

What Triggers Your Gambling?

Objective

To identify triggers and habits that lead you to problem gambling. To increase alternative behaviors to use when you feel tempted to gamble.

What to Know

You may have a variety of triggers that make you want to gamble. These triggers may differ if you purchase lottery tickets, go to the casino, partake in online gambling, or bet in other ways. Your gambling triggers might range from feelings such as frustration or depression to circumstances such as being around people who are gambling.

Other triggers might include:

- Retirement
- Marital problems
- Trauma
- Job-related stress
- Emotional problems such as depression or anxiety
- Loneliness
- Alcohol or drug use
- Environmental factors, such as friends or available opportunities

? Whether you want to quit gambling completely, or just cut down, knowing how the habit of gambling works can help you stop or reduce your gambling.

There are two things that support your gambling habit.

1. **Gambling operates on a variable reinforcement system.** This means that, randomly or by chance, you experience wins of varying amounts. You might believe you somehow “make” the win happen, when in fact you have little or nothing to do with it.

2. **The house always has the advantage.** Gambling operations take a certain percentage of the money wagered by players. You might repeatedly re-wager your winnings, which often results in losing more and more money. Because winning is random and variable, there is no guarantee you will win – or win back lost money. So, the “house advantage” guarantees that over time if you gamble, you will pay a price and you will eventually lose.

If you want to stop or cut down on your gambling, reminding yourself that you will eventually lose might help. You can also set a financial limit so you spend within your “gambling budget.”

But the first step to reducing or stopping gambling is to think about when and why you gamble. This exercise will help you recognize what you feel or do that makes you want to gamble – your triggers. Once you understand your triggers, you can find alternatives to habitual gambling.

The following chart includes some of the more common triggers for gambling.

Read each one to see if it applies to you, and check off either yes or no. If you check yes, review the “other choices” column, then write down your own ideas to cope with that trigger.

Trigger	Other choices besides gambling	What else can you do?
I gamble because I'm bored. <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	When I'm bored, I'm going to call my mentor, trusted loved one, or a friend.	When I feel bored...
I gamble because I need to win money. <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	When I want to win money, I'll remind myself that gambling usually costs me money.	When I need money...
I gamble when I'm stressed. <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	When I feel stressed, I'll go for a walk.	When I feel stressed...
I gamble when I feel lucky. <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	When I feel lucky, I'll tell myself that the odds of winning are against me.	When I'm feeling lucky...
I gamble when I'm angry. <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	When I'm angry, I'll talk to a supportive person or exercise.	When I'm angry...
I gamble when I want to forget my problems. <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	When I want to forget my problems, I will remind myself that my problems don't go away when I gamble.	When I want to forget my problems...

<p>I gamble when I want to win back money I've lost. <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No</p>	<p>When I want to win back the money I've lost, I'll talk to my support person.</p>	<p>When I want to win back money I've lost...</p>
<p>I gamble when I want to have fun and excitement. <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No</p>	<p>When I want to have fun, I'll do something else I know is fun and ask a friend to join me.</p>	<p>When I want to have fun...</p>
<p>I gamble when I feel depressed. <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No</p>	<p>When I feel depressed, I'll remind myself that I usually lose when I gamble – making me even more depressed!</p>	<p>When I feel depressed...</p>
<p>I gamble because my friends do it and pressure me. <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No</p>	<p>When my friends ask me to go out to gamble, I'll suggest doing something else.</p>	<p>When my friends ask me to go out and gamble...</p>
<p>Gambling is a habit. <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No</p>	<p>At those times I usually go out gambling, I'll plan ahead to do something different.</p>	<p>At those times I usually gamble...</p>
<p>I gamble when I feel lonely. <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No</p>	<p>When I'm lonely I'll talk to a friend about how I feel.</p>	<p>When I feel lonely...</p>
<p>Other: _____ _____ _____ _____</p>		

Reflections on This Exercise

What is the most common thing that triggers you to gamble? Explain.

Was it hard to come up with alternatives to gambling? Why or why not?

What else can you do to cope with triggers?

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?
