

HOW TO CHOOSE YOUR GAMBLING GOAL

To help you choose the best goal for you, you might find it helpful to ask yourself the following questions:		
▼	YES	NO
1. Is my gambling considered to be a severe problem?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Have I already made an attempt(s) to moderate my gambling but did not succeed?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Will any gambling hurt me financially?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Have I been mandated to seek treatment by my employer or by the criminal justice system?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Are my personal relationships at risk (that is, friends or family) if I continue to gamble?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Do I want to continue gambling so that I can win back lost money?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. Am I always thinking about gambling and ways to win?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. Am I using gambling to escape other problems or feelings?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

If you answered YES to any of the questions above, then trying to cut down may not be the best choice or an easy goal for you to achieve. In this situation, abstinence may be the best choice for you. That's what we'd recommend. If you decide to continue gambling, even if it is much less than it was, it will likely aggravate your financial situation, upset people around you who you will be depending on, and be difficult to achieve and maintain. However, we also understand that the final decision is yours.

Most importantly, if your motivation to gamble at all includes the idea of winning (even if gradually) money you have lost, then you are at a serious risk of worsening your problem. In this case, we would recommend that you stop gambling altogether. That would be the safest way to proceed. This point is so important that it is worth repeating.

REMEMBER!

If your motivation to gamble includes the idea of winning ANY of the money you have lost, then you are at serious risk of worsening your problem.

RESPONSIBLE GAMBLING GOAL

If you have answered all of the above questions with a NO, then you may succeed at low-risk gambling. Many gamblers ask whether they can continue to play other games other than the one that has caused them the main difficulties. This will depend on whether you have had any difficulty with any of these other types of games before and whether your motivation to keep playing these games has anything to do with winning money or winning back lost money. For example, if you decide to cut out slot machines, which have caused you the greatest difficulty, but increase your lottery wagering to try to win back some money, then this would

indicate that it is best to stop the lottery playing as well. So, be honest about why you want to keep playing other games. You should also definitely not increase your betting on any other games you might play while you decrease the one causing you the most harm. On the next page you will find the GUIDELINES FOR LOW-RISK GAMBLING to make sure you gamble safely.

STARTING WITH ABSTINENCE

One of the dangers with Controlled Gambling is that you may eventually cross the line and begin to gamble too much or too often. It takes a lot of planning to make sure you stay within healthy limits when you are controlling your gambling.

As an initial step towards this goal, it is advisable to try to have a period of abstinence from ALL gambling. This would serve the purpose of showing that, yes, you are able to eliminate all gambling from your life and function well. Also, it would reveal any hidden motivations or attractions of gambling that may not be obvious to you right now and which could harm you later. Remaining abstinent for a few weeks may bring some relief to the pressures you are experiencing as a result of gambling without having to worry or figure out how you are going to control your gambling frequency and expenditures.

So we would recommend that even if you wish to gamble in some form in the future, that you take the challenge to refrain from gambling while you are participating in this program.

Ultimately, of course, the final decision is left up to you, as we know that people are more likely to succeed at changing a habit when they have chosen their own goal. Of course, you always have the option of changing your goal at any time.

GUIDELINES FOR LOW-RISK GAMBLING

The following guidelines may help you stay within safe gambling limits and will allow you to enjoy your favourite games risk-free.

1. Decide ahead of time what is an acceptable amount to wager and what is an acceptable loss — don't bet money you can't afford to lose.

Assume that whatever you wager you will lose. So it is wise to have a pre-set limit as to what is acceptable to lose. This will allow you to enjoy gambling but not lose in excess of what you can reasonably afford. Any loss you (likely) incur will then be acceptable.

2. Do not rely on gambling to earn money. Although most people who gamble hope to win money, low-risk gamblers neither expect or plan on winning. They know that gambling is a game and money that is wagered is likely to be lost, but enjoy the game anyway. In the same way we attend movies, eat in restaurants, go to sporting events, etc. and expect to pay for these pleasures, gambling is seen in the same way. Of course, winning is an unexpected bonus; it's like getting free tickets to an event or a complimentary meal, but it should not be expected. Gambling should be mainly fun, not a way to earn money.
3. Keep track of how much time and money you spend gambling. Keeping track of your gambling maintains your awareness of how much time and money you devote to gambling and allows you to make changes if you think it is too much. Without keeping track, it is very easy to underestimate the truth and start a bad gambling habit. Our memories can

sometimes mix things up. Keeping track keeps us honest.

4. Never borrow money to gamble. If you need to borrow money to gamble, then there is no justification to gamble. View gambling as a leisure activity that must be comfortably affordable within your financial situation. Whether it is from friends or family, from credit cards or from your own future paycheque, borrowing to gamble is a high-risk activity and not recommended.
5. Know when you should not gamble. Consider sacrificing your gambling activity if it disturbs those closest to you, if you keep exceeding your money limits, if it is illegal, if you find that you gamble in a high-risk fashion or if you are under the influence of alcohol or drugs. There are times when it is best to just not gamble. Be aware of these kinds of situations that apply to you.
6. Do not gamble to cope with unpleasant emotions and stress. Gambling is best viewed as a fun, leisure activity and not as a medicine to make you feel better. This will set up an unhealthy relationship between gambling and your personal mental health. It gives gambling a power it should not have. If you gamble to cope, it is best to get professional help.
7. If you lose, DO NOT try to win that money back. Losses are normal and should be expected. It would be strange or unreasonable to expect to get back the money we just spent eating at a restaurant. Losing money from gambling is really just paying for the right to gamble and that's normal and to be expected. Trying to win back your losses suggests you misunderstand what healthy gambling is. Losing is just paying for the right to gamble. Don't think about getting that money back.

MY GOAL STATEMENT

Decide on which goal you will follow over the next several weeks and indicate your choice by completing one of the two goal boxes.

ABSTINENCE

I intend to achieve total abstinence from the gambling that has harmed me. I understand that I may choose to change my goal at a later date.

Signed: _____

RESPONSIBLE GAMBLING

I intend to gamble responsibly.

This means that I will gamble:

_____ times per day, week, or month.

I will wager a maximum of \$_____ per gambling occasion.

Signed: _____

THE ROLE OF GAMBLING IN YOUR LIFE

In preparing to work on your gambling habit over the next several weeks, it is important to remain very aware of the fact that gambling isn't always an entirely negative activity. There is no question that, as with any type of addictive habit, there are some pleasurable or rewarding aspects to gambling. When you began to gamble, and even now when gambling is harming you, you may still find the gambling experience attractive. Having a realistic motivational state to change your gambling habit involves being aware of all aspects of gambling, both the positive and negative.

This next exercise will tell us a little more about the overall impact of gambling on your life. We need to look at the bigger picture and get an idea of the function or meaning of gambling in your life. One way to do this is to ask you to consider the positive and negative aspects of continuing to gamble and about the positive and negative aspects of not continuing to gamble. Your answers will put some perspective on the role of gambling in your life and what you might expect when you are gambling less.



GOOD THINGS ABOUT GAMBLING

What are the benefits about continuing to gamble? What would you enjoy most about continuing to gamble (e.g., I love the excitement)?



BAD THINGS ABOUT GAMBLING

What are the costs of gambling? How does gambling negatively impact your life (e.g., I spend too much)?



GOOD THINGS ABOUT NOT GAMBLING

What are the benefits of stopping gambling (e.g., I'll feel less stress)?



BAD THINGS ABOUT NOT GAMBLING

What are the costs of stopping gambling? What would you miss most if you stopped gambling (e.g., I'll miss the chance of winning money)?
