

Gambling: Tips and Tools for Beating Your Addiction

If you or someone you know struggles with compulsive or problem gambling, it's important to recognize the issue, and to get help.

While the following tips and tools offer suggestions of how to beat your addiction in the short term, there's nothing like the support of professionals to not only kick your habit, but to address the underlying issues of your addiction to gambling, and to ease any personal and emotional suffering you may be experiencing. In the end, it's this suffering that often causes you to gamble, which then brings on real and deep difficulties in your personal and professional life.

Thing You Can Do to Help Yourself Every Day

Limit the Cash Available to You

- Carry around only enough cash to meet obligations for one day at a time.
- Reduce the daily withdrawal limit on your debit card (or better yet, give your debit card to someone you trust).
- Get rid of credit cards, or leave them with someone you trust.

Talk to Somebody You Trust

- Tell someone close to you that you are having a problem with gambling. A burden shared is a burden halved.
- If financial pressures seem overwhelming, see a financial counsellor about your options.
- Attend Gambler's Anonymous, a self-help group run by gamblers in recovery from their addiction.

Gambling begins in the mind. You may also want to try and recognize patterns of when you gamble—do you gamble when you're feeling low or lonely? When you're feeling "up" and happy? Try and practice recognizing and keeping track of the feelings you have before gambling. Try and come up with "antidotes" to counter your pro-gambling thoughts. For example:

- **Thought.** "Just one small bet won't hurt."
- **Antidote.** "Hang on. It usually doesn't stop at that. I feel better about myself since I stopped gambling, and I don't want to jeopardize that. I've worked too hard to get my life back in control."

Wherever possible, gain perspective. Each person is unique, and you know best the situations that are stressful and are most likely to make you want to gamble. For you, such situations may include social pressure to gamble, negative emotional states, positive emotional states, interpersonal conflict, negative physical states such as hunger, fatigue or pain, or a desire to test personal control.

- **Recognize lifestyle factors that make it difficult to refrain from gambling.** Realize that bars may contain VLTs, which are a temptation; that your closest friends run the betting pool at work; or that your job involves supplying bars, the local casino, or the mall kiosk that sells lottery tickets.
- **Develop scripts or plan ways to deal with such high-risk situations.** For example, if you have trouble with social pressure, prepare a stock answer to an invitation to gamble such as, "I'm not gambling anymore."
- **Try the broken record assertiveness technique.** Say the same thing over and over again. For example, "Thank you, but I am not interested in gambling." Broken record helps wear the other person down before they wear you down.
- **Avoid excessive use of alcohol,** as it loosens convictions and clouds judgment.
- **If you can, avoid problematic situations, people and places.** If you can't, use coping skills and face it head on. For example, if you want to visit a nightclub for the entertainment and social atmosphere, take along a supportive friend. By facing the situation and resisting the temptation, you increase your sense of self-worth.
- **Practice daily coping skills** such as relaxation techniques, meditation, recording feelings in a journal or taking quiet time for yourself. These can help you deal with long-term abstinence.

Types of Services Available

Recovery among problem gamblers can be more successful when the gambler receives help through a professional trained in treating compulsive or problem gambling, and if your family or close friends are involved in your treatment. Programs can teach the foregoing helpful strategies and much more. These services can include:

Recovery from addiction to gambling is a process. It won't happen overnight, and may not be easy. But the reward of having your life back and of re-establishing healthy relationships with friends, family and/or your career will likely be well worth the effort.

- Prevention and education services
- Counselling services
- Youth treatment programs
- Residential treatment services and day treatment programs to assist severely dependent clients in their recovery
- Long-term residential treatment support in halfway houses
- Crisis services including detoxification programs
- Services specific to gender, age, or Aboriginal Peoples
- Business and industry programs