

# **STAYING ON TRACK**

A guide to remaining gambling-free

**BOOKLET 8**

**DEALING WITH MOOD AND  
SUBSTANCE ABUSE PROBLEMS**

Brought to you by the University of Calgary.  
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This is the final booklet, Dealing with Mood and Substance Abuse Problems, on preventing relapse in problem gambling in the ***Staying on Track*** series. Mood and substance abuse problems, and how to deal with them are discussed in detail.

## Depression and substance use

For some people problem gambling is only part of the picture. People who have had problems with gambling sometimes also have problems with alcohol, drugs or depression. This booklet helps you assess what to do if depression and substance use are issues relevant to you.

Many gamblers report they have had problems with depression, alcohol, or substance abuse at other times in their lives, even if they are not currently experiencing problems. Some people may have started to gamble as a way of escaping from unhappiness, using gambling to avoid their feelings or as a way of adding excitement to their lives. Some people use drugs or alcohol as another way of dealing with unpleasant feelings or making themselves feel better or more stimulated.

Gambling may have taken up a large part of your life. It may be that you still miss gambling, and this may affect your mood, leaving you feeling sad and down. It may be that you have started to use alcohol or other drugs in an effort to fill up the space left by quitting gambling.

You may not feel that you have problems with your mood, or with alcohol or drug use, or you may have become more aware of possible problem areas in your life now that you have quit gambling. It is useful to take a closer look at these areas. Even if you don't feel you have any problems, take a few minutes to do the following quick screening exercises and take a close look at your answers. You have already made a big change in your life by quitting gambling. If some of your answers concern you it may be time to make some more efforts to help yourself.

Besides being problems in themselves, excessive drinking or drug use and depressed mood are all possible roads to relapse. Paying attention to problems in these areas will help you stay on track as well as improve the quality of your life.

# Depression

## What is depression?

Depression can affect how you think, how you act and how you feel. Serious depression affects 1 in 10 Canadians at some point in their lives. People who are depressed tend to feel sad or “down” most of the day every day or feel they have lost interest in things they used to enjoy.

## How do you know if you might be depressed?

This is a brief questionnaire that asks you to rate how you have felt or behaved in the last two weeks.

### EXERCISE

For each statement, circle which number you feel describes how you have felt in the past two weeks. 1 = rarely or none of the time, 2 = Some or a little of the time, 3 = Moderate amount of time, 4 = Most or all of the time.

- |                                                                                                                                                          |   |   |   |   |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|
| 1. I felt depressed or ‘down’ most of the day.                                                                                                           | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 2. I lost interest in most things I usually enjoy.                                                                                                       | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 3. I have lost my appetite – I’m losing weight.<br>without intending to OR I have a much<br>larger appetite than usual – I can’t seem<br>to stop eating. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 4. I have a great deal of difficulty falling<br>asleep and staying asleep OR I wake up<br>very early and can’t get back to sleep.                        | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

- |                                                                  |   |   |   |   |
|------------------------------------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|
| 5. I want to sleep all the time, it's hard for me to get moving. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 6. I feel tired and have little energy.                          | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 7. I have a hard time concentrating.                             | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 8. I have a hard time making decisions.                          | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 9. I have been thinking about killing myself.                    | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

After you have rated your feelings over the past 2 weeks take a look at your answers. These questions ask about symptoms of depression. If you have answered several of them affirmatively you may be experiencing depression.

## What can you do about it?

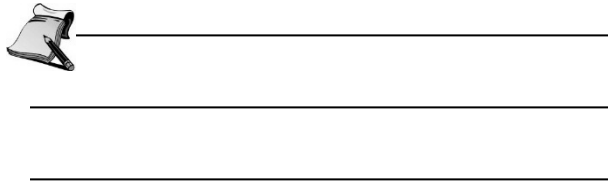
There are various things you can do if you think you may be depressed. *If you feel suicidal you must seek professional help.* Get in touch with your doctor or a mental health service agency. Crisis support is available through the Gambling Help Line (1-800-665-9676).

If you are feeling down you may decide to seek help from your doctor or a mental health professional or you may decide to make some changes on your own. Several of the strategies suggested in Booklet 6, which discussed lifestyle changes, may be helpful.

It may sound overly simple, but one of the most important strategies for improving a depressed mood is to get involved in pleasurable activities. When you are depressed it may be hard to imagine enjoying yourself, but it can help to make a list of things you enjoy and make an effort to do at least one of them every day.

## EXERCISE

Make a list of things that give you pleasure. Include some that involve other people and some that are just for you. Try to think of things that are free or inexpensive, as well as activities that may have costs involved. Then give yourself permission to choose at least one thing from the list every day and do it! Refer back to booklet 6 for more ideas:



## Alcohol use

### How much is too much?

The safe upper limit for drinking alcohol is considered to be no more than 3-4 drinks per day, 3-4 times per week for healthy men, and no more than 2-3 drinks per day, 2-3 times per week for healthy women (who are not pregnant). If you drink more than these amounts, or if you feel your drinking is a problem, then you are drinking too much.

### Is alcohol a problem in your life?

Consider whether your use of alcohol is interfering with your life. Is your alcohol use interfering with your work or school responsibilities, causing health concerns or interfering with close relationships?

### EXERCISE

Think about your life as you ask yourself the following questions:

Have you ever felt the need to cut down on your drinking?

YES ☐ NO ☐

Have you ever felt annoyed by someone criticizing your drinking?

YES ☐ NO ☐

Have you ever felt guilty about your drinking?

YES ☐ NO ☐

Have you ever felt the need for an eye opener (drink first thing in the morning)?

YES ☐ NO ☐

Take a look at your answers. If you have answered “yes” to two or more of these questions, you may have an alcohol problem.

## Drug use

Drug use does not just mean the use of illegal substances like marijuana or cocaine. Prescription and over the counter drugs can also be used to excess. Even if you never use illegal drugs, you may be over using tranquillisers, sleeping pills or pain medication.

### Do you have a problem with drugs?

In the same way you thought about alcohol use take a moment to think about your drug use. Consider whether your use of drugs is interfering with your life. Is your drug use interfering with your work or school responsibilities, causing health concerns or interfering with close relationships?

Take the time to answer these questions. Remember to think about your answers in relation to the use of any kind of drugs: prescription, non-prescription and illegal substances.

### EXERCISE

Ask yourself the following questions:

Have you ever felt the need to cut down on your drug use?

YES ☐ NO ☐

Have you ever felt annoyed by someone criticizing your drug use?

YES ☐ NO ☐



Have you ever felt guilty about your drug use?

YES ☐ NO ☐

Have you ever felt the need to use drugs to 'help you get through the day'?

YES ☐ NO ☐

Take a look at your answers. If you have answered 'yes' to two or more of these questions you may have a problem with drug use.

## If alcohol or drugs may be a problem

After looking at your answers you may feel that you have a problem with alcohol or drugs. The Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission offers help free of charge to people with drug and alcohol problems. You also may want to talk to your family doctor or to a mental health professional.

If you want to try to deal with these issues on your own you could try the following strategies:

### Monitor your use

Keep a record of how much alcohol you are drinking or how often and how much you are using drugs. Keep track for a week or two. If you are using more than you are comfortable with then:

### Set a target

You could decide to abstain completely for a while. Even if you want to keep using drugs or alcohol it's helpful to stop completely for a week or two. If you don't feel it's necessary to abstain, you could set a goal. Some people decide to limit themselves to using drugs or alcohol one day a week, or they may limit themselves to a set amount for a particular time period such as a week.

Pay attention to where and when you are using (overusing) drugs and alcohol

Think about the last time you used too much. What were you doing? Who were you with? What were you feeling?

## Think of alternatives

Just like when you were trying to stop gambling, it helps to get involved in other activities when you want to drink or use drugs. Use the list of alternatives you made up in Booklet 6 to remind you of other things you could do.

## Don't use drugs or alcohol to help you cope with difficult situations

Sometimes people use drugs or alcohol to help them to be more sociable, or to make it easier to avoid expressing their anger. Is this something you do? If so, what are some other ways to deal with difficult situations?



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Quitting gambling was a big step. It didn't happen without effort on your part. Using these booklets to help stay on track is important. Paying attention to possible problems with mood, alcohol or drug use will help you to keep yourself relapse free.



