

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 behavior 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 behavior? 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 behavior 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 behavior outweighed the costs. But have you ever looked at your behavior under a microscope and really examined *all* the benefits and *all* the costs?

People who want to stop an addictive behavior have two types of thinking about their behavior, 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 behavior to lead a healthier life. Because short- and long-term thinking don't happen simultaneously, the CBA (Figure 3.4) brings them to one place to help you identify and compare the far-reaching consequences of your behavior 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 behavior.

Figure 3.4. Cost-Benefit Analysis (example).

Using or Doing	
Label each item short-term (ST) or long-term (LT)	
Benefits (rewards and advantages)	Costs (risks and disadvantages)
Relieve negativity (ST)	Hangovers (ST)
Relieve stress (ST)	Damages health (LT)
Feel more confident (ST)	Damages relationships (LT)
Socializing is easier (ST)	Divorce (LT)
Relieve physical pain (ST)	Get arrested (LT)
Makes me feel “normal” (ST)	Financial troubles (LT)
To reach a state of oblivion (ST)	Lose home (LT)
Helps me have fun (ST)	Lose family (kids, parents, siblings) (LT)

NOT Using or Doing	
Label each item short-term (ST) or long-term (LT)	
Benefits (rewards and advantages)	Costs (risks and disadvantages)
Improves health and hygiene (LT)	Get bored (ST)
Improves relationships (LT)	Can't relieve stress (ST)
Improves work and job safety (LT)	Have to manage pain other ways (ST, LT)
Stay out of jail/prison (LT)	Have to cope with problems (ST, LT)
Finances improve (LT)	
Won't lose home (LT)	
Won't lose my kids (LT)	
Regain self-respect, improve mental health (LT)	

The costs and benefits of using

Using the Figure 3.4 example, start by looking at what's pleasurable about your addictive behavior. Be as specific as possible. For example, instead of writing, "My addictive behavior helps me cope," write how it helps you cope. "My behavior 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 behavior 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 behavior make even better?

What things does my addictive behavior 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 behavior help me socialize and fit in?

Do I need my addictive behavior to seem more fun, charming, interesting, or more confident?

Do I need my addictive behavior 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 behavior?

How many people do I lie to in order to hide my addictive behavior?

How do I feel after the effects my addictive behavior wear off?

How is using affecting my health?

Does using affect my energy, stamina, and concentration?

How much money have I lost to my addictive behavior?

What legal problems do I face because of my behavior?

How does using affect my relationships?

How does using affect my work performance?

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 behavior. 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 behavior?

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?

Short-term and long-term benefits

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

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 realize their addictive behavior 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 behavior.

Now that you're considering your behavior 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.

