons for quitting gambling. Try to identify as many as possible.



Benefits of not gambling

Updating your reasons for stopping gambling list can help to maintain your motivation. The positive effects of quitting become more noticeable over time. The following is a list of some of the benefits reported by people who have quit gambling.

- Having pocket money.
- Greater financial stability.
- Feeling better physically and mentally.
- Having more time to spend with family/friends.
- Increases sense of accomplishment/pride.
- Reduced feelings of sadness, anger, frustration and depression.
- Improved relationship with family/friends.

Benefits of not gambling for your family

Family members and friends also benefit from you not gambling. Here are what researchers found to be the most positive rewards for family members and friends of people who have quit gambling.

- Increase in enjoyable social and family activities.
- Financial improvement or stability.
- Reduced feelings of sadness, anger, frustration and depression.

- Fewer problems with children.
- Less marital and family conflict.
- Increased self-esteem.

EXERCISE

List benefits would you like to see for you and your family/friends:



Take a moment to rate your motivation to stay on track:

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Not at all									Extremely	
Motivated									Motivated	

If your motivation is less than 10, review your reasons for stopping gambling and any concerns you may have in reaching your goal of quitting. People who have recently quit gambling often worry about how they will spend their free time (booklet 6 focuses on this issue), or how they will deal with stressful situations (refer to booklet 8). It is also a common error for gamblers to believe that they are “due” for a win or that they can get ahead by winning money (booklet 5). It is important for you to remain motivated to stay quit, so you should remind yourself of your reasons for quitting often and keep the benefits of not gambling in mind.

Stages of Change

There is a well-accepted model for understanding the stages people go through when changing their behaviour. People are not either “motivated” or “unmotivated” for change. Instead, they move through the stages before coming to a decision to take action about their problem. It is possible to move forward or backward through the stages and sometimes there may be several starts and stops before movement continues in a forward direction. Understanding these stages can help to keep you moving toward success.

Resisting change

At this stage, the gambler does not see the gambling as a problem and has no plans to tackle their gambling problem right now. Some people in this stage have given up on themselves and have accepted the situation as their “fate”. Denying, minimizing, or rationalizing the gambling behaviour are also common.

EXAMPLE

“I don’t know why you nag me so much! There is nothing wrong with putting a few bucks in the VLT’s every now and again.”

Change on the horizon

Gamblers in this stage begin to recognize that their gambling has become a problem. However, they many spend quite a bit of time thinking about it before deciding to do anything about it. Although many gamblers get stuck in this stage for a long time, they will typically say that they intend to consider quitting or decreasing their gambling in the next 6 months.

EXAMPLE

“I want to cut down on the amount of money I’m losing gambling but I’m not sure how to do that. I seem to have no self control.”

Getting ready

At this stage, gamblers tend to make small changes in their gambling behaviour. For example, they may make an effort to gamble less money or to gamble fewer days. They will likely say that they intend to make significant decreases in their gambling in the next 30 days.

EXAMPLE

“Instead of gambling all my tips after work, I am only going to gamble half.”

Time to move

Gamblers in this stage have already made a significant reduction in their gambling behavior or have completely quit. They have made a commitment to overcoming the problem and are taking the time, effort, and energy to do so.

EXAMPLE

“That’s it! That is the last time I lose any more money in those machines. I’m packing in gambling for good.”

Staying there

Gamblers who have quit (or significantly reduced their gambling) for at least 6 months, have reached the final stage, Staying there. The goal in this stage is to maintain the changes that have already been made in the Time to move stage.

EXAMPLE

“I haven’t gambled now in almost eight months. I have really changed my lifestyle around.”

Stages of Change adapted from Prochaska, Norcross, & Diclemente

What happens if you slip?

If you slip do not become discouraged. Many people go from one stage backwards to the stage before. Understand that quitting an addiction can be a lengthy process. Hopefully you can avoid a relapse by using the strategies outlined in booklet 4.

If you have had a slip how do you regain your motivation to quit gambling?

Review the benefits of and reasons for quitting

First, review the first exercise in this booklet on why you want to quit gambling. Next, review the exercises on the benefits for you and your family of not gambling.

Gain support from friends and family

The more people you tell about your gambling problem, the more people you will have to support you.

EXERCISE

Make a list of people who you will tell (or have already told) about your plan, who will support you.



Arrange rewards for not gambling

Reward yourself for not gambling. This is important, even if you are in serious debt. Arranging rewards for yourself can increase your motivation and help you reach your goal.

EXAMPLE

"I am going to put the money I would normally spend on gambling aside and save it for that new computer part I want."

"If I can make it through the whole week without gambling I will treat myself to a nice lunch out on Friday."

"Instead of spending Sunday afternoons gambling like I usually do, I will spend the day doing something I really enjoy like hiking in the country."

EXERCISE

Identify as many rewards for yourself as possible:



Your family and friends can also be involved. It may be beneficial to include them in your plans.

EXAMPLE

"With the money I save from not gambling this month I will treat my spouse and I to a romantic evening alone."

“If I can go a whole month without gambling, my friends and I have agreed to go out for a big night on the town.”

EXERCISE

List some rewards that your friends and family can help you arrange.



Remember, if a slip occurs do not become discouraged. The process of change is not always a straight line, but a slip does not mean you have failed. Take what you have learned and apply it to staying on track in the future.



