

# ***Stop Gambling***

***A self-help manual for giving up  
gambling***

***Simon Milton***

## **Contents**

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>How this manual can help you</b>
<b>Chapter 1</b>	<b>Self-knowledge: Understanding your gambling problem</b>
<b>Chapter 2</b>	<b>Self-motivation: How to motivate yourself to stop gambling</b>
<b>Chapter 3</b>	<b>Self-education: Why you can't win at gambling</b>
<b>Chapter 4</b>	<b>Cognitive therapy: The way you think makes you gamble</b>
<b>Chapter 5</b>	<b>Alternative activities to gambling: Do something else!</b>
<b>Chapter 6</b>	<b>Problem solving: How to deal with problems that cause gambling</b>
<b>Chapter 7</b>	<b>Emotion management: How to cope with strong negative feelings</b>
<b>Chapter 8</b>	<b>Self-esteem building: Rebuilding your self-esteem</b>
<b>Chapter 9</b>	<b>Relapse prevention: High-risk situations and avoiding lapses</b>
<b>Chapter 10</b>	<b>Review: Consolidating what you have learnt</b>
<b>Chapter 11</b>	<b>For partners and families: How partners and families can help</b>

## **Introduction**

### **How this manual can help you**

---

Welcome and congratulations! By reading this manual, you have taken a positive step towards freeing your life from gambling. I admire you for having the courage to change. It can be hard to admit that you need help and working through a self-help manual is a great place to start. The techniques used in this manual have successfully helped many people to stop gambling. It IS possible to stop gambling and when you succeed, your life will change dramatically for the better.

This manual will give you some of the skills that you need to stop gambling. You may be wondering what these skills are. Surely it's just all willpower, isn't it? If you want to stop, you will stop, won't you? Well, I agree that willpower plays an important role in giving up any damaging habit. But gambling isn't just any damaging habit.

Compare gambling to some common problem behaviors. If you smoke, you probably smoke between 20 to 50 cigarettes a day. If you drink heavily, at worst, you drink between 20 to 30 standard drinks a day. By contrast, if you play ten lines on a five-cent poker machine and lose \$200 in a session, you have pressed the button on the machine about 1000 times, perhaps even more! Think about it. Even if you have only been playing the pokies for a short period of time, the number of button presses over your gambling career is phenomenal. If you bet on horses or dogs or play

casino games, the number of bets may not be as high, but it is still extremely substantial.

The sheer volume of bets that you have made means that gambling is very entrenched in your brain. It has become a deeply engrained habit. This means that willpower alone will only take you so far. You will need to learn some special skills if you are going to break this habit.

The skills taught in this manual are part of a treatment known as cognitive behavioral therapy. Cognitive means that some of the skills focus on the way you think about gambling. The behavioral skills address the causes of your gambling and help you to stay off gambling for good. Currently, cognitive behavioral therapy is the empirically-validated, best practice for problem gambling. This means that carefully controlled research has found that it is the most effective treatment for people with gambling problems.

### **Do you have a gambling problem?**

Anyone who gambles will have days when they lose money. This is inevitable. Many gamblers are prepared to lose a small amount of money in return for entertainment and the hope of a big win. So, how do you know whether you have a gambling problem? How bad do the losses have to be before you should do something about it? The following questions can help you to decide this issue. Work through each of them carefully and answer them as honestly as you can.

Question 1) Are you preoccupied with gambling? Do you spend a lot of time thinking about gambling? Do you spend a lot of time thinking about ways to get money to either gamble or to pay debts that were caused by gambling? (Circle YES if you answered yes to any of these questions).

YES NO

Question 2) On average, has the amount of money you lose in each session increased significantly since you began gambling? Has the size of your average bet increased significantly since you began gambling? Do you risk more money now compared to when you first started gambling?

YES NO

Question 3) Have you tried to cut back, control or stop gambling, but been unsuccessful in these attempts?

YES NO

Question 4) If you have tried to cut back or stop gambling, have you felt restless or irritable during these attempts?

YES NO

Question 5) Do you gamble as a way to escape? Do you gamble to escape from feeling anxious, stressed, depressed, helpless or guilty? Does gambling distract you from your problems?

YES NO

Question 6) After losing money, do you chase your losses? Do you bet more and more money, to win back what you have lost?

YES NO

Question 7) Have you lied to people about your involvement in gambling? Have you lied about whether you were actually gambling or not? Have you lied about how much money you lost or how much time you spent gambling?

YES NO

Question 8) Have you committed an illegal act to help finance gambling or to meet financial commitments that were not met because of gambling?

YES NO

Question 9) Have you lost or put at risk a job, a relationship, an educational opportunity or a career opportunity because of gambling?

YES NO

Question 10) Have you relied on other people (including financial institutions and pawnbrokers) to lend or give you money to help you out of a desperate financial situation caused by gambling?

YES NO

If you have answered YES to five or more of the above questions, it is likely that you have a serious gambling problem and this manual will be of great assistance

to you. However, if you have answered YES to any of the questions, gambling is starting to cause problems in your life. We know that gambling is progressive which means that the longer your gambling goes unchecked, the more likely it is that you will develop a serious gambling problem in the future. Gambling can be a little bit like cancer. The longer it goes untreated, the worse the problem becomes. The quicker it is cut out, the better the prognosis.

### **How to use this manual**

The goal of this manual is to give you the knowledge and skills that you need to stop gambling. The manual begins by explaining how gambling problems develop. The manual is then organised in to separate chapters for each new skill that you learn. Each chapter has practice exercises and sets daily and weekly tasks to help you develop competence in each skill. Throughout the manual, there are case studies of problem gamblers who have been successfully treated using the techniques in this manual. Their names and details have been changed to protect their confidentiality. However, their stories are an accurate reflection of what many problem gamblers experience.

Work through each chapter carefully and thoughtfully. Every chapter has information and skills that will be useful at some time in your recovery from gambling. It is easy to think that a chapter doesn't apply to you or that you already know the information. However, the more you practice and revise these skills, the easier you will find it to stop gambling.

Many gamblers find it useful to use an exercise book or diary to complete the

tasks that are set in the manual. Although space is provided, many of them require repetition and a personal workbook will be helpful if you run out of space. You will notice that many of the examples in the manual concern poker machine players. This is because around 80% of problem gamblers play poker machines. However, the same skills are useful regardless of your gambling type.

### **Patience and perseverance**

Learning new skills takes time and hard work. Don't become disheartened if it takes time for you to stop gambling. The more you practice, the more skilled you will become and the easier it will be for you to fight the urge to gamble. You may also find that it takes some time for your life to improve even though you have stopped gambling. For some, the financial devastation caused by gambling carries on for some time after they have stopped. Again, be patient and persevere with the program. As long as you stay away from gambling, your life can improve. If you go back to gambling, you have no chance.

### **Now you are on your way!**

Congratulations! You've taken the first step in an important journey. Good luck!

#### **Biographical note acknowledgements and further advice**

*Simon Milton, BA Hons, MPsych, MAPS, is a clinical psychologist who specialises in the assessment and treatment of problem gambling.*

*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.*