

Gambling - how to change your habits

If you want to change the impact gambling has on your life, the first step is to decide that you want to change, control or stop your gambling. This is often easier to do if you get some support. It may be helpful to talk to your family and friends. Understanding your gambling problem, taking steps to ensure your financial security and getting professional help are important parts of your recovery.

Think about how gambling is affecting your life

Most people gamble to relax and have fun. Sometimes they win, but more often they lose. However, for some people, gambling becomes too important and can hurt themselves, their family and friends. Thinking about the impact your gambling is having on yourself and your loved ones can help motivate you towards change.

Try to understand why you gamble

Why you gamble may not be clear straight away. It usually takes time and effort to discover why you gamble. You might start by thinking about what was happening in your life when you started gambling.

It may help to see a counsellor to help you explore these issues. For example, you might feel the desire to gamble when you are bored or depressed, when you are carrying cash or when you are confronted with a large unpaid bill. Make a list of the circumstances, feelings or events that tend to trigger your desire to gamble. You can then look for different ways to cope with your desires.

Tips to help you change your gambling

If your gambling is causing problems in your life, there are things you can do to minimise, control or stop the gambling. It will help if you look at why you gamble and the habits that may be part of your gambling. You can do this in a number of ways. Some suggestions include:

- **Set some goals** – setting short and long-term goals may help you to stay focussed and clear about changing your gambling.
- **Find support** – talking about your gambling to someone you trust, such as a friend, partner or family member, can make things easier. It can also reduce the stress that may be causing you to gamble.
- **Consider professional help** – it may be helpful to seek out some professional help. There are a range of services that can provide you with confidential assistance.
- **Keep a diary** – keeping a journal of your gambling behaviours and thoughts may help you to identify and control the urge to gamble. Entries can include where and when you gamble, how much money you use and how much you win or lose. It can also be useful to note the thoughts and emotions related to your gambling.
- **Look for alternatives** – many people gamble because they don't know what else to do. Try to find other activities you enjoy and use them when you feel the urge to gamble. Try doing something else at the time you may usually gamble.

Reduce your risks

It can be helpful to reduce the risks of gambling by establishing some controls over your money. Suggestions include:

- Limit the amount of cash you take to the venue and leave cards at home.
- Avoid taking out loans and look at other ways to limit the opportunities to gamble more than you should.
- Avoid using gaming venues to socialise.

Remember to look after yourself

Some people with gambling problems feel nervous, agitated and frustrated when they aren't gambling. Finding other ways to manage stress and relax is important. Suggestions include:

- **Encourage yourself** – don't be critical about yourself. Instead, be positive and encourage yourself. Treat yourself like you are your best friend.
- **Take care of yourself** – many gamblers believe they don't deserve care and often neglect themselves. Take time to care for yourself. For example, take time to do something you enjoy each day.
- **Be active** – regular exercise such as walking each day can help greatly.
- **Eat well** – during times of stress, eating habits usually change. Take time to resume a healthy diet.

Where to get help

- Gambler's Help Tel. 1800 858 858, TTY 1800 777 706 – 24-hour telephone counselling service
- Gambling Help Online - for problem gambling counselling and support (Australia-wide), 24 hours, seven days
- Gamblers Anonymous Tel. (03) 9696 6108 – support group for people with a gambling problem
- Gam-Anon Tel. (03) 9898 7526 (volunteers only) – support group for family and friends
- Crown Responsible Gaming Support Centre Tel. 1800 801 098
- Australian Hotels Association (AHA) – Self Exclusion Program Tel. (03) 9654 3491 Mon to Fri (business hours) Answer Machine Out of Hours
- Lifeline Tel. 131 114
- Suicide Helpline Victoria Tel. 1300 651 251
- Financial and Consumer Rights Council Tel. 1800 134 139 or (03) 9663 2000
- Your doctor or other health professionals

Things to remember

- The first step is to decide that you want to stop or control your gambling.
- Understanding your gambling problem and getting professional help are key steps to help you recover.
- There are various organisations that can offer support, assistance and counselling for people who have problems with gambling.

This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:

Department of Justice - Problem Gambling Strategy

Copyright © 1999/2010 State of Victoria. Reproduced from the Better Health Channel (www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au) at no cost with permission of the Victorian Minister for Health. Unauthorised reproduction and other uses comprised in the copyright are prohibited without permission.

- This Better Health Channel fact sheet has passed through a rigorous approval process. For the latest updates and more information visit www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au.