Maintaining recovery for problem gambling and gambling addiction

As you may have noticed, quitting problem gambling is relatively easy. It’s staying in recovery—making a permanent commitment to stay away from gambling—that is such a challenge. Maintaining recovery for problem gambling and gambling addiction is possible if you surround yourself with people to whom you’re accountable, avoid tempting environments, give up control of your finances (at least at first), and find exciting or enjoyable activities to replace gambling.

Changing your lifestyle and making healthier choices

One way to stop yourself from problem gambling is to analyse what is needed for gambling to occur, work on removing these elements from your life and replace them with healthier choices. The four elements needed for problem gambling to continue are:

- **A decision**: Before gambling occurs, the decision to gamble has been made. If you have an urge to gamble: stop what you are doing and call someone, think about the consequences to your actions, tell yourself to stop thinking about gambling, and find something else to do immediately.

- **Money**: Gambling cannot occur without money. Get rid of your credit cards, let someone else be in charge of your money, have the bank make automatic payments for you, and keep a limited amount of cash on you at all times.

- **Time**: Gambling cannot occur if you don’t have the time. Schedule enjoyable recreational time for yourself that has nothing to do with gambling, find time for relaxation, and plan outings with your family.

- **A game**: Without a game or activity to bet on there is no opportunity to gamble. Don’t put yourself in tempting environments or locations. Tell the gambling establishments you frequent that you have a gambling problem and ask them to restrict you from betting at their casinos and establishments.

Maintaining recovery from problem gambling or gambling addiction depends a lot on the reasons why you were gambling in the first place. Once you’ve quit gambling, reasons such as depression, loneliness, or boredom will remain, so in order to maintain your recovery, you’ll need to address these problems. There are alternative behaviours you can substitute for gambling. Some examples include:
REASONS FOR GAMBLING
To provide excitement, get a rush of adrenaline
To be more social, overcome shyness
To numb unpleasant feelings, not think about problems
Boredom or loneliness
To relax after a stressful day
To solve money problems

SAME SUBSTITUTE BEHAVIOURS
Sport or a challenging hobby, such as mountain biking, rock climbing, or Go Kart racing
Counselling, enrol in a public speaking class, join a social group
Therapy, consult Help Guide.org
Find something you’re passionate about such as art, music, sports, or books then find others with the same interests
As little as 15 minutes of daily exercise can relieve stress. Or deep breathing, meditation, or massage
The odds are always stacked against you so it’s far better to seek help with debts from a credit counsellor

Dealing with gambling cravings
Feeling the urge to gamble is normal, but that doesn’t make it any easier when you are struggling to make better choices. Remember, as you build healthier choices and a good support network, resisting cravings will be easier and easier. The following strategies can help:

- **Reach out for support.** Call a trusted family member, meet a friend for coffee, or go to a Gamblers Anonymous meeting.
- **Do something else.** Distract yourself with another activity, such as cleaning your house, going to the gym, or watching a movie.
- **Postpone gambling.** Tell yourself that you’ll wait five minutes, fifteen minutes, or an hour — however long you think you can hold out. As you wait, the urge to gamble may pass or become weak enough to resist.
- **Give yourself a reality check.** Visualize what will happen if you give in to the urge to gamble. Think about how you’ll feel after all your money is gone and you’ve disappointed yourself and your family again.

If you aren’t able to resist the gambling craving, don’t be too hard on yourself or use it as an excuse to give up. Overcoming a gambling addiction is a tough process. You may slip from time to time; the important thing is to learn from your mistakes and continue working towards recovery.