

National Problem Gambling Clinic
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Self-help guide during COVID-19

The current COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic is an unusual time that has had an impact on all our lives. COVID-19 can be worrying and its effect can have an impact on your mental and physical health. We want to make sure you stay safe during the current pandemic, have tools to keep you mentally and physically well, and help reduce your gambling behaviour.

What changes will be made to the National Problem Gambling Clinic?

Part of the service will be temporarily suspended as clinicians prepare to help the most affected services during the pandemic. Unfortunately as a result, there will be a pause in therapy for those already in treatment and delays for those waiting to start.

However, we recognise that your efforts to break free from gambling do not have to pause; in fact, this pandemic may even act as an opportunity to change long-standing habits. We have therefore created this leaflet which summarises some of the key strategies you can put in place from the comfort of your own home.

STIMULUS CONTROL STRATEGIES

Problem gambling is thought to be an impulsive activity. In other words, you encounter something related to gambling and this leads you to gamble, often before you have time to think through the potential negative consequences of your actions. In other words it becomes habitual.

To be able to gamble you need: **gambling thoughts, access to money and access to gambling premises**. It is initially difficult to change gambling thoughts so you need to make it as difficult as possible to gamble by limiting your access to both money and premises.

You may have already found that it has been harder to gamble during COVID-19 as you are in isolation and gambling premises are closed. However, there are still a number of useful strategies you can use to limit your access to gambling.

All the below strategies can be put into place from the comfort and safety of your own home.

Reducing access to money

- Only take the amount of cash out with you that you need when going to the supermarket or exercising and leave bank cards at home

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- Order a new bank card:
 - Give the unopened letter to someone you trust, and have them remove **the 3 digit security code** on the back of the card.
 - This will make it difficult to set up new online accounts impulsively, and you will be unable to top up existing accounts.
- Use Android or Apple Pay instead of your bank cards.
- Only use contactless which will limit spending to £30 (due to increase to £45 so stay informed)
- Look into whether your bank has a gambling block function. Some banks can turn this on online, whilst others may require a phone call. See below for some links to high-street banks:
 - Barclays: <https://www.barclays.co.uk/loans/money-worries/addiction/>
 - Lloyds: <https://www.lloydsbank.com/online-banking/mobile-banking/card-freezes.html>
- Set up a new bank account such as Monzo or Starling online. Both banks can block gambling transactions and set limits on transactions and cash withdrawals.
 - Monzo: <https://www.starlingbank.com/blog/merchant-blocking-gamblingbetting/>
 - Starling: <https://monzo.com/blog/2018/06/19/gambling-block-self-exclusion/>

Reducing access to gambling facilities

Online

- **Gamstop**
 - A free website you can sign up to that will self-exclude you from all UK based gambling websites.
 - You will need to provide them with your postcode, date of birth and email address.
 - It will take up to 24 hours for your self-exclusion to become effective.
 - You will be excluded for either 6 months, 1 year or 5 years depending on the option you chose.
 - The self-exclusion will remain in force, following this time period, unless you ask GAMSTOP for it to be removed.
 - Visit their website for more information: <https://www.gamstop.co.uk/>
- **Gamban**
 - Software that helps problem gambling by preventing protected devices from accessing online gambling
 - You can install Gamban on up to three devices to self-exclude from all UK based gambling websites.
 - 7 day free trial, then £24.99 a year
 - Visit their website for more information: www.gamban.com.

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Bookmakers

- **MOSES**

- You can self-exclude from bookmakers using MOSES (Multi Operator Self Exclusion Service).
- This can be done over the phone without you having to go into bookmakers.
- You call MOSES and inform them of the areas you visit or are likely to visit to gamble. They will use a mapping tool to identify relevant betting shops and add them to the exclusion.
- You will need to provide them with a good quality, up to date photograph of yourself, which they will use to create your exclusion.
- This information will then be circulated to all relevant bookmakers.
- You will be excluded for a fixed period of 12 months and cannot leave the scheme during this time. You will need to renew it for the exclusion to continue (you should be notified when it is time to renew)
- You can add more betting shops at any point during your self-exclusion. Visit their website or call for more information: <https://self-exclusion.co.uk/> or 0800 294 2060.

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WHAT ELSE CAN I DO?

Managing cravings

Cravings are thoughts and feelings that occur just before you gamble. Feelings can range from mild edginess to full-blown anxiety or even excitement or euphoria. Thoughts can include what we call 'permission giving' thoughts, which encourage you to gamble e.g. "I am going to win this time" or "one bet won't hurt".

If you are experiencing cravings you can try any of the following coping methods:

- Avoid the stimulus using stimulus control strategies
- Practice relaxation and breathing techniques
- Physical activity
- Talk to someone you trust
- Take a hot bath or shower
- "Ride the wave" – cravings normally take 5-10 minutes to pass and the strong feelings will fade away after this
- Commit to not gambling for the next 5 minutes and continue this until the craving passes

Be mindful of trying to challenge craving thoughts as focusing on your thoughts can mean thinking about gambling, which is a craving in itself.

Keep a diary of any craving you have and what coping methods you have used. It is useful to know what has and what hasn't worked. That way you are more prepared next time! It is also important to adapt your copy strategies for when times like these when daily life is restricted and things that may have worked in the past may not currently be available.

Identifying triggers

COVID-19 can be a particularly strong trigger for individuals to gambling. It has caused a complete change in our usual routines and can increase loneliness and boredom.

Possible triggers to be mindful of during this time include:

- Feeling anxious or worried
- Being bored or feeling that you have too much spare time
- Loneliness or isolation
- Feeling frustrated at the current situation and the impact it has had on you emotionally, financially and socially
- Struggling with uncertainty

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- Excessive alcohol consumption
- Seeing adverts on your TV or phone for online gambling

It is important that you avoid triggers where possible, but if you cannot, try and follow the strategies mentioned in this document, including the Five Ways of Wellbeing, and use the Other Services and Resources mentioned as needed.

Reward yourself for not gambling

It is important when learning not to gamble to introduce rewards for the progress you have made. If you make a contract with yourself that you get something pleasurable if you do not gamble, this can encourage you to face the challenge of not engaging in gambling behaviour.

It can seem a little strange at first to reward yourself for not gambling, especially if you are currently dealing with the consequence of your gambling; however, if your new life is not pleasurable then thoughts of gambling will likely be stronger.

Create a list of a reward that you can give yourself for each week of not gambling. It can be something different each week and the longer you are abstinent the larger the reward can be. Given the amount of time a lot of us have on our hands at the moment, you may even want to try and give yourself a small daily reward to boost motivation and keep you going!

Remember... rewards do not have to be money-based – it can be time with family or a good movie! Also, if you do gamble then you should not reward yourself that week and the reward process starts again.

Try using one of the tracking apps mentioned in the 'Other Services and Resource' section of this document.

Enjoying life without gambling

Many gamblers report a void once gambling has been removed from their life. Finding new ways of enjoying your life in the absence of gambling is crucial for keeping away the thoughts and urges that put your recovery at risk. We appreciate that this is hard for everyone at the moment given the restrictions we are all living in so the suggestions below are ones you can try from the safety of your own home.

Why not try:

- Brainstorming a selection of new activities you have never tried but may enjoy that can be done during self-isolation
- Restarting past hobbies and interests that gambling stopped you doing
- Planning your week in advance, including these activities
- Rewarding yourself for the days, weeks and months you do not gamble

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It is important in such a time of uncertainty that you have a daily routine that includes things you need to do, such as showering and eating, and things you want to do. Not all pleasurable activities cost money and now may be the perfect time for you to learn a new skill or try something different.

Remember... our experience shows that you are more likely to be successful in moving away from gambling if you are enjoying yourself, do not deny yourself the enjoyable things in life.

Five Ways to Wellbeing



Connect

Feeling close to, and valued by, other people is a fundamental human need. Social relationships are critical for promoting wellbeing, particularly in times of great need.

Why not:

- Stay in touch with friends and family by phone, video calls, email or social media if you do not live with them.
- Plan some activities to do with friends and family virtually like quizzes or playing games in the evenings.
- Check in with those who are more vulnerable to see how they are doing and offer support where you can.
- Use forums and chat rooms to talk to other problem gamblers. *See other resources for more information.*
- Call the National Gambling Helpline on 0808 8020 133 for advice and support.

Be Active

Regular physical activity is associated with improved well-being across all age groups. Make sure you are using the allotted time given to exercise and be physically active.

Why not:

- Spend some time stretching in the morning when you first get up.

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- Go for a walk or run outside.
- Do a home work out. P.E with Joe on The Body Coach TV has been popular with many families during this time to get all in the house active <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCAxW1XT0iEJo0TYIRfn6rYQ>. There are also some great home workout videos flooding the internet at the moment – why not challenge yourself or those you live with.
- Put on some music and dance.

Take Notice

Taking notice helps us focus on the here and now. We can become more in tune with ourselves and our environment if we slow down and take notice. This has been shown to improve well-being and allow us to live in the moment. This is particularly important at this time, as we do not have much control over the future but we can take time to acknowledge and appreciate the present and accept the uncertainty.

Why not:

- Walk or run a new route during your allotted exercise time.
- Spend some time de-cluttering a room in the house.
- Try a mindfulness exercise. *See other resources for more information.*
- Spend some time in nature, whether that's watering house plants, in your garden, or walking through a local park.
- Try a new recipe or bake some treats.

Keep Learning

Setting goals and continuing to learn throughout life helps boost wellbeing and build resilience. With us being at home more in the coming weeks, now is the perfect time to learn some new skills!

Why not:

- Read a book or magazine.
- Take an online course. FutureLearn is one organisation that offer free online training courses on a variety of topics: www.futurelearn.com.
- Listen to a podcast or watch a documentary.
- Learn a new language or how to play an instrument. Youtube is a great resource for this!

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Give

Carrying out small acts of kindness can increase happiness and general wellbeing. It is also great to help build morale in the community, which is what we all need right now.

Why not:

- Help an elderly or vulnerable neighbour by buying their shopping or picking up their prescriptions.
- Support a friend by calling them.
- Donate food or toiletries to your local foodbank or homeless shelter.
- If you are safe and healthy, you can offer to volunteer with the NHS during this difficult time. Remember, this is completely optional and you should make sure you are looking after yourself first!

<https://www.goodsamapp.org/NHsvolunteerresponders>

Who should I contact in the meantime?

You may be thinking that the above skills sound great but what you really need right now is talking to someone.

The **National Gambling Helpline** is a 24 hour service, open 7 days a week providing information, advice and support for anyone affected by problem gambling.

You can contact them for free on: **0808 8020 133**.

Alternatively, you can contact them through their live chat on their website: <https://www.gamcare.org.uk/get-support/talk-to-us-now/>.

If you are in a crisis or experiencing suicidal thoughts, please kindly consider one of the following:

- Call The Samaritans on 116 123, or e-mail them on: jo@samaritans.org
- Call the CNWL Urgent Advice Line on 0800 0234 650
- You can also seek help from your GP: call for an emergency telephone appointment or ask to speak with the duty doctor.

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OTHER SERVICES AND RESOURCES

Debt Advice

Debt is a major feature of problem gambling and can be particularly difficult to manage in this current crisis. Many people try not to think about debt and may try to avoid paying back money. However, this takes time and effort and is often unsuccessful. Being honest with your debt is an important step to help you be successful in reaching your goal of abstinence.

Below are some free resources and support services that can assist with any-debt related issues you may have:

- Citizens Advice: www.citizensadvice.org.uk or 03444 111 444
- National Debtline: www.nationaldebtline.org or 0808 808 4000
- StepChange: www.stepchange.org or 0800 138 1111

The government has also implemented a number of strategies to help individuals financially affected by COVID-19. Visit the below website for information on debt, housing and financial support offered during this crisis.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/support-for-those-affected-by-covid-19/support-for-those-affected-by-covid-19>.

Gamblers Anonymous

Gamblers Anonymous (GA) usually offers groups for the opportunity to share experience, strength and hope with other problem gamblers. Due to COVID-19 there are no groups running currently; however, you can use the Forum and Chat Room for support from other problem gamblers.

<https://www.gamblersanonymous.org.uk/>

Gordon Moody

Gordon Moody is a residential treatment programme for those suffering with gambling addiction. They have two centres, one in London and one in Dudley. Visit their website for more information on their service and how to self-refer.

www.gordonmoody.org.uk

Gam-Anon

Gam-Anon is a national organisation that provides support for family members and usually hold regular national meetings for family members. They are currently trialling online meetings, visit their website below to access this.

www.gamanon.org.uk.

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Apps

I Am Sober

I Am Sober is an abstinence counter app that allows you to track how long you've gone without gambling. You can track how much money or time you've saved by not gambling, and unlock achievements based on how long you've abstained for.



Nomo

Nomo is another abstinence tracker app that allows you to track how long you've gone without gambling, as well as how much time and money you've saved. A daily journal can also be used to log what emotions or thoughts you are experiencing each day – this can be great for cravings and gambling thoughts.



NHS Every Mind Matters & One You

Every Mind Matters and One You are NHS services aimed at helping you manage and maintain your mental and physical health. They have a number of resources on their website, including advice on how to stay well whilst at home during the pandemic.

They also have a variety of apps that are available on iOS and Android to help monitor and make changes to your diet, alcohol consumption and smoking and get you exercise. <https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/>

ONE YOU

Headspace

An everyday mindfulness and meditation app for Stress, Anxiety, Sleep and many other topics that focus on healthy living. They offer a 10 day free trial, but require you to sign up for a paid subscription for full access to the programme.

Visit: <https://www.headspace.com/> or the App Store for more information.

