
Gambling - how to change your habits

Summary

- Talk about your gambling problems with somebody you trust who won't judge you. This could be a family member, friend or professional counsellor.
 - Keep a gambling diary to help you better understand your gambling problem.
 - Avoid high-risk situations such as the use of credit cards, taking out loans, carrying large amounts of money with you, using gaming venues for socialising, or gambling as a reaction to emotions.
 - Find an alternative recreational activity or hobby to fill the gap left by gambling.
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Once you become aware that you could be a problem gambler, you may feel ashamed and guilty. Self-blame and self-harm can increase stress and may urge you to gamble more. Instead, seek help so that you can change your life for the better. If gambling is causing problems in your life, there are many things you can do to stop it being an issue.

Strategies for change

Suggestions include:

- **Keep a gambling diary** – this will help you better understand your problem. Include the type of gambling, the time spent and the amount you gamble. Write down the thoughts, feelings and situations that occur before and during a gambling session, so you can start to understand the causes of gambling.
- **Set goals** – setting short-term and long-term goals may help you to stay focused and clear about cutting down or giving up your gambling.
- **Avoid high-risk situations** – such as the use of credit cards, taking out loans, carrying large amounts of money with you, using gaming venues for socialising, or gambling as a reaction to emotions. These behaviours will weaken your resolve to control or stop your gambling.
- **Be kind to yourself** – acknowledge your positive achievements. Write them down to remind yourself of your strengths and attributes.
- **Find alternatives to gambling** – many people continue gambling because they do not know what else to do with their spare time. Explore new activities and hobbies.

Voluntary self-exclusion

If you would like to stop yourself from gambling at a venue, you can take part in a program called 'voluntary self-exclusion'. You select the venues that you want to be excluded from and sign an agreement not to enter or use the gambling areas in those venues. The agreement gives those venues the legal authority to remove you if you do enter. There are three of these programs available: for licensed hotels and clubs, for Crown Casino and for TABs. These programs are free.

You don't have to do it alone

Get someone to help you. Don't be put off by this. You can do it on your own, but a support person makes it easier, especially if you have serious problems caused by gambling. Talk about your gambling problems with somebody you trust who won't judge you. This person might be a spouse, parent or friend. Many organisations offer professional counselling, advice and support. Opening up to someone can ease the stress and emotional pain that causes you to continue to gamble.

Gambler's Help

Gambler's Help is a free service for people who are affected by gambling. There are Gambler's Help services available throughout Victoria, which provide:

- Free, professional, confidential counselling for people for whom gambling is an issue
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- Counselling for the family and friends of people for whom gambling is an issue
- Financial counselling to help people with gambling-related money problems
- Advice on self-exclusion programs and other support services
- Community education to help communities reduce the negative effects of gambling.

Talk about lying

Many problem gamblers end up hiding their gambling from people around them. This is understandable as it is hard to explain to a partner, family member or friend some of the things that problem gamblers do to keep their gambling going, such as borrowing money from finance companies or taking cash from a child's money box.

People who lie about gambling debts may try to gamble their way out of debt so they won't have to 'come clean'. This usually leads them further into debt. Coming clean about gambling with a trusted person can relieve pressure and provide the space to prepare a more thoughtful plan for recovery.

Lying is a hard habit to break. If it happens with your support person, it stops them being able to help you because they won't trust what you say. You and your helper need to talk about this and plan out how to cope.

Relax and look after yourself

Giving up when you've spent hours each week gambling can make you feel tense and irritable. You may feel even worse when you go into the places where you gambled, or if you pass a TAB or the casino on your way to work.

Learning how to relax, getting plenty of rest and eating properly can help you stick to your goal of reducing or giving up gambling. A counsellor may be able to help you with your strategies, which may include:

- Muscular relaxation training
- Exercise
- Sport
- Yoga
- Meditation.

Setbacks and lapses

You can often predict when problem gambling will reappear. You are more likely to lose control when you have bad times in other parts of your life that make you sad, anxious, angry or depressed. You may feel an urge to borrow money and go back to the old habit.

A lapse doesn't mean you have to continue to gamble. Instead, use the lapse to learn more about what triggers you to gamble. Examine what worked and what didn't work with your plan, and make adjustments accordingly.

What to do if you feel like gambling

When you feel like you might gamble again, or if you do gamble again, helpful strategies include:

- Talk to your support person.
- Write your feelings and actions in your gambling diary. If you gambled, look at what happened and see if you can spot ways of stopping it next time. Look for the positives too. Did cash limits help? Did you find it easier to talk about it instead of lying about it? These are big steps forward. Next time it will be easier to cope.
- Control your cash. See the Better Health Channel fact sheet 'Gambling – financial issues' for more information.
- Fill in the gap that gambling has left with new things to do.
- Practise your relaxation.

Where to get help

- Your doctor or other health professionals
- 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
- Gamble Aware – information about the odds of winning, how gambling works, and when to stop
- Financial and Consumer Rights Council Tel. 1800 134 139 or (03) 9663 2000
- Lifeline Tel. 13 11 14
- SuicideLine Victoria Tel. 1300 651 251

Things to remember

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