

Chapter 2 - Self-motivation

How to motivate yourself to stop gambling

Every day I thought about why I wanted to stop and how my life was getting better without gambling. It all snowballed from there. - Peter

It took me six months, but finally whenever the urge to gamble came up, I would immediately think about the damage it was causing, instead of thinking about just going and putting \$20 in. - Rosanne

In order to stop gambling, you will need to work hard. If you have already made the commitment to stop gambling, this chapter will help you to stay motivated, especially when things get difficult. If you are unsure whether to stop gambling, this chapter will help you to make up your mind.

Introduction

I wish there were an easy way to stop gambling. Unfortunately, there isn't. If you have tried to stop before, you will know that there is no magic pill that will immediately take away the urge to gamble. There is no simple strategy that will change your gambling overnight.

Remember that you have worked hard at gambling over the past few years. You have pressed the button on the poker machine thousands of times. You have spent hundreds of hours gambling in the TAB or the casino. You are so good at gambling that you barely have to think about what you are doing when you play. You have practiced it so much, it has almost become an automatic behavior, like driving a car or reading or writing. This means that you will have to work hard at practicing some new ways of thinking and behaving to stop the old habits from returning. Hard work isn't fun and learning new skills can be difficult. It's a little like trying to write with your left hand if you are right-handed. It feels uncomfortable and unnatural at first and you often go back to using your right hand without even thinking about it. However, as you practice and practice, writing left-handed becomes easier and easier.

So if stopping is going to be hard work, you will have to be motivated. Your motivation is your responsibility and you will have to work on it. To help you, here are six motivational skills that many gamblers have used very successfully. Give them a try.

Skill 1: Believe that you can stop gambling

I'm sure there have been plenty of times when you have lost all of your money gambling and you pledged to yourself that you would never gamble again. You manage not to gamble for a few days and start feeling pretty good about things, but then you get paid or you borrow some money to pay some bills and you think, "I'll just put \$20 in". Before you know it, your pledge is forgotten and

you've lost \$200 chasing after the initial \$20 while thinking that the machine has got to pay soon or that a big win will get you out of trouble. Many gamblers feel extremely discouraged when this happens. They start to believe that they have no discipline, that they are impulsive and that they are out of control. Worst of all, they give up on giving up. They feel that there's no point trying to stop because they don't believe that they can do it.

If this is how you feel, remember what we discussed in the introduction. It can be difficult to stop gambling on your own and you will need to learn some new skills. It makes sense that you couldn't stop when you didn't have the skills that you needed. But many, many people have given up in the past and more will give up in the future. There is no reason why you cannot give up, too. The only requirements for success are the desire to stop and the willingness to learn some new skills. If you have these, you can stop gambling.

If you are having doubts about whether stopping gambling is what you really want to do, the next few skills should steel your resolve.

Skill 2: Calculate how much money you have lost gambling

For many gamblers, the most serious consequence of their gambling is financial. An excellent way to motivate yourself to stop gambling is to complete an honest appraisal of how much money you have lost over the past year. This can be calculated quite easily. Work out how much you lose on a typical week. Multiply this amount by 52 for the number of weeks in the year. For example, if you normally lose around \$300 per week, you multiply \$300 by 52 weeks and find a total gambling loss of \$15,600. The following table will help:

On average, how much do you lose per week: _____
Multiply this answer by 52: **x 52**
Total amount lost gambling: _____

If the amount shocks you, don't be disheartened. It simply means that now is the time to do something about the problem before it gets any worse. There is hope. There are many problem gamblers who have lost millions of dollars and have been able to re-build their lives using the techniques presented in this manual. There is no reason at all why you cannot stop, too.

Skill 3: Calculate the amount of time you have spent gambling

Gamblers don't only lose money. They also lose time. Another good way to motivate yourself is to calculate the amount of time you have wasted gambling. Firstly, estimate how many hours you gamble on an average week. Of course, this often depends on how much money you have and how long it lasts, but try to come up with an average figure. Then carry out a similar calculation as you did in Step 2. For example, if you spend 10 hours a week gambling multiply 10 hours by 52 weeks to get 520 hours spent gambling. That's over 21 days of non-stop gambling!!

On average, how much time do you spend gambling per week: _____
Multiply this answer by 52: **x 52**
Total amount of hours lost gambling: _____

You might like to think about how much money you could have earned if you had worked during those hours at the average wage (about \$15 an hour). Think about what you could have done with that time. Think about the projects you could have completed, the courses you could have done, the friendships you could have made. Think about whether the time has come for you to stop gambling and get your life back.

Again, don't be disheartened if these figures shock you. Even some of the most severely dependent gamblers have been able to stop gambling and re-build their lives. There is always hope if you commit yourself to stopping.

Skill 4: Look back and look forward

Another good way to motivate yourself is to remember what your life was like before you started to have problems with gambling. Ask yourself how much debt you were in? What was your financial position? How happy were you back then? Many gamblers say that they weren't in debt, that their financial position was sound, and that they were reasonably happy.

Now assess your current circumstances. Many problem gamblers are heavily in debt, have serious financial troubles and often feel stressed, depressed and anxious. The downward trend is very obvious.

Now think about what your future will be like if you don't stop gambling. Again, ask yourself whether the time has come to stop gambling and arrest this trend.

Now imagine a future without gambling. What positive changes can you see? What will your life be like? Think about how your mood will improve. Think about how your financial position will recover.

Skill 5: The Decisional Balance Sheet

Another way to get motivated to stop gambling is to complete a Decisional Balance Sheet. The Decisional Balance Sheet helps you to weigh up the pros and cons of gambling using the table below. Try to be as honest and thorough as possible. Ask yourself "What do I like about gambling?" Then consider all of the different areas in your life that have been effected by gambling. Ask yourself, "What is it about gambling that is really negative?" To give you some guidance, the balance sheet of one of my clients is included below. As you can see, the number of disadvantages far outweighs the advantages. Note that the advantages such as excitement are often short-term and transitory, but the disadvantages such as debts have a much longer impact.

Decisional Balance Sheet	
Advantages of gambling:	
<i>Escape from problems for a while</i>	<i>Might win some money</i>
Disadvantages of gambling:	
<i>Financial problems</i>	<i>In trouble with the police</i>
<i>Can't pay bills</i>	<i>Caused problems at work</i>
<i>Caused my relationship to fail</i>	<i>Embarrassed borrowing money</i>
<i>Never have any money to go out</i>	<i>Never feel like I get anywhere in life</i>
<i>Always juggling bills</i>	<i>Depressed and stressed</i>

Now fill out the balance sheet on the following page for yourself and decide whether the advantages of gambling outweigh the disadvantages or vice versa. Looking at the balance sheet and assessing your answers, can you make a commitment to try to stop gambling and to attempt the ideas in this manual?

Decisional Balance Sheet	
Advantages of gambling	
Disadvantages of gambling	

Skill 6: Make a commitment!

Many gamblers make a promise that they will stop gambling. Unfortunately, they struggle to keep this promise because they often don't have the skills that they need. So as well as making a promise to stop gambling, commit yourself to the following:

- 1) Make stopping gambling the number one priority in your life right now. Decide that you will not be half-hearted and you will not place anything else above this goal.
- 2) Practice the new skills presented in this manual for at least 30 minutes every day. Decide that you will become an expert at these skills.
- 3) Work through every chapter in this manual. Decide that you will give the ideas in this manual every chance to work.
- 4) Stay positive. Decide to keep trying, even if the new skills seem difficult at first or if you bust out.
- 5) Choose a day to be your "stop gambling day", the sooner, the better!

If friends, families or partners know about your problem, you might like to share this commitment with them. If you are doing this on your own, congratulate yourself for taking this step.

What now?

To this point, you have admitted that you have a problem, you have motivated yourself, and you have made a commitment to work on the problem. Congratulations! You have taken three very important steps.

I mentioned earlier that giving up gambling would require some hard work. So although you are motivated to work hard right now, it is possible that your motivation may begin to wane as you continue to struggle with gambling. We also know that relapse is very common amongst gamblers. To keep their motivation high, every day many recovered gamblers write down the reasons why they want to stop gambling. You can complete this task for yourself by filling out the worksheet below.

<p><u>Why do I want to stop gambling?</u></p> <p>By not gambling, my life will improve in the following ways:</p>
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You are probably wondering why you have to do this task every day. However, remember all the times that you looked forward to gambling and felt hopeful that you would win. These thoughts are deeply set and come quickly to mind whenever you get the urge to gamble. If you are going to fight off these urges, you will need some ammunition. By completing this task every day, you will have some prepared responses ready whenever the urge arises. Writing out your answers is important, too. The best way to learn anything is by repetition. By writing the answers down, you can entrench the answers in your mind, as if you are preparing for an exam. And, as you know, stopping gambling is more important than any exam.

Summary

- * if you are going to stop gambling, you will need to work hard**
- * hard work requires motivation**
- * you need to motivate yourself every day**

Daily Homework

- * write out every day how gambling has damaged your life and how your life will improve when you stop gambling**

The Final Task

Go back over the chapter you have just read. Write down what you got out of it. What was important? What did you learn?

Biographical note acknowledgements and further advice

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This chapter is taken from Stop Gambling: A self help manual for giving up gambling which was originally published in Australia by Pan Macmillan in 2001. It may be copied and freely distributed without alteration. It is based on various published studies including those by myself, Dr Fadi Anjoul, Dr Louise Sharpe and Dr Robert Ladoceur.

Self help manuals can play an important role in the treatment of some gambling problems. However, not all gamblers respond to the techniques set out in these chapters. A qualified gambling counselor can provide personalized treatment that specifically addresses your circumstances. Seeking such help is highly recommended.