

The cover features a large orange rectangle at the top, a teal rectangle in the middle, and a grey rectangle at the bottom. The text is positioned within the teal rectangle.

STAYING ON TRACK

A Guide to Remain Gambling-Free

BOOKLETS 1-8

Brought to you by the University of Calgary

Funded by the Alberta Gambling Research Institute



STAYING ON TRACK

Overview

BOOKLET 1

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About Staying on Track

Staying on Track is a new program offered as part of a research project through the University of Calgary and the Alberta Gaming Research Institute. Its goal is to help people who have quit gambling to stay away from it for good.

Many treatment programs for people with gambling problems offer participants the opportunity to attend support groups for long-term follow-up after treatment ends. Many people choose not to attend these groups. Staying on Track offers these individuals an alternative approach to preventing relapse.

Many other problem gamblers quit gambling without the help of formal treatment. Staying on Track can offer these individuals additional help in overcoming this challenging addiction.

Staying on Track contains information that is based on research with problem gamblers who have successfully quit. Staying on Track is brand new and is being evaluated, funded by a grant from the Alberta Gaming Research Institute. Your experience with this program will be used to further develop and improve these materials.

We ask you to read the Staying on Track booklet and then save it. Some of the information may be a review for you; other information may be new. Read the booklet from time to time to help you be prepared to prevent a return to gambling.

Nine tips to preventing relapse

1. Avoid relapse by identifying triggers.

There are certain circumstances that are likely to cause urges to gamble in people who have quit gambling. These circumstances can be external situations or internal thoughts and feelings. Based on hundreds of interviews with former gamblers, we know that the following reasons are common triggers: dealing with negative emotions such as anger, sadness and frustration, a desire to make money, combating boredom, and the belief that winning is possible.

Avoiding triggers that will cause you to be tempted to gamble is the first major strategy for success. The situations in which you gambled in the past are most likely high-risk triggers for you.

EXERCISE

List triggers that cause you to be tempted to gamble:



2. Prepare a budget.

First, you will want to figure out your monthly income so that you can successfully put aside money to repay your debt or increase your savings.

EXERCISE

Fill in what your monthly expenses are:

Rent/Mortgage	\$ _____
Bills (power, cable, heat)	\$ _____
Transport	\$ _____
Food	\$ _____
Entertainment (not including gambling) Medical	\$ _____
Loan/credit card payments	\$ _____
Child care expenses	\$ _____
Other expenses	\$ _____
Debt from other sources	\$ _____
Late bills	\$ _____

TOTAL EXPENSES

Next compare your income and expenses:

Total income	\$ _____
Total expenses	\$ _____
Subtract your expenses from your income	
Balance	\$ _____

If your balance is zero or less than zero, you might want to consider how you can change this. Is there a category you can cut back on? Is it possible to increase your income by working more hours or taking on a second job?

If you feel you need some help in getting control over your finances, think about contacting a free financial counseling service agency in your area. Most of these agencies will offer advice on debt consolidation and/or debt repayment.

3. Limit access to money.

In addition to improving your financial situation, it is also important to avoid further losses (i.e. relapsing). Most people find that if they have cash in their pocket they are more likely to gamble. Many people who do successfully stop gambling state that getting their cash flow under control is critical. Removing the temptation to gamble whenever possible will help you to avoid a relapse.

Turn over finances to a trusted family member or friend. It is normal to feel reluctant to hand over control of your money. However, many gamblers have found this to be extremely helpful especially during the first stages of recovery. Getting your family and friends involved and gaining their support is an excellent way to avoid relapse.

If you don't feel comfortable getting someone else involved, continue to manage your finances but arrange to limit your access to money (for example canceling credit cards or not keeping cash on hand).

Remember - it takes time to recover from the financial consequences of gambling. Don't give up. By reading this booklet and making some changes, you can get control of your finances.

4. Develop ways to deal with urges.

To be successful in quitting gambling you must learn to cope with urges or temptations to gamble. The first step is to become aware of the source of your urges. When do you experience these urges? What strategies do you use that work well? What strategies do not work for you?

EXERCISE

Make a list of what causes your urges.



There are two major ways to cope with urges, coping BY THINKING and coping BY ACTING. Here are some examples of how former gamblers were able resist even the most overwhelming urges to gamble:

BY THINKING

- Talked self out of it
- Consciously decided not to gamble
- Thought of the bills they had to pay
- Realized it is not a way to get ahead
- Used self control/will power
- Remembered past gambling problems

BY ACTING

- Spoke with a friend/spouse
- Found something else to spend money on
- Went to see a friend that didn't gamble
- Made sure they did not have access to money
- Walked away
- Did other activities instead
- Avoided friends who gambled
- Went to a Gamblers Anonymous meeting

EXERCISE

List strategies you can use to combat your urges. Try to list both thinking and acting strategies that will help you to fight an urge.



Studies show that the most successful quitters use self-talk along with an action to resist an urge.

5. Challenge the thinking that allows you to gamble

We think ourselves into acting. One strategy to avoid relapse is to become aware of the thinking patterns that allow you to start or to continue to gamble. Consider the last time you gambled. What thoughts gave you permission to gamble?

EXERCISE

Go through the check list and mark anything that applies to you.

- ☐ Did you forget about all the money you had lost and, instead, told yourself that you would win this time?
- ☐ Did you convince yourself that your system or skill would come through for you this time?
- ☐ Did you explain away past losses as “a fluke”?
- ☐ Did you convince yourself that you were due to win because of past losses?
- ☐ Did you convince yourself that you could influence the outcome in some way (for example, choosing the right machine, picking the right lines or numbers)?
- ☐ Did you convince yourself that gambling could solve your financial problems?
- ☐ Did you convince yourself that the odds of winning were better than they really were?

These thoughts often occur without our awareness. Focusing on your thinking patterns can bring them into your awareness. It can be helpful to examine how accurate your thoughts about gambling are. What are the odds of winning your favorite game? How much have you lost? Can you really solve your financial problems through gambling?

EXERCISE

Prepare some challenges to your thinking patterns:



6. Get more balance into your life.

Too much of one thing can be bad for you. For example, people who are “workaholics” may achieve a great deal in their work lives, but often experience more stress, have strained relationships, face more health problems, (like headaches and high blood pressure) and are at greater risk for abusing substances. A balanced lifestyle is one that includes a good balance of pleasurable activities and productive activities.

Since gambling has probably been a central focus of your life, both in terms of time and energy, replacement activities are essential in order to stay on track and quit gambling successfully. Successful change requires a balanced lifestyle because a balanced lifestyle helps you remain stress-hardy. Stress-hardy people can cope well with the minor problems and crises of life. Have you begun to develop new activities to fill the time left from quitting gambling? Be sure to make some of these activities pleasurable, some physically active, some mentally active (such as playing games, reading, doing puzzles), and some social.

EXERCISE

List new activities that you have already begun or could begin.



7. Deal with possible problems of depression.

For many people gambling is only part of the problem. They have battled with depression at other times in their life, even before they had a gambling problem. Their gambling may be, in part, related to a desire to escape from depression. Is this true for you? Are you feeling sad or down most of the day, nearly every day? Do you find that nothing gives you pleasure? Have these feelings continued despite having quit gambling for some time? Depression is associated with relapse in gambling – it is difficult to sustain the energy needed to stay away from gambling when you are depressed.

Effective treatment for depression is available. Talk with your family doctor or call your local mental health service agency (found in all phone books). Recognize depression as a legitimate problem to be solved.

8. Deal with substance abuse problems.

Alcohol and other drug problems are very commonly associated with gambling problems. It is important to make an honest assessment of your use of alcohol and other drugs. Have you felt a need to cut back on your drinking or drug use? Have you felt annoyed by criticisms of your use? Are you drinking more than one or two drinks per day? Have you felt guilty about your use? Has your use increased since you quit gambling? Do you use alcohol or drugs to cope with problems?

One reason to monitor your use carefully, is that alcohol and other drug use can lessen your resolve to stay away from gambling. Do you have the same motivation not to gamble after a couple of drinks or drug use?

EXERCISE

Think about your recent alcohol and other drug use. List some things that you can do to take action if needed



If you think alcohol or drugs is a problem for you, help is available from your family doctor or local mental health service agency (found in all phone books).

9. Get back on the wagon if you slip

Hopefully you will be immediately and permanently successful in your attempt to quit gambling. However, quitting gambling is a process that often involves one or more slips back into gambling. It is rare that a person quits “cold turkey” and never gambles again. If you do slip or relapse it is easy to become frustrated and to give up. To avoid this it can be helpful to prepare yourself in advance to “get back on the wagon” if you slip. Why did you quit gambling in the first place? What are some of the positive effects of quitting that you are hoping for in the short-term? In the long-term? Who can help to remind you of these benefits if you slip? In short, make a plan to be ready to re-motivate yourself if you need to do so along the way.

EXERCISE

Outline your plan:



Quitting an addiction such as gambling is challenging. Many people report that it took them several attempts at quitting before they were successful.

If you have quit gambling for a period of time and then slip, do not become discouraged. Use the tips in this booklet to help you remain on track and stay gambling free.

STAYING ON TRACK

Avoiding Relapse

BOOKLET 2

Avoiding Relapse

In this booklet, we cover causes of relapses as reported by gamblers and suggest strategies to avoid a relapse.

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What is a relapse?

Relapse can be broadly defined as resuming an activity after you have quit for a period of time. Research indicates that as many as 75% of gamblers return to gambling shortly after a serious attempt to quit. By being aware of high-risk situations for relapse you have a better chance of preparing yourself to deal with these situations, and you will be better able to maintain your goal of quitting gambling. This booklet is designed to help gamblers who have quit gambling become aware of the possible triggers of relapse.

Real stories told to us by gamblers are used to illustrate each cause of relapse. As you read each story, think about whether this trigger is a risk for you.

Triggers of relapse reported by gamblers

Dealing with negative situations or emotions

Many people use gambling as a way to avoid or cope with negative emotions such as anger, frustration, loneliness, guilt and anxiety. Similarly, they may gamble to escape negative situations like family problems or tension at work. Negative situations or emotions make a person feel uncomfortable. Gambling can be viewed as a way to relieve or forget these unpleasant feelings.

Alan:

“My son had told me a few days earlier that he was moving to Saskatchewan to live with his mother. He was out with his friends that night and I came home from work to an empty house. I didn’t even think about it, I just went (gambling). I was very angry that he was moving back.”

Sally:

“In the back of my mind the main reason (for gambling) is because my husband and I had some relationship problems that have caused me some anxiety.”

Seeking excitement and enjoyment

The chance to win money can be very enjoyable and exciting. Society views gambling as an enjoyable form of recreation just like going to a movie or playing sports. People who quit gambling may miss this pastime. Booklet 6 offers some suggestions on how to replace gambling with healthier activities.

Amanda:

“I get to a certain point, it’s usually when I am trying to stop gambling, when I say I’m gonna do other things like go to restaurants and stuff like this, but I always get bored. Then I say to myself the only thing I enjoy is gambling.”

Nick:

“Well it was like entertainment. I could have spent it drinking. It’s something to do. You could have spent \$10 on a movie and another \$10 on popcorn and candy too. Instead I spent the \$20 on gambling.”

The desire to make money

The idea of winning a large sum of money in a short time with little effort is appealing to everyone. Many people who have quit gambling did so because of financial trouble. However, they may still believe that gambling is an easy way to make money to pay off their debts. Booklet 5 explains in greater detail how gambling is not profitable in the long run.

Steve:

“I wanted to win big money. A VLT machine is almost like a savings account. It’s like one of these accounts where you deposit money and deposit money and every once in a while you’re able to make a withdrawal. You know what I’m saying? So on account, I’ve got thousands of dollars. I should be able to make a withdrawal one of these days. But the question is what day, what time of day, and where, which branch?”

Combating boredom

Many people who gamble do so on a fairly regular basis. When a person decides to quit gambling they are left with a lot of spare time on their hands. Sometimes people don't know what to do with their time when they're not gambling. Bob:

"Tuesdays and Wednesdays are my days off from work and I had to find something to do. I guess I was gambling for something to do on those days."

Socializing and fitting in

For some people gambling is a social activity. If you belong to a social group that gambles, you might feel pressured to continue. If you decide to quit playing poker for example, then you miss seeing your gambling friends on poker night.

Janet:

"My grandma was in town from Ontario, and she really wanted to go to bingo. How could I say no since she was paying? I didn't feel guilty because I was playing bingo with my grandma after not playing for a while. I was being social."

Having access to money

You can imagine the temptation for an ex-smoker if they have a package of cigarettes in their pocket. The same temptation is true for gamblers with money in their hands. Ex-gamblers will tell you that they were not intending to gamble but when the opportunity arose and they had the money in their pockets, they just couldn't resist. Upcoming booklet 3 offers ways to limit your access to money.

Sally:

"The only reason why I wasn't gambling at that point, was basically because I was very low in funds. I was barely making the rent, never mind the whole gambling experience. Once I had some money in my pocket though, I went again."

Thinking you can win

Many gamblers report that they relapsed because they were sure they would win, or they saw other people winning and thought they could too. Gamblers often claim that they “feel lucky”, even though there is nothing they can do to influence the chance of winning.

Mike:

“I had to win. I was overdue. Also, it was a full moon and there were signs pointing my way that I was going to be lucky...but obviously the signs were wrong.”

Control issues

Gamblers who have quit decide to see if they can gamble in a more controlled manner. For example, they may try to reduce the amount of money or limit the amount of time they allow themselves to spend gambling.

Carol:

“I had free spare time, availability of funds and I was just curious. I wanted to see what the hullabulla was about cause I thought I was cured.”

Stephen:

“Well I didn’t really consider it a slip, I considered it a test. I would like to be able to just gamble like a normal person. I guess what I was trying to do was lose my \$40 to see if I would go to the bank machine.”

Giving up

Gambling is hard to quit and sometimes people just want to stop trying. The most common reason why ex-gamblers stop trying to quit is a slip. Gamblers will tell you that once you slip, even if it’s only once, it is very easy to become discouraged and give up.

Dwayne:

“After losing as much as I did on Friday, I knew that I had done it again and my money wouldn’t last till the next cheque. So I kind of thought that if I didn’t have enough to get me through till payday then it really didn’t matter that I spent what very little I had.”

Giving into urges

Giving into urges is easy to do since an urge can be very strong. If you enjoy gambling and have quit for a couple of weeks it may be very hard to resist gambling when the opportunity arises. Similarly, if gambling has become a habit it can be very hard to break the pattern. Booklet 4 will advise on how to deal with urges.

Nancy:

“I was walking along the Avenue like I usually do on Sunday afternoons, and I had to stop in the pub because I knew the VLT’s were in there.”

Research indicates that the number one cause of relapse was people thinking that they could win, followed closely by the desire to make money, to combat boredom, giving into urges and avoiding negative emotions. By being aware of high-risk situations, you are better able to avoid a slip.

EXERCISE

Think about your past gambling patterns and list three high-risk situations that may cause you to relapse.

EXAMPLE

Every time I walk past the pub on my way home from work I feel like going in and playing the VLT’s.

Situation 1



Situation 2



Situation 3



You will be looking back at this list later, once you have read about some strategies to help you deal with these situations.

Maintaining your goal to quit gambling

The following are some factors people reported as being helpful in staying quit and staying on track.

Support of your family

A lot of gamblers tend to lie to their families about the extent of their gambling. Families of gamblers have reported that once they found out about the gambling problem and its extent, they were better able to understand what the gambler was experiencing. Be honest with family members and friends and they will be better equipped to offer support.

Self-control or will power

Many ex-gamblers will tell you that eventually they get so fed up with losing money or lying all the time to hide the extent of their gambling, they become determined to stop. This type of determination is called will power

Changing your social life activities

Find something else to do socially which doesn't involve gambling. For example, instead of going to the casino every Friday night with friends try going to a hockey game instead. If you regularly meet with friends in a lounge where there are VLTs, you could suggest meeting someplace with no VLTs. See booklet 6 for more suggestions.

Experiencing a change in your financial status

Over the long run, you lose more money than you make gambling. The realization of how much money you have lost due to gambling can be incentive to quit. Similarly, after you quit gambling the money that you save is an incentive to maintain your abstinence.

Developing a sense of accomplishment, pride and self-respect

It feels good when you accomplish what you set out to do. Many people are proud of themselves for being able to overcome a difficult problem like gambling. Ex-gamblers say that they were embarrassed about their gambling activities. Others say that they were ashamed of all the lies they told in order to hide their gambling. Quitting gambling is the first step in regaining your self-respect. This feeling can make it easier to keep from gambling.

Recalling past gambling problems

Gamblers will tell you that thinking of all the problems that gambling has caused for them, such as relationship problems and financial problems, can motivate them to continue their abstinence.

Out of the seven factors listed above, the top five reasons (short term and long term), which gamblers reported helped them to maintain their goal, were:

SHORT TERM FACTORS

	PEOPLE REPORTING FACTOR AS HELPFUL
Developing a sense of accomplishment, pride and self-respect	100%
Self-control or will-power	61%
Recalling past gambling problems	57%
Changing the activities of your social life	52%
Having the support of your family	48%

LONG TERM FACTORS

	PEOPLE REPORTING FACTOR AS HELPFUL
Developing a sense of accomplishment, pride and self-respect	100%
Recalling past gambling problems	86%
Self-control or will-power	79%
Experiencing a financial status change	63%
Changing your recreational activities	58%

EXERCISE

For each of the three high-risk situations you described on page 7, list all of the maintenance factors which you feel will be helpful in preventing you from gambling in these high-risk situations.

EXAMPLE

I will walk home from work a different way so that I will not be tempted to go into the pub and play those VLT's.

Maintenance factors that could be useful in Situation 1:



Maintenance factors that could be useful in Situation 2:



Maintenance factors that could be useful in Situation 3:



By becoming aware of the triggers of relapse you can identify situations in which you are at risk of relapsing. Being aware of these potentially dangerous situations gives you the opportunity to devise a plan to resist gambling before you find yourself in a high risk situation and will help you stay on track.

STAYING ON TRACK

Taking Control of Your Finances

BOOKLET 3

Taking Control of Your Finances

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Limiting your access to money	36

In this booklet, you will assess your financial situation and make appropriate adjustments. The importance of limiting your access to money is discussed.

Financial assessment

You have likely experienced a number of financial consequences as a result of your gambling. It is not uncommon for gamblers in recovery to feel overwhelmed by their heavy debts. You may even feel that the only way out of your financial problems is to gamble. However, it is important to remind yourself that gambling is not a way to repay your debts. Financial pressures that are not dealt with may also lead to relapse due to increased anxiety and worry.

Taking an active approach to relieve your financial situation is critical. It is important to tackle your financial difficulties head on rather than seeking bailouts from family/friends. This booklet will help you assess your financial situation, develop a plan, and learn ways to control and limit your access to money.

EXERCISE

Complete this checklist to find out if you are heading for financial trouble.

- ☐ Have you missed any of your monthly credit payments?
- ☐ Are any of your credit cards near or over the limit?
- ☐ Are you using credit cards to pay for daily needs (food, gas, clothing)?
- ☐ Are you using your bank overdraft for day-to-day living?
- ☐ Are you getting behind in your rent/mortgage or utility payments?
- ☐ Have you used one credit card to pay off another?
- ☐ Have you been borrowing money from family or friends to get by?
- ☐ Have you been refused credit because of your credit rating?
- ☐ Do you worry about money and your debts?
- ☐ Are any of your creditors threatening legal action against you (e.g., threaten to sue you, garnishee your wages, seize your car)?
- ☐ Are you getting phone calls or letters from collectors about overdue payments?
- ☐ Do you and your spouse, or other family members or friends, argue about your debts/financial situation?

Answering YES to any of the previous questions may mean that you need to take steps to prevent or solve financial problems.

In order for you to successfully manage your money, you first need to become familiar with your financial situation. Identifying your income, creating a budget, determining what you owe, and creating a plan are all helpful steps to keep you on track.

First, you will want to figure out your monthly income so that you can successfully put aside money to repay your debts or increase your savings.

EXERCISE

Identify how much you have by tracking your monthly income.

Income Sources:	Each Month:
Wages (gambler)	\$ _____
Disability pension or insurance	\$ _____
Wages (others in household)	\$ _____
Child Support/Alimony Payments	\$ _____
Pension/Retirement Plan Benefits	\$ _____
Trust Fund	\$ _____
Unemployment Benefits	\$ _____
Tips/Commissions (average each month)	\$ _____
Welfare Payments	\$ _____
Food Stamps	\$ _____
Social Security	\$ _____
Investment Income (dividends, interest, etc.)	\$ _____
Other	\$ _____
Total Income:	\$ _____

The next step involves calculating your expenses. Performing this exercise will help you establish where you might be overspending in your budget as well as help you determine how much money you can pay towards your debts.

EXERCISE

Identify how much you need to live, by determining your monthly expenses. Later on you will revise your expenses, so leave the second column blank:

Expenses:	Each Month:	Revised:
Rent/ Mortgage Payment	\$ _____	\$ _____
Home Maintenance/ Repair (average)	\$ _____	\$ _____
Utilities	\$ _____	\$ _____
Telephone Bill	\$ _____	\$ _____
Groceries (average)	\$ _____	\$ _____
Car payment	\$ _____	\$ _____
Car Insurance/Gas/Repairs (average)	\$ _____	\$ _____
Clothing (average)	\$ _____	\$ _____
Other Transportation	\$ _____	\$ _____
Meals Out	\$ _____	\$ _____
Child Care	\$ _____	\$ _____
Laundry and Dry-cleaning	\$ _____	\$ _____
School Expenses	\$ _____	\$ _____
Medical Expenses	\$ _____	\$ _____
Entertainment	\$ _____	\$ _____
Life/Medical Insurance/Premiums	\$ _____	\$ _____
Loans/ Credit Card Payments	\$ _____	\$ _____
Cable TV	\$ _____	\$ _____
Property Taxes	\$ _____	\$ _____
Sport Activities/Events (average)	\$ _____	\$ _____
Cigarettes/Alcohol (average)	\$ _____	\$ _____
Other	\$ _____	\$ _____
Total Expenses:	\$ _____	\$ _____

This exercise will likely show that your expenses exceed your income. It is important for you to become aware of the reality of your situation

Acknowledging your debts and financial situation will better prepare you for the changes that need to be made in the future.

EXERCISE

Compare your income and expenses:

Total income	\$ _____
Total expenses	\$ _____

Subtract your expenses from your income.

Left over:	\$ _____
-------------------	----------

**If this number is negative,
then your expenses exceed
your income.**

You will need to have a clear idea of what you owe before you can begin reducing your debts. This exercise will help you determine how much you owe and who you owe it to.

EXERCISE

Identify how much you owe:

Bank loans	\$ _____
Others (family and friends)	\$ _____
Credit cards	\$ _____
Mortgage	\$ _____
Student loans	\$ _____
Car loan	\$ _____
Stores	\$ _____
Unpaid medical or health bills	\$ _____
Unpaid taxes	\$ _____
Unpaid bills	\$ _____
Total owed:	\$ _____

EXERCISE

Identify the financial issues that you are most concerned with.

EXAMPLE

I am worried that I will lose my house and car because I am behind on my payments.

I am worried that I will not be able to pay child support again this month.



Making adjustments and developing a plan

Reviewing your financial situation here may be your first look at the “total” impact that gambling has had on your life. After examining the whole picture, the situation may appear even more serious than you first thought. It is normal to feel overwhelmed, however, it is important to remember that, with a plan and not gambling, it is possible to recover from financial difficulties.

The first step in your plan should be to think of ways to increase your income.

EXAMPLE

I will take on a second part-time job.

EXERCISE

List ways you can increase your income:



The next step is to decrease your expenses.

EXAMPLE

<i>Expenses:</i>	<i>Each Month:</i>	<i>Revised:</i>
<i>Clothing (average)</i>	<i>\$ 60-70</i>	<i>\$ 20-30</i>
<i>Other Transportation</i>	<i>\$ 20</i>	<i>\$ 10</i>
<i>Meals Out</i>	<i>\$ 100</i>	<i>\$ 40</i>

Below are some tips to reduce your expenses:

- ☐ Make your own food; it's cheaper than eating out all the time.
- ☐ Buy generic brands; name brands are more expensive.
- ☐ Use coupons whenever possible.
- ☐ It pays to shop around for the best prices.
- ☐ Car pool or walk to work if possible.
- ☐ Buy second hand furniture and audio equipment rather than renting or buying it new.
- ☐ Barter with friends and family for services. For example, if you were a plumber you could fix the neighbor's sink in exchange for the neighbor babysitting your child for an afternoon.
- ☐ Take advantage of second hand stores for clothes or children's toys.
- ☐ Participate in "free of charge" activities at your local recreational center.
- ☐ Pack a lunch for day outings instead of buying one.
- ☐ If you want to go to a movie try to go on a discount day or to a matinee.

EXERCISE

Go back to page 30 and fill in the second column with your revised expenses.

Seek professional advice in order to set up a debt repayment plan.

Seek professional counseling if:

- ☐ There is not enough to cover payments after covering basic living expenses.
- ☐ You are 3 or more months late with any payment.
- ☐ Creditors are threatening you or have started legal action.
- ☐ You need help assessing your finances or can't decide what to do.
- ☐ You are considering bankruptcy.

Be sure not to take any financial steps until you seek professional advice.

Credit Counselling Services of Alberta

Calgary:	(403) 265-2201
Edmonton:	(780) 423-5265
Elsewhere:	Toll free (1-888-294-0076)

EXERCISE

For each financial issue that you identified on page 6, think about what steps you will take to address them.

EXAMPLE

I will go down to Credit Counseling Services tomorrow to set up a plan.



Limiting your access to money

In addition to stabilizing your financial situation, it is also important to avoid further losses. Most people find that if they have cash in their pocket they are more likely to gamble. Many people who do successfully stop gambling say that getting their cash flow under control is crucial. Removing the temptation to gamble whenever possible will help you to avoid a relapse.

This may seem like a lot of trouble, however, you have likely become quite creative when it comes to obtaining money. Following the strategies will make it more difficult to relapse.

1) Turn over finances to a trusted family member or friend. It is normal to feel reluctant to handover control of your money. However, many gamblers have found this to be extremely helpful during the first stages of recovery. Getting your family and friends involved and gaining their support is an excellent way to avoid relapse.

EXERCISE



Tick off all strategies you would consider trying:

- ☐ Arrange to receive only the cash needed for the day's expenses.
- ☐ Turn over your credit cards or bankcards to a family member for safekeeping.
- ☐ Have your wages collected by a spouse or other family member.
- ☐ Arrange for a family member or friend to sign for cheques.
- ☐ Arrange to have 2 signatures to take out cash.
- ☐ Set up a joint account with a family member or a friend
- ☐ Give a family member or friend the rent and bill money. (If you don't feel comfortable getting someone else involved, continue to manage your finances but arrange to limit your access to money.)

EXERCISE



Tick off all strategies you would consider trying:

- ☐ Cancel your credit cards or bank cards.
- ☐ Make sure cheques are automatically deposited in your bank account.
- ☐ Create long term savings bonds that can't be touched.
- ☐ Keep a record of all money spent and earned (budgeting).
- ☐ Take out only the cash needed for the day's expenses.
- ☐ Limit the amount of money you can withdraw in a week (by making arrangements with your bank).
- ☐ Tell family and friends NOT to lend you money.

- ☐ Do not keep large amounts of money at home
-
- ☐ Don't keep cash on hand.
- ☐ Leave money at home.
- ☐ Avoid a job where you handle cash.
- ☐ Arrange for how you will handle a gift of money or other unexpected lump sums of cash

By becoming aware of the triggers of relapse you can identify situations in which you are at risk of relapsing. Being aware of these potentially dangerous situations gives you the opportunity to devise a plan to resist gambling before you find yourself in a high risk situation and will help you stay on track.

STAYING ON TRACK

Dealing With Urges

BOOKLET 4

Dealing With Urges

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Dealing with urges	43
Effective coping strategies	44
Ineffective coping strategies	48

In this booklet, we cover gambling urges and how to deal with them in more detail.

What is an urge?

Most of us have experienced an urge. An urge is a strong desire, temptation, impulse or craving for a particular substance or activity. The strength of an urge depends on the person experiencing it and the situation in which the urge occurs. Dealing with an urge to gamble is not that different from dealing with an urge to eat, drink, or smoke. Some people who have quit gambling have reported that they can physically feel the urge to gamble. This booklet is designed to help you identify your urges and develop effective coping strategies.

EXERCISE

Take a moment to describe your urges.



Identifying urges

Most people know when an urge is happening. Identifying why the urge is happening, however, can be tricky. It is important to recognize where the urge comes from as this information can be used to help you avoid the urge and deal with it more effectively. For example, if you experience an urge while driving near a gambling venue, try taking a different route. Urges can occur as a reaction to environmental cues, as a response to internal feelings, or even out of the blue.

It can be helpful to remember specific times that you have gambled since you have been trying to overcome this problem.

EXERCISE

Try to identify several different occasions when urges occur.



Appearing below is a list of the various causes of urges, as reported by people trying to quit gambling.

EXERCISE



Check off all the factors that you feel contribute to your urges to gamble on the occasions you have listed.

- ☐ Boredom.
- ☐ Free time.
- ☐ Feeling depressed or lonely.
- ☐ Wanting to gamble for pleasure, entertainment, or excitement.
- ☐ To escape from problems or to forget troubles.
- ☐ Feeling broke (worrying about debt).
- ☐ Wanting to celebrate.
- ☐ Chasing financial loses.
- ☐ Pressures at work.
- ☐ To avoid people.
- ☐ Problems at home.
- ☐ Out of habit.
- ☐ Having access to money/extra pocket money.
- ☐ To be social with people.

EXERCISE

List the causes of the urges that you find most difficult to resist



Dealing with urges

The ability to deal with an urge (i.e. not gamble) depends on your motivation and coping skills. Increasing and maintaining your motivation is discussed in upcoming booklet 7. In this section, we will look at the coping skills best suited for you.

To be successful in quitting gambling you must learn to cope with urges and temptations. Urges are usually the strongest during the first few weeks of quitting. It is important for you to develop new ways of coping when this happens, but first it is necessary to evaluate your existing coping skills. This will help you to identify factors that cause you to gamble and will increase your awareness about situations where you may be at risk.

There are two types of effective coping:

BY THINKING

Use self-talk to fight the urge to gamble.

In research, almost all the people interviewed who had successfully overcome a gambling problem said that they used “thinking” strategies such as remembering past gambling problems and thinking about how well they were doing in accomplishing their goal.

BY ACTING

Do things that will help you stay away from gambling. Over half the people interviewed who had successfully overcome a gambling problem reported that they made a change in their leisure and recreational activities. Almost half made a change in their social life.

Effective coping strategies

Recording your urges and coping strategies can increase your understanding of why you gamble and it can help you to identify the strategies that are most effective for avoiding gambling.

EXERCISE

Record an example of when you effectively coped with an urge to gamble

EXAMPLE

Where were you and with whom?

I was driving alone after a fight with my partner.

Describe how you were feeling:

I was feeling angry, upset, and bored.

What did you say to yourself?

I told myself that if I went gambling (and lost) I would just end up feeling worse.

I also told myself that there were plenty of other things I could do to calm down.

What did you do instead?

I drove to a friend's house to talk things over and watch TV.

Did your coping work?

YES ☒ NO ☐

Situation 1

Where were you and with whom?



Describe how you were feeling:



What did you say to yourself?



What did you do instead?



Did your coping work?

YES

☐

NO

☐

Situation 2

Where were you and with whom?



Describe how you were feeling:



What did you say to yourself?



What did you do instead?



Did your coping work?

YES

☐

NO

☐

Situation 1

Where were you and with whom?



Describe how you were feeling:



What did you say to yourself?



What did you do instead?



Did your coping work?

YES

☐

NO

☐

The following list may also be helpful when dealing with an urge on the spot.

Do something else

Delay - wait 15 minutes the urge will pass

Deep breathing

Deny yourself access to money

Ineffective coping strategies

Almost all gamblers have tried to cope with an urge and failed.

EXERCISE

Record examples of when you did not successfully deal with an urge and then try and replace it with one that is more effective.

EXAMPLE

Ineffective coping mechanism:

I'll just play for half an hour to kill some time. And besides...you can't win if you don't try.

Why is it ineffective?

I always lose track of time and miss important meetings.

New effective coping mechanism:

I will just walk away and review my reasons for quitting gambling until the urge goes away.

Situation 1

Ineffective coping mechanism:



Why is it ineffective?



New effective coping mechanism:



Situation 2

Ineffective coping mechanism:



Why is it ineffective?



New effective coping mechanism:



Situation 3

Ineffective coping mechanism:



Why is it ineffective?



New effective coping mechanism:



Here are some examples of how former gamblers fought off the most overwhelming urges to gamble.

BY THINKING

- o Talked themselves out of it.
- o Consciously decided not to gamble.
- o Thought of the bills they had to pay.
- o Realized it is not a way to get ahead.
- o Self control/will power.
- o Remembering past gambling problems.

BY ACTING

- o Spoke with a friend/spouse.
- o Found something else to spend money on.
- o Went to see a friend that didn't gamble.
- o Limited their access to money.
- o Walked away.
- o Did other activities instead.
- o Avoided friends who gamble.
- o Went to a Gamblers Anonymous meeting.

Studies show that the most successful quitters use self-talk along with an action to resist an urge. Think of both thinking and acting strategies that would help you to fight an urge.

EXERCISE

Summarize your thinking strategies for fighting an urge.



Becoming aware of your urges allows you to examine patterns that you may have. Once you are aware of what causes your urges, experiment with different coping strategies to find ones that work for you. Being prepared to deal with urges will help you to stay on track and remain gambling free.

STAYING ON TRACK

Changing Your Thinking

BOOKLET 5

Changing Your Thinking

In this booklet, you will identify and modify thinking patterns that allow you to gamble.

Contents

Thinking patterns that allow you to gamble	53
How your thoughts and beliefs allow you to gamble	55
Basic strategy for identifying thoughts and beliefs	58
Basic strategy for developing challenges to these thoughts and beliefs	60

Thinking patterns that allow you to gamble

This booklet is designed to examine irrational thought processes and give you advice on how to change them.

Thinking and acting

All of our actions have a thinking or “cognitive” component to them. We never act without thinking although sometimes the thinking component is automatic and fast. Because the thinking component is automatic and fast, we often are not aware that it is happening. It can seem as if we are acting without thinking.

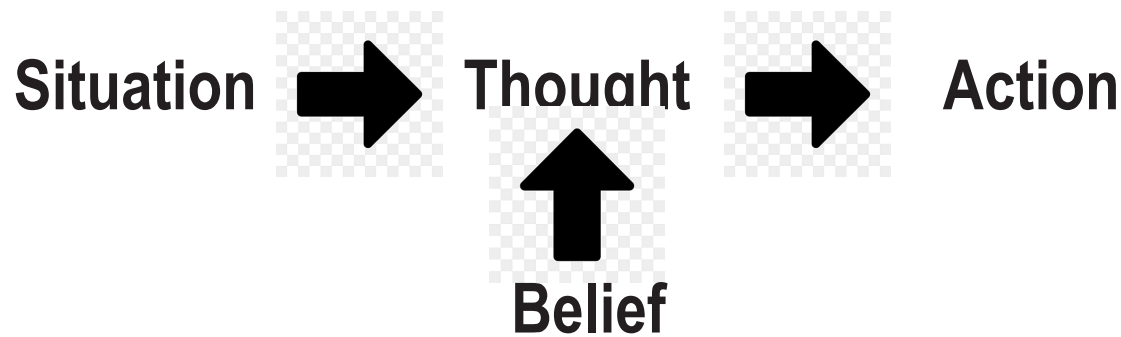


For example, Tom is driving his car to work and while he is approaching an intersection the traffic light turns yellow. Tom slows to a stop at the red light. Tom tells himself to do this. The thought that Tom has that makes him take action is “I must stop; the light is turning red”. If Tom was just learning to drive this thought might be very conscious and deliberate. In Tom’s case, however, he has many years of driving experience. Tom isn’t aware of thinking at all about his decision to stop. The thought is automatic.

Our underlying beliefs

The specific thoughts that we have in any given situation are determined by our underlying beliefs. The underlying thought that was inspired by the yellow light was “I must stop”. Tom has an underlying belief that stopping at a yellow light is both legal and safe.

Jack, on the other hand, believes that yellow lights indicate the opportunity to make it through the intersection before the light turns red. Jack’s thought is “I must speed up if I am going to make it”. Jack, like Tom, is unaware of this automatic thought and speeds through the intersection. Imagine being in this situation.



Changing our thoughts and beliefs

If we can identify our thoughts and the underlying beliefs then we can begin to change them. The process of changing our thoughts and beliefs is difficult because they are automatic and fast and happen almost without our awareness. There are four steps to success in changing our thoughts and beliefs:

1. Identify the thought
2. Identify the underlying belief
3. Develop a realistic challenge to the thought and belief. Are they reasonable?
4. Practice, practice, practice challenging the thoughts and beliefs

For example, Jack, who speeds up when he sees a yellow light, hears of a friend who was injured in a car accident because a driver was running a red light. Then, in the same week, he receives a warning from a police officer who spots him doing the same thing. Jack decides to change his belief that speeding through a yellow light is a good thing and also decides to change his behaviour. Monday on the way to work, he realizes that he has done it again as he automatically speeds through the yellow light at the first intersection. As he approaches the second intersection he reminds himself “I must stop. Speeding through is dangerous.” He eases up on the gas pedal and stops as the light turns red. At the third intersection, he again reminds himself to stop. At the fourth intersection he is distracted by the radio and forgets to correct his thinking. Once again he speeds through. Jack is motivated to change his driving behaviour but how can he do it? If Jack is going to successfully change his habit, he will need to remind himself repeatedly to stop until this new way of thinking becomes a habit and becomes automatic. This change in thinking takes dedication and sustained effort on Jack’s part. Changes in thinking do not come easily.

How your thoughts and beliefs allow you to gamble

You have spent many hours gambling, which means your thoughts associated with gambling have become fast and automatic. Because of this, these thoughts and their underlying beliefs are difficult to identify. This section will help you understand how your thoughts and beliefs direct your gambling. When researchers asked gamblers to speak their thoughts aloud while gambling, they found about 70% of the thoughts people expressed to be inaccurate. The common mistakes that lead to gambling are listed below.

Selective memory

Many gamblers can easily recall their wins but forget or minimize their losses.

“I always win when it’s a full moon.”

“I win more than I lose.”

Overconfidence in winning

Some gamblers believe that they have a winning system or spend time mastering a game that doesn’t actually involve skill.

“My system for the slots works.”

“I can double the mortgage payment in a few hours.”

Explaining away losses

Some gamblers believe that a series of losses means that a win is near. Some gamblers believe that losses happen because of external reasons. Other gamblers believe they are personally responsible for wins because of their skills.

“The machine is going to pay because it is due.”

“The only reason I lost was...”

Illusion of control

Many gamblers believe that they can influence games that have random outcomes. Games are designed to give players this idea. Slots, VLT's, lottery tickets and bingo have no skill component but are designed so that it appears your choices or strategies make a difference. In reality, the player cannot influence the outcome. You cannot become a VLT expert in the way you might be an expert for games of skill (e.g., a chess champion, a golf master).

"If I get my (favorite) machine I can win."

"I know how this game works – I am good at it."

Underlying beliefs

Many of the thoughts that lead to gambling are related to incorrect underlying beliefs. A very common underlying belief of gamblers is that gambling is a way to solve financial problems. This belief is often related to having experienced a big win early in their gambling career. Because it has happened before, we overestimate the likelihood that a big win will occur again. We also regularly hear about winners – whether it's the player three machines down the row of slots or the multimillion-dollar winner of the lottery. Winning is noisy but losing tends to be silent; we rarely hear about it.

EXERCISE

Examine any thoughts you have about gambling. List any that are incorrect.



A second common misconception concerns the concept of randomness. A common belief is that if you play long enough, you will win. You know that the outcome you are waiting for will happen if you hold on long enough. Just one more wager....

But, in truth, separate plays or wagers in many games have absolutely no relationship to one another.

For example, if you flip a coin once, your chance of getting heads is 50% and your chance of getting tails is 50% - there are two alternatives and they are equally likely. The second time you flip the chances are the same, 50-50. The result of each individual toss has no relationship to any other toss. The coin does not have a memory. A run of heads does not mean that tails is more likely on the next toss.

VLT and slot players often continue playing even if they are consistently losing because they feel it is their turn to win. Or they feel that the specific machine is due to pay out. The fact is each spin is a separate event and is not affected by what has happened before. A machine that has just paid out is just as likely to pay out as one that has not.

Similarly, in roulette each number has a 1 in 37 chance of winning on a particular spin. If you watch the play for a period of time and notice that a particular number – say 23 – has not come up for a long time it may seem logical to think that it will come up soon. But each spin of the wheel is a separate event. Number 23 has a 1 in 37 chance on every single spin. Neither the roulette wheel nor the ball has a memory.

EXERCISE

Gambling capitalizes on this common mistaken belief. We can easily believe our number is due to come up because it hasn't happened in a while. List situations where this belief caused you to keep gambling.



Finally, many gamblers do not have accurate information about the odds of various types of gambling. They may realize that the house has the advantage but they like to believe that they will profit from other less lucky players. However, because of the house advantage, there is a negative rate of return when you gamble. The games are designed so that in the long run you will lose money. The more you play, the more you lose. For example, the typical payout from a VLT machine is 70%, which means that the machine retains 30%. In other words, for every \$10 you put into the machine you will, on average, get back \$7. The more you play the more likely you will achieve this average and there is nothing you can do to change this. Games of chance have a negative rate of return:

Games	House Advantage	Pays to player
VLT's	30%	70%
Horse Racing	19%	81%
Sports Select	375	63%
Lottery	55%	45%
Bingo	35%	65%
Casino Games (combined)	21%	79

EXERCISE

List situations where a mistaken belief about the odds of winning caused you to keep gambling



Basic strategy for identifying thoughts and beliefs

You have already begun to think about your common thought patterns and probably have ideas of how your thoughts enable you to keep gambling. The basic strategy for identifying these thoughts and underlying beliefs is to pay attention to what happens in specific situations. You need to slow down a very fast and automatic process.

Start by remembering the last time you gambled. What was the situation? What was the action? What was the thought inspired by the situation that led to the action? Do you remember saying anything to yourself? Is there a belief underlying this thought?

Below are a few examples, followed by an exercise, to help you identify your own thought patterns.

EXAMPLE

Situation	Thoughts	Underlying Beleif	Action/Outcome
<i>Unexpected \$50 pay cheque</i>	<i>I can turn this into \$500 (and pay the mortgage).</i>	<i>Gambling is a solution to my financial problems</i>	<i>Visit to Blackjack table at nearest casino.</i>
<i>Feeling bored, wife out of town</i>	<i>No harm in dropping by the lounge. This may be my lucky day. I usually win when I go on the weekend.</i>	<i>I can win gambling (Ignore the negative rate of return)</i>	<i>Starts playing VLT, spent \$150.</i>
<i>Lost \$40 in VLT's</i>	<i>I'll get an advance on my credit card. This machine is due to pay out.</i>	<i>The outcome is predictable; it is not random</i>	<i>Continued playing and lost \$80.</i>

Situation	Thoughts	Underlying Beleif	Action/Outcome

Basic strategy for developing challenges to these thoughts and beliefs

If you are going to change these thoughts and beliefs you need to develop realistic and believable challenges. For example, you cannot challenge your thinking that the slot machine is due to pay out if you believe that the process is not random. You may need to become a scientist or detective and collect information that will help you change your belief. Keeping records of your wins and losses is often very helpful in disputing the belief that you are skilled at gambling or that the negative rate of return doesn't affect you.

EXAMPLE

Thought:

I can turn this into \$500 easily.

What specifically is irrational about this thought?

I lose more money than I win, therefore in the long run I am not really earning money. There is a negative rate of return with all types of gambling. It is not really easy because it causes me a lot of time, stress, and worry.

Realistic challenge:

Can you really turn this into \$500? Gambling is actually an easy way to lose money. Only rarely is it a way to “earn” money. It is not a solution to my problems. I lose more than I win. Look at my bank records.

EXERCISE

Situation 1

Thought:



What specifically is irrational about this thought?



Realistic challenge:



Situation 2

Thought:



What specifically is irrational about this thought?



Realistic challenge:



Situation 3

Thought:



What specifically is irrational about this thought?



Realistic challenge:



We have already mentioned how difficult it can be to change our thinking. It takes sustained practice if you want to be able to make the new way of thinking become automatic. The exercises you have just completed are the first step in bringing your fast and automatic thoughts into your awareness. Imagining various situations can let you practice your challenges in your mind.

When faced with the actual situations, you will sometimes be entirely successful, sometimes partially successful and sometimes unsuccessful. It is important to pay attention to both your successes and failures. What other challenges can you develop for the problematic situations? Keeping records is always beneficial. Most important, do not become discouraged. Identifying and modifying thoughts that allow us to gamble is a powerful strategy in avoiding relapse to gambling and staying on track.

STAYING ON TRACK

Lifestyle Balance

BOOKLET 6

Lifestyle Balance

In this booklet, we cover lifestyles and how to adjust your current routine to suit your new gambling free lifestyle.

Contents

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What are your lifestyle goals?	67
Finding other pleasurable activities to replace gambling	70
Maintaining an active, not a passive, lifestyle	70
Quitting other negative behaviours	72
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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 1st.



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 1st.



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.



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.



EXERCISE

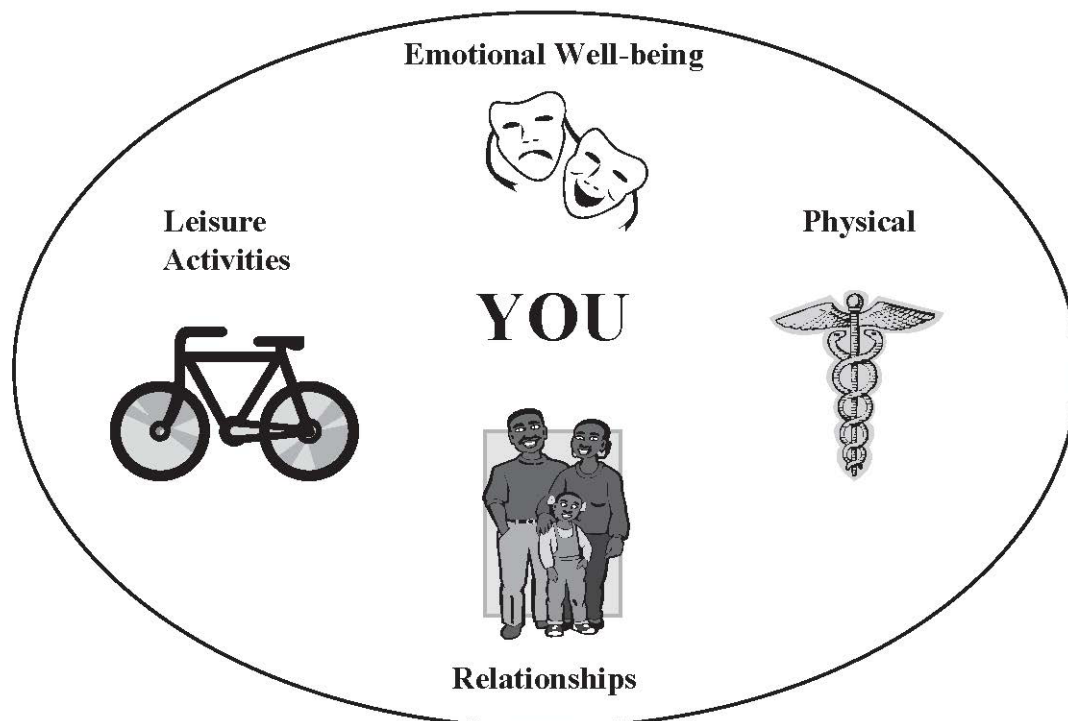
List any leisure activities you would like to do more of or try for the first time

EXAMPLE

I want to start bowling again on Thursday evenings



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.

Pleasant Activities List

The following list was modified from a Pleasant Events List¹, 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.

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Being out in the country. | <input type="checkbox"/> Camping. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Wearing nice or new clothes. | <input type="checkbox"/> Working on machines. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Talking about sports. | <input type="checkbox"/> Thinking about something good in the future. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Meeting someone new. | <input type="checkbox"/> Completing a hard task. <input type="checkbox"/> Laughing. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Playing ball. | <input type="checkbox"/> Solving a problem, puzzle, cross-word. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Planning trips or vacations. | <input type="checkbox"/> Being at weddings, baptisms, confirmations. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Buying things for self or someone you care about. | <input type="checkbox"/> Having lunch with friends. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Going to the beach. | <input type="checkbox"/> Playing tennis. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Doing art work | <input type="checkbox"/> Driving long distances. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Rock climbing. | <input type="checkbox"/> Woodworking, carpentry. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Reading the Bible. | <input type="checkbox"/> Writing stories, novels, plays or poetry. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Playing golf. | <input type="checkbox"/> Being with animals. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Decorating my room or house. | <input type="checkbox"/> Riding in an airplane. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Going to a sports event. | <input type="checkbox"/> Hiking. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Reading a “how to do it” book or article. | <input type="checkbox"/> Having a frank and open conversation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Reading stories, novels, poems or plays. | <input type="checkbox"/> Working on my job. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Going out with friends. | <input type="checkbox"/> Going to a party. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Going to lectures or hearing speakers. | <input type="checkbox"/> Going to church functions |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Breathing clean air. | <input type="checkbox"/> Speaking in a foreign language and learning. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Thinking up a song or music. | <input type="checkbox"/> Going to service, civic, or social club meetings. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Boating | <input type="checkbox"/> Going to a business meeting or a convention. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Restoring antiques, refinishing furniture. | <input type="checkbox"/> Being in a sporty car. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Watching TV. | <input type="checkbox"/> Playing in a band. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Talking to myself or a friend. | <input type="checkbox"/> Making soup. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Camping. | <input type="checkbox"/> Combing, brushing or washing my hair. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Working in politics. | <input type="checkbox"/> Acting. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Working on machines. | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Restoring antiques, refinishing furniture. | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Watching TV. | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Talking to myself or a friend. | |

- ☐ Taking a nap.
- ☐ Going to a play.
- ☐ Looking at the stars or moon.
- ☐ 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.
- ☐ 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.
- ☐ 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.

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

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

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.

STAYING ON TRACK

Getting Back on the Wagon

BOOKLET 7

Getting Back on the Wagon

In this booklet, your motivation, the process of quitting, and how to handle a slip are discussed at length.

Contents

Understanding your motivation	77
Stages of Change	80
What happens if you slip?	82

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.

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

- o Increase in enjoyable social and family activities.
- o Financial improvement or stability.
- o Reduced feelings of sadness, anger, frustration and depression.
- o Fewer problems with children.
- o Less marital and family conflict.
- o Increased self-esteem.

EXERCISE

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



1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Not at all Motivated

Extremely 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.



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.

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.



STAYING ON TRACK

Dealing with Mood and Substance Use Problems

BOOKLET 8

Dealing with Mood and Substance Use Problems

In this booklet, mood and substance abuse problems, and how to deal with them are discussed in detail.

Contents

Depression and substance use	86
Depression	87
Alcohol use	89
Drug use	90
If alcohol or drugs may be a problem	91

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.
without intending to OR I have a much
larger appetite than usual – I can’t seem
to stop eating. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 4. I have a great deal of difficulty falling
asleep and staying asleep OR I wake up
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?

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? prescription and illegal substances.

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.

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?



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.



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