



# Strategies to Help You Stay Away From Gambling

By Dr. Linda Hancock

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Hancock has written a regular weekly column entitled “All Psyched Up” for newspapers in two Canadian provinces for more than a dozen years. Over the years, her readers and clients have said that they have benefited from her common-sense solutions, wisdom, and sense of humour. Dr. Linda Hancock, the author of “Life is An Adventure...every step of the way” and “Open for Business Success” is a Registered Psychologist who has a private practice in Medicine Hat. She can be reached at 403-529-6877 or through email [office@drlindahancock.com](mailto:office@drlindahancock.com)

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Sometimes people who are determined to stop an addiction do well for a period of time and then slip. It is important to have a number of strategies in place to prevent this. Here are a few that I recommend to my clients:

1. Figure out your pattern - Use a pen and paper to draw out the sequence of things that happen in your life right before you start gambling. Begin with the word "Good" and ask yourself the question "Then what happens?" Write down the answer and then ask "Then what happens?" Do this until you have traced out every step until you reach the point where you have lost money and are feeling upset.
2. Identify the thoughts and feelings that occur before, during and after the gambling - Do you usually gamble when you are angry, afraid, lonely or sad? Are your thoughts "This time I will win" or "I might as well try"? Frequently people gamble to avoid or reduce their emotions. Their thoughts can encourage them to do what they will later regret. Afterwards, they can feel depressed, angry or shamed.
3. Make a video of yourself in which you will talk to the camera about the consequences you have faced because of your gambling. Make sure you use details and tell the whole story of your situation. When you are tempted again to gamble you can play this to yourself as a reminder. You see denial and minimization are two of the defence mechanisms that addicts use to escape the reality of what addictions can do to their lives.
4. Make a list of the things you have suffered and lost because of gambling. Keep this in your pocket or purse at all times. Read it when you are tempted.
5. Reduce your opportunities to access money - Ask the credit card companies to lower your credit limits. Some people ask a spouse to take over the finances. Have automatic debits made from your chequing account into investments that are locked in and can't be accessed.
6. Find healthy distractions - Develop a hobby that will capture your attention. Write out a list of things that you can do "instead of". Join a club or sports team. Set up appointments with professionals or friends during your most vulnerable times.
7. Limit your alcohol intake - Often people who drink find that their resistance is lowered when they drink. And remember, VLTs are usually found in bars. Avoid locations that can trap you.
8. Find good support - Make sure that you have people in your life who know about your addiction and are willing to help you make changes. Join a 12 step program. Find a sponsor. Begin working with a therapist. Get honest with yourself about your problem and learn how to accept help.