Today you find yourself having to work towards retrieving something incredibly precious: your mental health. You are the most important person in achieving this goal.

This brochure will provide you with valuable information to help you manage many aspects of your daily life and assist you with your ongoing recovery.

The road to recovery begins here. Let’s get going!

Developed by the Programme des troubles anxieux et de l’humeur, this brochure is part of a larger vision to promote full citizenship, where the individual plays a pivotal role in the respect of his or her own rights, duties and abilities within the community.
Some people may be tempted to turn towards drugs or alcohol as a way of improving their mood or escaping their pain. This type of consumption is not only problematic, it can also be dangerous.

Drugs and alcohol may:

- Intensify feelings of depression
- Initiate or aggravate a manic phase
- Make a person more impulsive or suicidal
- Worsen an existing anxiety disorder
- Diminish the effects of medication and interfere with other therapeutic strategies
- Create a dependence that would only add a new problem to an already difficult situation

If you are experiencing a substance abuse problem, it is very important that you speak openly about it with your treatment team.

Your attending physician has prescribed medication specifically designed to help you manage your mental health issue. You have received specific instructions regarding this medication; it is therefore extremely important for you to follow these instructions closely in order to obtain the full benefits from your prescription.

Some medications take time before becoming fully effective, so be patient!

Failing to take your medication as prescribed or combining an existing prescription with other non-prescribed medications, can lead to the following effects:

- Rendering the prescribed medication ineffective
- Creating undesirable side effects
- Creating toxic effects
- Making it impossible to correctly identify what is or is not beneficial to you

So if you want to help yourself, help your doctor! Follow his or her instructions!
Sleep plays an essential role in your treatment. It represents an all-natural remedy with real therapeutic benefits. Medication should never be your first choice when attempting to get a good night’s sleep.

Here are some basic tips that will help you find a more stable and better quality night’s sleep.

**BASIC TIPS**

- Avoid substances containing stimulants at least 4 to 6 hours before bedtime (coffee, tea, energy drinks, most soft drinks and chocolate all contain substances that make it difficult to sleep)
- Nicotine is a stimulant: Avoid smoking before bed and don’t smoke if you wake up during the night
- Alcohol is a depressant: While it may help you to fall asleep initially, it will also interfere with your normal rest cycle during the night
- While a small snack can be beneficial, avoid eating large meals before bedtime
- Regular physical activity can help achieve a more restful sleep, but should be avoided right before bedtime as it will act as a stimulant
- Keep your bedroom clean and tidy; choose a comfortable mattress

**STRATEGIES TO OVERCOME INSOMNIA**

If you suffer from long-term or severe insomnia, the basic principles outlined here may be insufficient to help you. In this case, you will require additional strategies to regulate your sleep. Remember, patience is key: it may take up to several weeks before you get back into a regular sleep pattern.

- Set aside at least one hour every night to relax before bedtime
- Develop a pre-bedtime routine
- Go to bed only when you feel yourself getting sleepy
- If you find that you can’t fall asleep, get out of bed and leave your room
- Wake up at the same time every day: wake-up time in the morning is what is most important in regulating your sleep schedule
- Your bed should only be used for sleep and sexual activities
- Avoid taking naps during the day
- Limit the time spent in bed to the actual duration of your sleep

For this to work, follow as many of these recommendations as possible!

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1. The information contained in this section was taken from the book *Relief from insomnia: getting the sleep of your dreams*. Please consult the bibliotherapy for the complete reference.
More and more people are inquiring about natural products as a way to manage their issues. Physical activity naturally produces many substances throughout the body that are extremely beneficial to a person’s mental and physical health.

It is recommended to partake in physical activity between 30 and 60 minutes, 3 times per week, or 20 minutes per day, depending on your personal preference. Try to go with what works best for you and choose a formula that you will be able to maintain over the long term. Walking, weight training, dancing and cycling are examples of activities that you could try.

Physical activity isn’t just a great way to stay active and busy, it is also a therapeutic tool that can contribute to your recovery. However, it is important to avoid engaging in any intense physical activity two hours or less prior to bedtime, as this may affect your sleep.

Who wouldn’t feel depressed or anxious sitting around all day with nothing fun or worthwhile to do except think about one’s problems? Similarly, having an irregular or an inverted sleep-wake schedule can seriously impede your recovery process. Every human being requires a minimum of structure in his or her daily life in order to experience pleasure and personal satisfaction. Learning to develop a daily rhythm will help you to be more active… because no one should try to reinvent themselves every minute of every day.

Try to add structure to your daily life by establishing regular wake-up, sleep and meal times. You should also strive to re-establish a more active routine that will help you ease back into your social roles. You’ll already start to feel much better!
Exposure to light

Exposure to daylight or to light from luminotherapy lamps has proven to be very effective in treating seasonal depression. Some findings even suggest that, when combined with prescription medication, exposure to light can also be extremely beneficial in the treatment of major depression. Natural daylight is always the best option. You could take a walk or simply sit in the sun for 15 to 20 minutes every day. Morning light is the best in this case.

Relaxation

Relaxation techniques and slow breathing exercises can help you regain your focus and implement the various therapeutic strategies you will learn. You can then put these strategies to use to help you in your general recovery process.

However, if you are experiencing panic attacks, use of these strategies during attacks is not the best option and can even complicate subsequent treatment. Talk with your treatment team or refer to the suggested reading material to learn how to correctly deal with these issues.

Diet and dietary supplements

Eating healthy foods and balanced meals at regular times during the day will help stabilize your energy levels and regulate your weight.

Many people also tend to incorporate so-called “natural” dietary supplements in an effort to get better. This practice can lead to several problems:

- Natural supplements have many proven effects on the body that can interact with your existing medication, thereby lowering its effectiveness
- Depending on your health profile, some natural products can even lead to serious health complications

Be sure to talk to your doctor or pharmacist before incorporating any supplements to your daily diet.
Many people enjoy reading as a way to understand their difficulties and take charge of their treatment. Below you will find many suggestions that can provide you with the tools necessary to help you take an active role in your treatment and eventual recovery.

Happy reading!

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**

**INTENSE EMOTIONAL REACTIONS AND DIFFICULT INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS**


**MOURING**


**OBSESSIVE-COMPULSIVE DISORDER**


**PANIC DISORDER WITH AGORAPHOBIA**


**POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER (PTSD)**


[www.plusqu1souvenir.ca](http://www.plusqu1souvenir.ca) (French only) User-friendly site of the Institut universitaire en santé mentale de Montréal Research Center on Trauma

**SLEEP**

SOCIAL PHOBIA, ASSERTIVENESS AND COMMUNICATION


GENERAL INFORMATION WEBSITES

www.iusmm.ca/sante-mentale.html (French only)
Website containing information pertaining to mental health issues and the various treatment options available

www.camh.ca
Website containing guides about mental health issues pertaining to anxiety, mood, substance abuse, etc.

www.moodinstitute.com
Website created by patients in collaboration with health care professionals

http://www.revivre.org/home.php
Support group

www.avantdecraquer.com (French only)
Support for family and friends