

TOOL: Cost-Benefit Analysis

So far, you've identified your core values and what you want your future to look like. You also have created a plan to get there. Remember, though, your addictive behaviour will be waiting in the wings for the slightest opportunity to hijack your plans and motivation.

Have you ever asked yourself what you get out of your addictive behaviour? You must be getting something - it's hard to imagine you'd do it if you didn't get something out of it, even if the behaviour causes you or others harm.

Do you drink because it helps you cope with the stress of being a parent or the challenges of your job? Do you find anonymous sex partners to make you feel more attractive and wanted? Do you harm yourself because it calms you?

Completing a Cost-Benefit Analysis or CBA will help you answer these questions. At some point in our lives, we told ourselves - either consciously or unconsciously - that the benefits of our behaviour outweighed the costs. But have you ever looked at your behaviour under a microscope and examined all the benefits and all the costs?

People who want to stop an addictive behaviour have two types of thinking about their behaviour, but never at the same time: Short-term thinking and long-term thinking.

- Short-term thinking: Using makes you feel immediately better.
- Long-term thinking: You want to stop the behaviour to lead a healthier life.

Because short- and long-term thinking don't happen simultaneously, the CBA brings them to one place to help you identify and compare the far-reaching consequences of your behaviour with its "right now" benefits. The CBA also will help you compare long- and short-term benefits of abstinence. To start, consider the costs and benefits of your addictive behaviour.

The Costs and Benefits of Using

Using the CBA example, start by looking at what's pleasurable about your addictive behaviour. Be as specific as possible. For example, instead of writing, "My addictive behaviour helps me cope," write how it helps you cope. "My behaviour makes me brave enough to say what I'm really feeling," or "Acting out helps me forget my loneliness."

Benefits (advantages and rewards)

- What pleasures, benefits, or advantages does it bring to my life?
- With what feelings or moods does my addictive behaviour help me cope (frustration, anger, fear, boredom, depression, anxiety, loneliness, stress, etc.)?
- How does it help me cope?
- What positive feelings, moods, or situations does my addictive behaviour make even better?
- What things does my addictive behaviour help, or at least seem to help me do better?
- Does it help me avoid reality or escape?
- Does it ease or reduce physical or emotional pain?
- Does my addictive behaviour help me socialise and fit in?

- Do I need my addictive behaviour to seem more fun, charming, interesting, or more confident?
- Do I need my addictive behaviour to feel normal?

Costs (risks and disadvantages)

- What is it that I dislike about using?
- How is it harming me?
- What will my life be like if I continue to use?
- How much time have I lost to my addictive behaviour?
- How many people do I lie to in order to hide my addictive behaviour?
- How do I feel after the effects my addictive behaviour wear off?
- How is using affecting my health?
- What legal problems do I face because of my behaviour?
- How does using affect my relationships?
- What effects has it had on my self-respect and self-confidence?

The Costs and Benefits of Not Using

Now, do the same exercise for your life without addictive behaviour. Be honest and realistic.

Benefits

- How will stopping affect my health?
- How will stopping affect my relationships with the ones I love?
- How will stopping affect my job?
- How much money can I save?
- What will stopping do to my self-respect and self-confidence?
- Will stopping affect my ability to deal with my problems?
- What will I do with the time freed up because I'm not pursuing my addictive behaviour?
- What goals have I abandoned that I could accomplish?

Costs

What will I miss about using?

- What issues in my life will I have to find new ways to deal with when I stop using?
- What thoughts and emotions will I have to learn to accept?
- What will change about my life that I like now because I use?

Example Cost-Benefit Analysis

The Substance or Activity to Consider Is: Alcohol

Using or Doing Label each item short-term (ST) or long-term (LT)	
<u>Benefits (rewards and advantages)</u> Relieve negativity (ST) Relieve stress (ST) Feel more confident (ST) Socialising is easier (ST) Relieve physical pain (ST) Makes me feel "normal" (ST) To reach a state of oblivion (ST) Helps me have fun (ST)	<u>Costs (risks and disadvantages)</u> Hangovers (ST) Damages health (LT) Damages relationships (L T) Divorce (LT) Get arrested (LT) Financial troubles (L T) Lose home (LT) Lose family (kids, parents, siblings) (LT)
NOT Using or Doing Label each item short-term (ST) or long-term (LT)	
<u>Benefits (rewards and advantages)</u> Improves health and hygiene (LT) Improves relationships (LT) Improves work and job safety (LT) Stay out of jail/prison (LT) Finances improve (LT) Won't lose home (LT) Won't lose my kids (LT) Regain self-respect, improve mental health (LT)	<u>Costs (risks and disadvantages)</u> Get bored (ST) Can't relieve stress (ST) Have to manage pain other ways (ST, Have to cope with problems (ST, LT)

My Cost-Benefit Analysis

Using or Doing Label each item short-term (ST) or long-term (LT)	
<p><u>Benefits (rewards and advantages)</u></p>	<p><u>Costs (risks and disadvantages)</u></p>
NOT Using or Doing Label each item short-term (ST) or long-term (LT)	
<p><u>Benefits (rewards and advantages)</u></p>	<p><u>Costs (risks and disadvantages)</u></p>

Short- And Long-Term Benefits

Once you have your list of benefits and costs for each section, identify each one as either short-term benefit (ST) or long-term benefit (LT).

Are you surprised that most of the benefits of using and costs of stopping are short-term while the costs of using and benefits of stopping are long-term? In SMART meetings, we often hear gasps from people as they realise their addictive behaviour has only short-term benefits but long-term costs.

This may be the first time you've taken a hard look at the price you - and those around you - have paid for your behaviour.

Now that you're considering your behaviour in terms of immediate and lasting benefits, the decision whether to use or stop is clearer.

Keep your CBA handy and refer to it when you have an urge. Make copies and keep them within easy reach. Make it a living document: Revise and update it whenever you need to.

The CBA is a great tool to use for any change or decision you want to make.

Four Questions About My Addiction

Using the CBA Worksheet (Cost-Benefit Analysis Tool)

Use this informative paper-and-pencil tool to see what your behaviours are costing you as well as what they are providing you.

Divide your paper into four squares, and label the squares for each of the questions below, and list your answers. Then consider if you are getting the results you're looking for, or if change might be something to consider.

1. What do I enjoy about my addiction, what does it do for me (be specific)?

List as many things as you can that you liked about whatever you are/were addicted to.

- a. Where possible, find alternative ways of achieving the same goals.
- b. Recognize positive thinking about the addiction as a potential relapse warning sign.
- c. Realize that there are some things you liked about the addiction you will have to learn to live without.
- d. List what you enjoy about your addiction so you can ask yourself if it is really worth the price.
- e. Realize that you aren't stupid; you did get something from your addiction. It just may not be working on your behalf anymore.

2. What do I hate about my addiction, what does it do to me (give specific examples)?

List as many of the bad, undesirable results of your addiction as you can. Here it is extremely important that you use specific examples. Specific examples have much greater emotional impact and motivational force!

- a. Ask yourself honestly “If my addiction was a used car, would I pay this much for it?”
- b. Review this list often, especially if you are having a lot of positive, happy thoughts about all the great things your addiction did for you.

3. What do I think I will like about giving up my addiction?

List what good things you think/fantasize will happen when you stop your addiction.

- a. This provides you with a list of goals to achieve and things to look forward to as a result of your new addiction free lifestyle.
- b. This list also helps you to reality test your expectations. If they are unrealistic, they can lead to a disappointment based relapse.

4. What do I think I won't like about giving up my addiction?

List what you think you are going to hate, dread or merely dislike about living without your addiction.

- a. This list tells you what kinds of new coping skills, behaviours and lifestyle changes you need to develop in order to stay addiction free.
- b. It also serves as another relapse warning list. If all you think about is how much life sucks now that you are not doing your addiction, you are in a relapse thought pattern that is just as dangerous as only focusing on what you liked about your addiction.

Notes

This is not a do once and forget about it exercise. It is an ongoing project. Most people simply can't remember all of the positive and negative aspects of addiction and recovery at any one time.

Furthermore, seeing all the negative consequences of addiction listed in one place is very powerful. On the positive side, no one really knows what they like or don't like about living free of their addiction until they have done so for some time. I know of people who continued to add items to all four questions for a full 6 months.