

Gambling Urge & Craving Toolkit

Your practical, research-informed guide for recognising, understanding, and managing gambling cravings effectively.

Introduction

Welcome to your Gambling Urge & Craving Toolkit. This guide is built around lived experience and expert-informed techniques to help you handle the highs and lows of recovery. Gambling cravings are real, complex, and often deeply rooted in emotional and physiological responses. The good news: you can overcome them. This toolkit provides education, reflection tools, grounding techniques, and scripts for action — all with one goal in mind: to help you stay in control and choose freedom.

Work through each section slowly. Print pages that support your routine. Use this as your go-to during cravings or part of a regular self-check-in. You are not alone. You are not broken. You are recovering — one choice at a time.

1. Why Do Gambling Urges Happen?

Gambling urges originate from your brain's reward system. Every time you gamble, your brain releases dopamine — a chemical tied to pleasure and excitement. Over time, your brain becomes conditioned to associate gambling with relief, stimulation, or escape. Even when you don't win, the 'anticipation' creates a buzz that your brain craves.

These cravings are made stronger by emotional triggers and environmental cues, such as stress, loneliness, paydays, certain places, or specific times of day. Understanding this loop allows you to interrupt it — with awareness, boundaries, and recovery tools.

****Common Triggers:****

- Emotional: boredom, anxiety, sadness, excitement, guilt
- Physical: tiredness, hunger, withdrawal symptoms
- Situational: being alone with your phone, payday, alcohol

****The takeaway:**** You're not weak. Your brain is doing what it learned. You can teach it something new.

2. Grounding Techniques to Reset the Mind

Grounding exercises help bring your attention back to the present moment. They're especially useful when cravings feel physical, overwhelming, or urgent. They calm the nervous system, activate rational thinking, and create space between the craving and the

action.

****Technique: 5-4-3-2-1 Senses****

Identify: 5 things you can see, 4 things you can touch, 3 things you hear, 2 things you smell, 1 thing you taste. Breathe slowly as you name each one.

****Technique: Box Breathing****

Inhale for 4 seconds → Hold for 4 → Exhale for 4 → Hold for 4. Repeat 4–6 times. Use when anxious or tense.

****Technique: Cold Reset****

Hold ice cubes, splash cold water, or place your hand on a cool surface. This grounds your body out of a triggered state.

****Technique: Tense and Release****

Tighten each muscle group (feet, legs, shoulders, hands) for 5 seconds, then relax. Releases built-up tension and helps you feel in control again.

3. Craving-Focused Mindfulness Script

Use this mindfulness meditation when a craving arises. Read it slowly or listen to a recording of yourself reading it out loud:

“I notice this urge. I see it for what it is — a pattern. A wave. A story from my past. But I do not have to follow it. I do not have to believe it. I sit here. I breathe. I wait. The wave rises... and the wave falls. I am still here. I am grounded. I am safe.”

Repeat this for 5–10 minutes. Breathe into your belly. Allow thoughts to come and go. Cravings pass — your peace can stay.

4. Trigger Mapping Worksheet

Understanding your personal triggers helps you prepare for cravings. Use this worksheet to notice patterns:

- What happened before the craving?
- What emotion did I feel?
- What thought entered my mind?
- Where was I? Who was I with?
- What did I do in response?
- What helped reduce the craving?

****Sample Entry:****

Trigger: Received payday → Emotion: Excitement and temptation → Thought: 'I can control it this time' → Response: Opened gambling app → Help: Texted support buddy

Use this worksheet daily for 7–14 days to identify consistent patterns and develop prevention strategies.

5. Craving Distraction Menu

Cravings lose power when you give your brain a healthy alternative. Use these go-to distractions categorised by available time:

****2–5 Minutes:****

- Splash cold water on your face
- Do 20 jumping jacks or push-ups
- Recite affirmations aloud

****10–15 Minutes:****

- Watch a comedy video
- Write a gratitude list
- Call or text a friend

****30+ Minutes:****

- Go for a walk or drive
- Cook a meal from scratch
- Journal your emotions
- Listen to a podcast about recovery

Write down 3 of your favourite activities now, and place the list where you'll see it. Have it ready before cravings strike.

6. Emergency Contact Scripts

Talking to someone when cravings hit can interrupt the spiral. Use these ready-made messages to make that first reach-out easier:

****Text Script 1:**** "Hey, I'm feeling a strong urge to gamble. Can you talk for a few minutes?"







****Text Script 2:**** "I don't need advice, just someone to help distract me. Can we chat?"

****Phone Call Opener:**** "I promised myself I'd reach out before I acted on a craving. That's why I'm calling."

Save a few supportive contacts in your phone under a label like 'Call Me First'. Make it frictionless.

7. Daily Urge Tracker

Use this tracker each day to monitor when, why, and how you experience cravings. Reflection helps identify patterns:

-  Date: _____
-  Time: _____
-  Urge Intensity (1–10): _____
-  Trigger: _____
-  My Response: _____
-  What Helped: _____

End-of-week questions:

- Which time of day were cravings strongest?
- What coping strategies worked best?
- What will I try differently next week?

8. Printable Affirmation Cards

Print and cut out these affirmations. Keep them in your wallet, on your fridge, or by your bed. Speak them daily.

- “This craving will pass. I will not act on it.”
- “I do not gamble today. That’s enough.”
- “I choose my peace over the promise of a win.”
- “I’ve survived 100% of my urges so far.”
- “Freedom is more valuable than a bet.”

9. FAQ – Understanding the Craving Cycle

****Q:** How long do cravings last?**

A: Most last 10–30 minutes. It helps to time them. Knowing they end can give you strength to ride them out.

****Q:** Will I always have cravings?**

A: No. With time and practice, they become less intense and less frequent. Your brain changes as you change your habits.

****Q:** What if I relapse?**

A: One slip is not failure. Reflect, reset, and restart immediately. You haven’t lost everything — you’ve learned something new.

10. Suggested Resources & Further Support

****Apps:****

- RecoverMe
- I Am Sober
- Clear Fear (for anxiety)

****Books:****

- 'The Easy Way to Stop Gambling' – Allen Carr
- 'In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts' – Dr. Gabor Maté

****Websites:****

- Gamblers Anonymous (GA)
- NHS Gambling Support
- BeyondGambling.org

****Helplines:****

- UAE: 800-HOPE
- UK: 0808 8020 133
- US: 1-800-GAMBLER