

Understanding and Overcoming Depression

We all experience moments of sadness or discouragement from time to time. Depression, however, is more than just a temporary case of the blues. It is a disorder that can last for weeks, months, even years if it is not treated. Depression causes its sufferers genuine distress, and its consequences are difficult to deal with—both for people suffering from it and for their loved ones. Luckily, it is possible to overcome depression.

/ Understanding Depression

Depression is part of a group of disorders called mood disorders. It is the result of a **combination of factors**, which vary from one person to another.

There are several types of depression. Some are mild, while others are moderate or severe. They can be related to major life events or changes, such as pregnancy (postpartum depression), or to specific times of the year (seasonal affective disorder).

Recognizing the Signs

If you experience some of these symptoms for more than two weeks, you may be suffering from depression. Consult a health care professional without delay or get in touch with a community organization to obtain information and support (see the list of organizations on the last page).

- **Feelings of sadness or emptiness**
- **Irritability**
- **Loss of interest in usual activities, and general loss of pleasure**
- Fatigue, lack of energy
- Insomnia or oversleeping
- Changes in appetite
- Weight loss or gain
- Reduced self-esteem, and feelings of worthlessness, guilt or failure
- Isolation, withdrawal from social life
- Appearance of physical symptoms, such as headaches, backaches or an upset stomach
- Agitation, trouble concentrating or making decisions, memory difficulties
- **Feelings of despair, suicidal thoughts** (in this case, **consult a health care professional immediately**)

ENDORSED BY:

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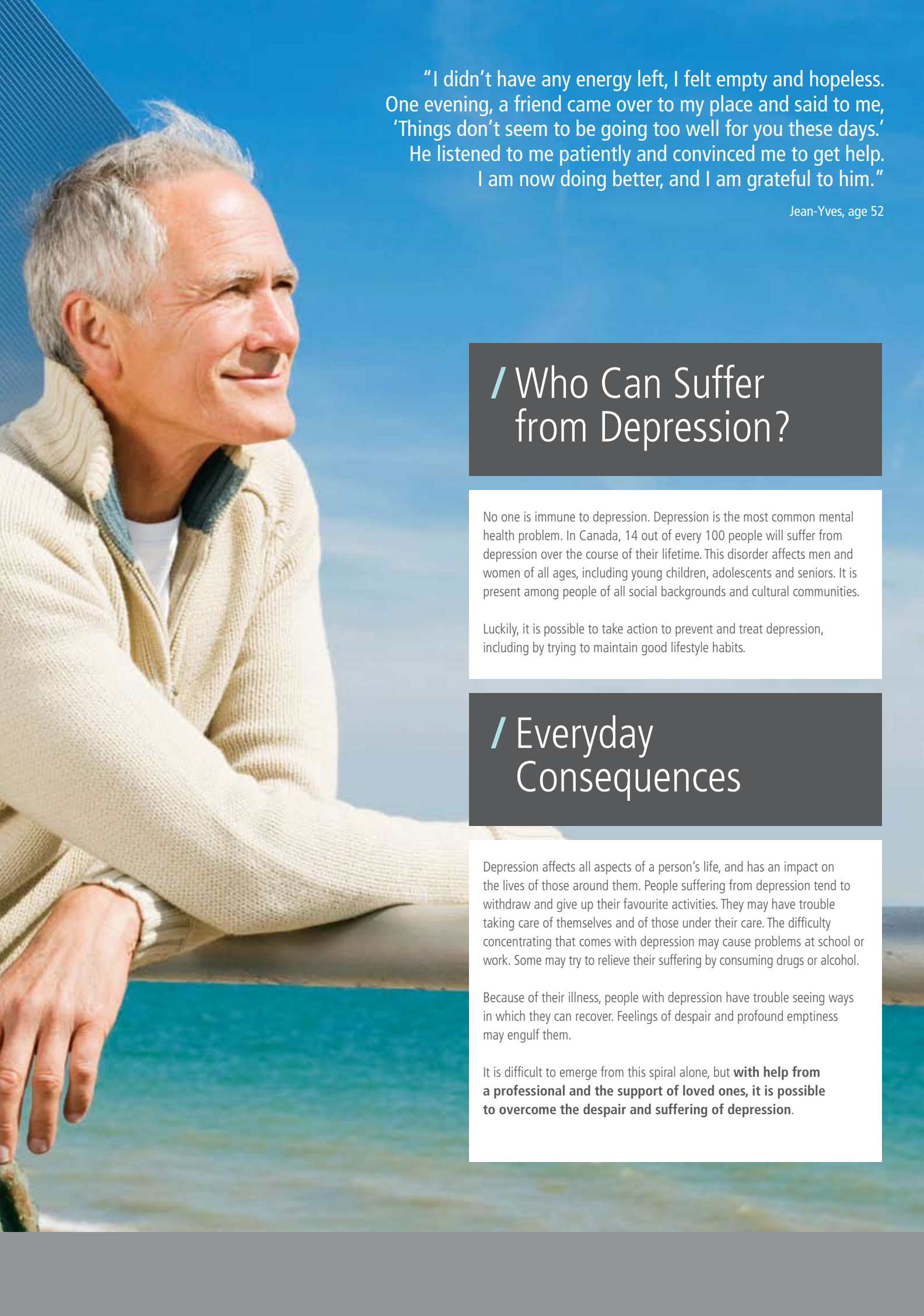


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"I didn't have any energy left, I felt empty and hopeless. One evening, a friend came over to my place and said to me, 'Things don't seem to be going too well for you these days.' He listened to me patiently and convinced me to get help. I am now doing better, and I am grateful to him."

Jean-Yves, age 52

/ Who Can Suffer from Depression?

No one is immune to depression. Depression is the most common mental health problem. In Canada, 14 out of every 100 people will suffer from depression over the course of their lifetime. This disorder affects men and women of all ages, including young children, adolescents and seniors. It is present among people of all social backgrounds and cultural communities.

Luckily, it is possible to take action to prevent and treat depression, including by trying to maintain good lifestyle habits.

/ Everyday Consequences

Depression affects all aspects of a person's life, and has an impact on the lives of those around them. People suffering from depression tend to withdraw and give up their favourite activities. They may have trouble taking care of themselves and of those under their care. The difficulty concentrating that comes with depression may cause problems at school or work. Some may try to relieve their suffering by consuming drugs or alcohol.

Because of their illness, people with depression have trouble seeing ways in which they can recover. Feelings of despair and profound emptiness may engulf them.

It is difficult to emerge from this spiral alone, but **with help from a professional and the support of loved ones, it is possible to overcome the despair and suffering of depression.**

/ Overcoming Depression

Getting Support

By consulting a health care professional such as a doctor or a psychologist as soon as you recognize the signs of depression, **you increase your chances of recovering completely and decrease the risk of a relapse.**

The health care professional will assess whether it is really a case of depression, propose appropriate treatment and suggest supplementary resources.

You can also call upon community resources to speak with someone who will listen to you and answer your questions. As well, confiding in someone close to you whom you trust can help you see things more clearly.

Adapted Treatment

Treatment for depression is specific to each person.

It may include several components: psychotherapy, medication and strategies to help one to regain one's balance. All of these aspects are important and complement one another.

Getting Involved in Your Treatment

Recovery from depression happens when you become fully committed in all aspects of your treatment.

- Attend follow-up appointments with your doctor.
- Participate actively and faithfully in your psychotherapy.
- Respect the dosage and duration of your medication.
- Adopt and maintain a balanced lifestyle.
- Do not give up any aspect of your treatment without first discussing it with a health care professional; if you have questions or concerns, talk about them with your health care professional.
- Keep track of the things that influence your mood.
- Work together with loved ones and all of the people who can help you maintain your balance.

Psychotherapy

Psychotherapy is central to the treatment of depression. It helps you to determine the emotions, thoughts and behaviours that are harmful to your mental well-being. Through psychotherapy, you become aware of your injuries, develop your strengths, and implement strategies to regain your sense of balance.

There are many different approaches to psychotherapy. However, even more important than the approaches themselves is the relationship of confidence established between patient and therapist, because trust is fundamental to the success of therapy. In order to be sure that you are comfortable working with a particular therapist, do not hesitate to ask questions when meeting with him or her for the first time. To find a certified professional, you can consult the list of organizations on the last page of this brochure.

Medication

In cases of moderate or major depression, **antidepressants** are often useful in restoring one's appetite and sleep cycles, and increasing one's concentration, energy levels and general feelings of enjoyment. These improvements make it possible to focus on the other aspects of the treatment. **Research has shown that medication in combination with psychological therapy is the most effective way of preventing a relapse.**

Antidepressants usually need to be taken for several months and continued after remission in order to avoid a relapse. Contrary to popular belief, antidepressants do not create a dependency. However, when you stop taking medication, it is important to do so according to instructions from your doctor or pharmacist.

Depending on your symptoms, other types of medication may sometimes be useful.

Strategies for Regaining Your Balance

Lifestyle habits and ways of looking at life influence your physical and mental health. The following strategies will help you regain your balance... and maintain it!

- Eat healthy foods, be active almost every day and make sure you sleep well.
- Manage your stress: organize your time by setting priorities and make time to relax, have fun and enjoy life's little pleasures.
- Be careful with substances that act on the nervous system: alcohol and caffeine should be consumed in moderation, medication should be taken only as prescribed, and illicit drugs and tobacco should be avoided completely.
- Surround yourself with people with whom you enjoy spending time, and whom you can count on when things are not going well.
- Reinforce your self-esteem by learning to appreciate your qualities and accept your limits.



Helping a Loved One

If someone around you shows signs of depression, find the courage to bring the question up with them. Do not hesitate to ask whether they are thinking about suicide. Listen to them and encourage them to get help.

Living with a depressed person can be difficult. Confusion, frustration, guilt or helplessness are just some of the emotions you may experience when facing such a situation. It is important to remain conscious of your limits. Many community organizations that offer services to people suffering from a mental disorder also offer support to their loved ones. Do not hesitate to seek support for yourself as well as the person you love.

Preventing Suicide

Nearly 80% of people who take their own lives suffer from depression.

If you are thinking about suicide, or if you are worried that someone you know is considering taking their own life, get help immediately.

- **Association québécoise de prévention du suicide: 1-866-APPELLE (277-3553)**
- **Dial 9-1-1 if it is an emergency**

Resources Available to You

HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONALS

- Your **doctor** or **pharmacist**
- The **CLSC** or **CSSS** in your area
www.msss.gouv.qc.ca/en/repertoires/csss
- **Ordre des psychologues du Québec**
www.ordrepsy.qc.ca / 1 800 561-1223
- **Ordre des travailleurs sociaux et des thérapeutes conjugaux et familiaux du Québec**
www.optsq.org / 1 888 731-9420
- Professional services at **school or work**
- **Info-Santé**
Dial **8-1-1**
24 hours a day, 7 days a week
- **Douglas Institute**
www.douglas.qc.ca

COMMUNITY RESOURCES

- **Mental Illness Foundation**
www.mentalillnessfoundation.org
1 888 529-5354
- **Canadian Mental Health Association**
www.cmha.ca
- **Revivre**
Quebec Anxiety, Depressive and Bipolar Disorder Support Association
www.revivre.org / 1 866 REVIVRE (738-4873)
- **ATAQ**
Association Troubles Anxieux du Québec
www.ataq.org
- **Help Online**
www.aideenligne.ca/en / 1 866 766 5620

- **Fédération des familles et amis de la personne atteinte de maladie mentale**
(Federation of families and friends of people with mental illnesses)
www.ffapamm.com / 1 800 323-0474

- **Association québécoise de prévention du suicide**
24 hours a day, 7 days a week everywhere in Québec
www.aqps.info
1 866 APPELLE (277-3553)
- In case of an **emergency**, dial **9-1-1**.

PASS THIS BROCHURE ON!

The information in this brochure should not be interpreted as providing a medical diagnosis, and should not take the place of consultation with a health care professional.

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