



# heretohelp

Mental health and substance use  
information you can trust

# depression, anxiety, alcohol and other drugs

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*It is neither normal  
nor healthy to be in  
a constant state of  
dread, despair or  
worthlessness.*

## Moods, anxiety and substance use: part of life

### Feeling depressed or anxious

Part of the essence of being human is experiencing moods (e.g., anxious or depressed) and fluctuations in mood over the course of our lifetime. Much like the weather is both stable and always-shifting, so too, are our emotions. As such, we may feel 'low,' 'blue' or 'down' sometimes or feel grief over a loss, crisis or disappointment. Similarly, we may get anxious before a high-pressure event, a move or entering any setting that makes us feel insecure or self-conscious. We may worry about our health, the well-being of our friends and family members, about paying off our bills. If we never felt sad, anxious or worried in our lives, we wouldn't be human.

### Using substances

We all use substances, many of which affect our mood. Whether we eat something that gives us pleasure (such as chocolate), enjoy a glass of wine to enhance a meal, or take a prescribed medication to control pain from a recent injury, the use of substances is an accepted part of life. Many people can use substances in moderation (whether legal or illegal), without experiencing problems. What we need to remember is that all substances have effects; some have greater risks.

## When is it a problem?

### The feelings won't go away

It is neither normal nor healthy to be in a constant state of dread, despair or worthlessness. This is true whether

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## medication

**Benzodiazepines** are a class of minor tranquilizers including sleeping pills (e.g., Valium, Ativan, Xanax, Serax, Rivotril) that are prescribed to help people deal with sleep problems, muscle tension, anxiety, depression and stress. They are also known as sedatives or nerve pills. They can be helpful in the short-term for reducing anxiety and aiding sleep during a crisis in a person's life. Prolonged use is not recommended and can result in physical and mental dependency and severe withdrawal symptoms.

**Antidepressants** are a class of medications that relieve symptoms of major depression. Antidepressants work to correct a chemical imbalance in the brain by acting on neurotransmitters (serotonin, noradrenaline and dopamine) which act as chemical messengers between brain cells. There are several different families of antidepressants, each having a slightly different effect on one or more of these chemicals. Several kinds of antidepressants can also help alleviate symptoms of anxiety disorders including panic or obsessive thoughts. Antidepressants aren't addictive, but discontinuing use must be a gradual process, and supervised by a treating physician.

you're male or female, or whether you're a child, teenager or adult. When these depressed feelings, and/or worries and anxieties persist, when they're interfering with daily life, and/or when they're out of proportion to any triggering event, there may be an underlying clinical disorder that requires intervention.

Over 30% of people diagnosed with a mood or anxiety disorder have both existing at the same time. The most common symptoms of co-occurring depression and anxiety disorder are distressing thoughts, fatigue, insomnia, difficulties concentrating, and a lack of motivation.

### Potential problems with substances

Binge drinking on the weekend, over-use of prescription drugs, consuming 'club drugs' at a rave, drinking more than five cups of coffee, and smoking cocaine are all potentially problematic forms of substance use. Usually when problems arise from substance use, there are a range of other factors at work. And when depression or anxiety are in the mix, substance use may be a sign of self-medicating.

'Self-medicating' is using substances (without physician supervision) to attempt to dull, numb, or distract oneself from negative symptoms, pain and stress. Through substances like alcohol and other drugs, a person may be seeking to alleviate a sense of anxiety, depression, powerlessness, pain or boredom that may pervade their life. They may also be using the substances to try and relieve physical symptoms or side-effects of medications.

Inappropriate use of some prescription medications to address depression or anxiety can lead to substance use problems. Some medications such as benzodiazepines (a class of tranquilizers frequently prescribed for anxiety) can result in physical and mental dependency, and withdrawal can be very difficult.

The interactions between anxiety or depression and substance use are complex. While substances may be used as coping mechanisms by people with mental health problems, the substance use can also worsen or trigger anxiety or depression. For example, alcohol may temporarily relieve feelings of anxiety; however, long-term alcohol misuse and acute alcohol withdrawal can often increase anxiety levels. Depression and anxiety are also associated with long-term use or withdrawal from many substances, including stimulants, club drugs, cannabis, opiates and alcohol.

Another consideration is that there may be a common underlying cause that contributes to both mental health and substance use problems.

For instance, people who have experienced adverse experiences such as trauma or abuse in childhood are much more likely to experience substance use problems, depression, and/or anxiety.



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## Warning signs

### major depression

- you feel sad, down, or flat (not feeling anything) most of the time
- you've lost interest in activities that you used to enjoy
- your appetite or weight has changed
- you worry a lot about the past
- you feel hopeless and worthless
- you have thoughts of death or suicide

### anxiety disorder

- you worry uncontrollably about the future and daily life events
- you experience sudden rushes of intense anxiety/panic out of the blue
- you fear or avoid certain situations, experiences or things
- you have problems with anxiety due to a trauma you faced
- you experience unwanted thoughts and/or compulsive coping responses

### substance use problems

- you drink/use in response to stress
- you have pain in your stomach
- you drink/use more than you intended
- you find yourself spending more than you ever used to buying alcohol/drugs and/or more than you can afford
- you find yourself increasingly hiding your drinking/substance use from others
- your previous attempts to manage or reduce your substance use have been unsuccessful
- your personality starts to change

### common warning signs

- you feel tired most of the time or have little energy left to get through the day
- you have trouble concentrating, remembering things or making decisions
- you feel helpless
- your sleep patterns have changed: you either need to sleep a lot or have trouble falling or staying asleep
- you often feel irritable, agitated or argumentative
- your symptoms interfere with daily life

As you can see, mood, anxiety, and substance use disorders have unique symptoms as well as symptoms common to all three conditions. The more information you can give your health care practitioner about the complete range of physical and psychiatric symptoms you feel, the better he or she will be able to identify the primary problem as well as any co-occurring problems

## three of a kind

Mood disorders, anxiety disorders and substance use problems have a lot in common: they can each result in negative thoughts and feelings including helplessness, shame and guilt; they can each lead to avoidance behaviours and isolation from social life; and they can each strain personal relationships and coping resources, and interfere with daily functioning.

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## where do I go from here?

In addition to talking to your family doctor, check out the resources below for help or more information.

### Ami Quebec for Mental Health and Addictions Information

Visit <https://amiquebec.org> for info sheets and personal stories about depression, anxiety and substance use and other information regarding mental health or any kind of mental health disorders or can call (514) - 486- 1448.

### HealthLink QC

Call 811 or visit <https://amiquebec.org> to access free, non-emergency health information for anyone in your family, including mental health information. Through 811, you can also speak to a registered nurse about symptoms you're worried about, or talk to a pharmacist about medication questions.

### Your Local Crisis Line

Crisis lines aren't only for people in crisis. You can call for information on local services or if you just need someone to talk to. If you are in distress, call 1 866 APPELLE or 1 866 277-3553, 24 hours a day to connect to a QC crisis line, without a wait or busy signal. The crisis lines linked in through this number have received advanced training in mental health issues and services

### Suicide Prevention Resources

For suicide prevention centers in Quebec visit <https://suicideprevention.ca/quebec-suicide-prevention-centres>

### Drugs: Help and Referral (DAR)

For information regarding support and referral to people coping with addiction in Montreal area call 514- 527 2626 and everywhere in

Québec call 1- 800 265 2626.

The integrated health and social services centre (CISSS) and the integrated university health and social services centre (CIUSSS):

To find contact information for your family medicine clinic, your CISSS or your CIUSSS, go to [Finding a Resource](http://sante.gouv.qc.ca/en/problemes-de-sante/sante-mentale/). <http://sante.gouv.qc.ca/en/problemes-de-sante/sante-mentale/>

### The Ordre des psychologues du Québec

To find a psychologists or a psychotherapists who speak different languages, visit [the Ordre des psychologues du Québec website](http://le.Ordre.des.psychologues.du.Quebec.website).

### Mood Disorders Association

Visit <http://www.douglas.qc.ca/page/bipolar-disorders-program> and <https://amiquebec.org/support/> or call 514- 486 1448 and 514-761-6131, extension 3303 for resources and information on mood disorder support groups.

### ACCÉSSS

ACCÉSSS (<https://accessss.net/>) is a provincial group of community organizations whose goal is to represent the interests of ethnocultural communities in health and social services decision-making bodies. It is a non-profit organization (NPO). ACCÉSSS is a meeting place for the community, the health network and the university community. Due to the management philosophy of ACCÉSSS which is to work in consultation with its various partners, as well as the nature of the files treated, ACCÉSSS is more and more involved in the networks of consultation.

Telephone: 1-866-774-1106 (toll-free) and (514)-287-1106

Fax: (514)-287-7443

email: [accessss@accessss.net](mailto:accessss@accessss.net)

### The Multicultural Mental Health Resource Centre (MMHRC)

For information regarding the availability of mental health services in Quebec or other provinces of Canada visit <http://www.multiculturalmentalhealth.ca/> to access information in different languages such as Farsi. This website is working under the supervision of Division of Social and Transcultural Psychiatry of McGill University.



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## More resources available for getting help or further information on mental health:

- <http://www.ementalhealth.ca/Montreal/Postpartum-Depression/index.php?m=article&ID=8901>
- [Canadian Mental Health Association](#)
- [Mouvement Santé mentale Québec](#) (in French only)
- [Association des groupes d'intervention en défense des droits en santé mentale du Québec](#) (in French only)
- [Regroupement des ressources alternatives en santé mentale du Québec](#) (in French only)
- [Les porte-voix du rétablissement – L'association québécoise des personnes vivant \(ou ayant vécu\) un trouble mental](#) (in French only)
- [Association des médecins psychiatres du Québec](#)



This fact sheet was written by AnxietyBC, Centre for Addiction Research of BC, and the Canadian Mental Health Association's BC Division. The references for this fact sheet come from reputable government or academic sources and research studies. Please contact us if you would like the footnotes for this fact sheet. Fact sheets have been vetted by clinicians where appropriate.



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HeretoHelp is a project of the BC Partners for Mental Health and Addictions Information. The BC Partners are a group of nonprofit agencies working together to help individuals and families manage mental health and substance use problems, with the help of good quality information. We represent Anxiety Disorders Association of BC, BC Schizophrenia Society, Canadian Mental Health Association's BC Division, Centre for Addiction Research of BC, FORCE Society for Kids' Mental Health, Jessie's Legacy Program, Family Services of the North Shore, and Mood Disorders Association of BC. The BC Partners are funded by BC Mental Health and Addiction Services, an agency of the Provincial Health Services Authority.