

HOW I CAGED THE BEAST
By Victoria Meyer

ANGER

*....at God for letting this happen
....at my mind for telling me how much I should hate myself
....at my friends for being able to be normal
....at school for being so hard
....at my younger self, I should have made better decisions
....at myself for existing*

FEAR

*....of the future
....of being alone now and later
....of failing out of school
....of passing school
....of not being able to get out
....of not knowing enough
....of not being enough
....of disappointing everyone
....because I don't know where or what I'm supposed to be*

LIES

*....that I have to tell myself in order to cope
....that I have to tell everyone around me so they don't know how gone I really am. They mustn't know this pain!
....that my mind tells me, but I can't make it stop!
....that I tell the patients like me, there isn't really any recovery
....that "they" tell me, "you'll feel better soon". Sure I will.
....hurt so much inside me and make me hurt on the outside.*

HATE

*....the person that I am
....the voices in my head telling me I can't because I'm too dumb, and ugly, and fat, and weird to get anywhere
....that I can't make this go away
....that faith doesn't seem to be enough
....that everyone has to go away because of me
....that I'm dragging everyone down with me. I don't mean to, I'm sorry.
....that I'm never enough, that I'll never be enough.
....that I am ALONE!*

Introduction

Depression is a tough battle to fight; there is a lot of down and very little up. But that isn't the point of this book. I am writing to help people understand what it means to have a mental health problem and also to bring hope and help to those of you that may be feeling the way that I did.

First off, let me point out something. Mental health diseases are just that, diseases. People often overlook the fact that mental health diseases have a chemical component to them, which means that it is an imbalance somewhere in the body, not a weakness of the person suffering with the disease. We can't help it, it just happens. You wouldn't blame someone if they were suffering from an allergy, cancer, or arthritis, so why is it so difficult for people to accept mental health diseases? Secondly, people use mental health diseases as their description, for example, people would say "Vicki is depressed" or "Jenny is bipolar". Think about those statements, what is wrong with them? Well try comparing them to these statements "Bob is cancer" or "Wendy is arthritis". Do you see it now? Vicki is not depressed; Vicki has depression, same as Bob having cancer. We need to change our outlook and our description of mental health.

There are so many companies currently campaigning to raise awareness about mental health to alleviate the stigmas surrounding it, which is great! However, unless you have had a mental health disorder or someone close to you has, it is almost impossible to really have a full grasp on how difficult of diseases that they are. That's why I wrote this book, so that everyone can have an insight as to the train of thought that is involved with depression and how difficult it is for the patient. Also, I wanted to give insight to the recovery period, and prove to you all once and for all that it will indeed get better.

It's hard to tell exactly when it started. I guess there were signs, but I took special care not to notice them. The first episode that I can pinpoint is when I worked at a local restaurant cooking the summer after my first year of university. I don't know why it was such a mental challenge for me, I was doing well and I loved the job. For some reason though, I couldn't do it. I started feeling sick just thinking about going in for my next shift, and I would cry alone until my shift came. After a few weeks, I had to quit. It was taking way too much of a toll on me. I was starting to withdraw from my family and friends, I hated everything. At the time it was the hardest thing that I had ever had to do, I had never given up on anything in my life. I blamed myself for being weak, being too stupid to find another option, too pathetic to work through my problems. When I look back on that time in my life, it is so obvious that it had been my first experience with the beast. At the time though, there was no way I could have known, I didn't know what he was.

I spent the rest of the summer working part time at my uncle's greenhouse, tending a market garden with my sisters, and working on my parent's farm. The summer went well. I was in my comfort zone; I knew exactly what I had to do all the time. When I think back onto that summer though, I realize that I was not myself. I had started to withdraw from my usual social circles, I slowly quit all the volunteer activities that I had been involved with in the past, I stopped talking to a lot of my friends, I didn't enjoy nearly as many of the activities that I usually would have enjoyed. I put on 20lbs. I kept all my feelings to myself, refusing to admit to anyone, including myself, that there was anything wrong. I channeled my feelings and created a comfort bubble to live in, and journaled my feelings when they became overwhelming, but I didn't tell anyone. I never admitted to anyone that there was something wrong, I had no idea what was to become of me.

June 30/08

I have no idea what's wrong with me. Maybe it's some sort of hormone imbalance or something. I was watering the plants today at work and I began having some sort of breakdown. I started feeling sick to my stomach. I wanted to do nothing but go home and cry but I made myself finish my shift.....it's the same feeling I had the last week of working at the restaurant. What's wrong with me?! This isn't normal! Maybe I should go see my doctor or a counselor or something?

I started my second year of nursing in September. All was going well, my grades were great, and I finally turned 19 and loved all the partying with my friends. Everything was picture perfect, no ugly beast there. When I look back at the picture I see him lurking in the shadows but at the time I ignored his mere existence. I was using the partying and all the fun as a distraction from the problems that were really bothering me, shading myself from the realities that had become my life.

In came the new year and everything was just great. I completed my placement on the pediatric floor with no issues (or none that I would have admitted to myself at the time, more disturbing journaling but my conscious mind refused to admit that there was a problem) and moved on to a chronic care floor. I was on that placement with a group of

some of my closest friends and it was awesome. The care of the patients there was complex, many of the patients were terminal, but it didn't really bother me. A few weeks in I was trying to work through my care plan for my patient that I was assigned the next day and I couldn't do it. Something was horribly wrong; the beast had escaped the shadows and was rearing his ugly head once again. I worked on it for hours, a task that should only take me 30 minutes max was now at 3 hours, and I wasn't even close to finished. I shook and I felt sick. I started to sweat and cry just thinking about all the things I needed to do the next day. Then I threw up. I couldn't do it, I was scared of being alone, I don't know why, but I was. I went down to my living room and just cried and cried. I was gone and the beast had taken over.

March 16/09

I don't know what I am so upset about, I wish I did. I just want to curl into a ball and cry all the time but I can't. Even the simplest of tasks are SO overwhelming to me right now. I have a hard time even doing the dishes, and I haven't been able to even touch the homework that I don't have to hand in.

I could see over the next few weeks how he was messing up my life, but it was as though I was standing in the shadows now and he was doing all the living. It took all I had in me to go to class and clinical. I went, I came home and did my homework and then I crawled into the fetal position on my bed and cried until the next day. I could lie for hours and do absolutely nothing, and unfortunately I was ok with that. Eventually I went to my family doctor. He didn't want to put me on anything because anti-depressants are not recommended for youth. Nothing else was done. I went home, and was back to square one.

March 23/09

My doctor wouldn't put me on anything because he was afraid I would kill myself, so basically I just had to deal with it. When the suicidal thoughts started coming it was awful, but I denied having any to anyone because I didn't want anyone but me to be in control of whether I was alive or not. I hate everything. Everyone is all happy on the days where I'm not curled in a ball crying all day, but those days are so much worse for me. I am numb. I can't cry if I tried. I'm not freaking out nearly as often, but I'm afraid it will start happening again. Then what will I do?!

I had a problem and no one could fix it for me. It was up to me to find a solution for myself. I was not happy with the way that my life was going, but I didn't really know what to do. I was not myself, I was not healthy but there seemed to be no cure for what ailed me. I wanted to drop out of school. I thought about it long and hard, it was the only solution that I could come up with to stop everything, thankfully my family convinced me to tough it out. Without them I never would have remained in my program, I never would have learned everything that in the following years, and I never would have had to integrity to write this book for you.

After I finished my school year, and I decided that I wanted an out and now with school out of the way I had the energy to do it. I started thinking about what it could be that was causing my problems. I decided that the medication that I was taking for my asthma was the culprit so I immediately stopped taking all of it. That was a really dangerous move and as a nurse I should have known that I needed to wean off those medications, but at the time I couldn't care less. Luckily it turned out ok, nothing bad happened to me. After a few weeks though, there was still no change. I was so frustrated, what I thought was the cause was nothing more than a coincidence. I phoned my family doctor and asked if he could send me to a therapist, but he recommended that I look it up in the phone book and self-refer. I went for two sessions, but at \$150/hour I could not afford to continue on that path.

I went on a road trip with my sister after school ended. Getting away from home and all my stressors made me feel great. I was almost back to my old self, as long as I didn't let myself think of course. On the return trip I was struck with the reality that I had to return to my life. I cried all the way home.

I applied to a bunch of jobs hoping that maybe getting myself out there would help to relieve my pain. I was wrong. Simple tasks were starting to take too much time out of my day; dressing for an interview took me 4 hours. I managed to get a job, but declined it as just thinking about going to work brought back the overwhelming feeling of dread that I had been avoiding. To say the least, I was back to square one yet again. I spent the summer gardening and working on the farm. I was in my comfort zone for the whole summer, anytime something was too overwhelming, I just didn't do it. It seemed to be working just fine for me, the beast was back in the shadows watching me and I was in control again. That's what I thought anyways. Now that I look back, I notice that it was indeed the beast taking over my life or I would have had more fun during that summer, seen my friends more, hung out with my family more, done something other than live in my little bubble that the beast corralled me in. But I was content, and by the time I was to go back to school I was convinced that I was cured.

School started again in September and I was excited to start a new year. I was myself again and everything was perfect. Well, it was for about an hour when the professors started talking about all the work that we had to do that year for our courses. I excused myself from class and threw up. The beast had never left, and now he was taking full force action against my assumed happiness.

Sept 6/09

I read up on our pre-school assignment. I thought that I had beat this crap, but apparently not. Just looking at it stresses me out already and that's not a good sign. This is SO frustrating. I can't seem to get rid of this depression. It's been over a year and its just non-stop episodes. I can't handle it, its not getting any better. Apparently though I have to wait until I'm old because there's nothing they can do for me, I just have to tough it out.

Sept 9/09

999, upside down its 666. That's what today is, the devil's day.

Sept 10/09

ARGH! WHY ME!

Sept 13/09

Only these feelings are real, past and future happiness are a false illusion.

*The recovery may take months, but how can I possibly tolerate it until then? How should one proceed through each day as if nothing is wrong when everything is? No one understands what it is like to live with the anguish devouring me body, mind, and soul. I have to try to utter small talk, be responsive to questions, knowingly nod and frown, and heaven forbid smile at the right times. Putting on a face is important. No one need see what is happening. No one need know the pain that I feel day in and day out. There is no hope. There is no relief. There is only numbness. The days when I cry are bearable, its those days when there are no tears that are the worst. To have to suffer in silence with only myself and my uncontrollable mind is unbearable. "Think positively, learn to live life to the fullest, do different activities, try and keep your mind off it" is what people recommend, but those are just illusions to me. There IS **NO OTHER TRACK TO MY MIND** and that's all there is to it. Different activities only block the pain temporarily, until it comes back to devour my happiness once again. But there IS a way out of the abyss, there IS a way to get better, and there IS a way to be happy again....but only God knows how.*

Sept 15/09

I waited in the emergency room for hours today for someone to acknowledge my existence. They just shuffled me around all day because I was in their way. I just wanted the hospital to help me. I just wanted someone to talk to me, treat me like a person, and they just treat me like a huge inconvenience. It hurts to be treated like that under normal circumstances, but under these it's so much worse. I feel so alone in this. No matter where I turn there's no one there to help me. There's no relief for people like me, there's no hope for better moods and thoughts and feelings for tomorrow. The saying goes "look at today, the future will take care of itself", but today I was alone and tomorrow I will yet again be alone, and the day after that and the day after that. It's just me and my thoughts, no where to turn, no where to go for help, and no way to make it stop. I know only one thing....I AM ALONE IN THIS! Where do I turn now?!

Sept 16/09

This is SO much more than emotional. I used to scorn people with depression and laughingly say "why don't they just suck it up?!" But I was stupid and naïve. Its so much worse than just being sad or stressed. It's being so stressed out that you become sad. And its not just a little sad either. It's sadness to the point that you can't function. I can't eat, I can't swallow. Everything I do eat makes me nauseous and if I'm having a really bad day I just throw up anyways. There's the constipation and diarrhea, and the constant stomach cramps. I ache all over. I'm always tense, I shake and sweat, and my head hurts. And that's just the noticeable stuff. My skin is dry, I can't bring myself to bathe as often as I should as gross as that is. I don't want to talk to my friends, I don't want to go visiting, or do any hobbies, or do anything I would typically enjoy doing. And sleep, I just can't do it. I wake up after a 10 hour sleep absolutely exhausted, and I wake up at least 10 times/night, I counted. It's an illness that I can't stop. It's a disease. Hear my cries and HELP ME! PLEASE!

I spent about a week after that searching for options before I came across one that I had no idea even existed. Apparently my university had a health and counseling center. I walked in and said that I wanted to see a counselor, now. I waited all of five minutes before the counselor came out and got me from the waiting room. I sat down in the armchair in her office and she asked what the problem was, at which point I burst into tears and sobbed for an hour. I don't know if I even got any words out. I went and visited my pastor one day, and he was probably the best listener out there. He gave me some books that helped me to realize that I was not alone.

Sept 17/09

For 3 years now I have been in the nursing program. That means I am a nursing student and that is how I have learned to describe myself. For 3 years, if you looked up my name in the dictionary you would find "nursing student" behind it. That's who I thought I was, that was who I let myself be, and that's all I was. But today Pastor Henry introduced a simple concept to me that changed my whole perception, 5 simple words "but your so much more".

Sept 21/09

Just smile and breathe, no matter how much it hurts. It hurts them more to see you suffer than it does for you to suffer in silence. Pout on an act. Pretend you're ok. Trick them into thinking you're getting better. Maybe if you're a good enough actor you can even trick yourself....

After about a month of seeing her 3-4 times/week she recommended that I seek medical attention. It was apparent to me that I was beyond just needing counseling at this point, as I had been suffering with it for one and a half years, having 3 separate outbreaks during that time. I saw the doctor at the health clinic at my university and she prescribed me some Prozac and told me to come back in a couple months for a refill. It worked. After about two months, I was functioning, I could do my homework and I could think. I was back to the early second year version of myself where I just journaled my feelings, but didn't need to act on them.

Sept 24/09

All my joy is gone. Summer is gone. It was all ripped out of me and replaced with anger, fear, anxiety, dread, sadness, and a lingering feeling that I am always alone. I can't even cry so everything just stirs in me, with no escape, no emergency pressure valve. Just me and my thoughts all the time. This is supposed to get better. But how? It's not going away on its own, or with therapy. WHAT DID I DO TO DESERVE THIS?!...whatever it was, I'm sorry.

Oct 22/09

What's even the point anymore? It's never going to get better, "the best years" of my life

aren't looking so promising for the rest of my life, so why go on?

Oct 24/09

Is it wrong to want to die? Death can't possibly feel worse than life...I am so alone all the time, and I can't trust myself enough when I'm alone. I find ways to hurt myself that are accepted, like today I got my eyebrows done. People don't question that activity, even though I do it to feel. Why does everyone have to go away and leave me all by myself? What did I do wrong?

After two months, I returned to the clinic for my refill on this miracle drug. At that point I was lectured on the fact that I was even using the clinic because I had a family doctor in town. Never in my life had I felt so betrayed. The people who I thought were the only ones who would help me had turned their backs on me. I was frustrated, now I would not have made the choice that I did, but the beast was still making most of my decisions for me that that point in my life. I never went back to the clinic. I never went back to the counselor. I was done. Luckily my family doctor (although slightly reluctantly) refilled my prescription for me.

Nov 25/09

I was better. I was me. Then I become alone again. The school doctor said she couldn't help me anymore. She said this was a problem I should bring to my family doctor. But I doubt he'll help me. He just wants me to wait it out. I have no one to turn to. It's just me alone with my thoughts again. No one can help me. I don't know what to do. Where do I turn? If I said to someone that I wanted to kill myself then maybe they'd take me seriously. I'm scared.

I felt so alone at this point, the beast was telling me over and over that no one really cared. There was no one on this earth who wanted me here; even the doctors who get paid to help me don't want to be bothered. Boy that beast is nasty. I started to cut myself. I know, that is a borderline personality trait, but seriously, unless you've been in that situation you would never understand. Now when I think about it, it was such a stupid thing to do, but then the beast had convinced me that it was the best option. It started small, a little cut on my inner thigh, a slit on my elbow. It progressed to daily scraping of my upper arms and heels because they bleed the most. I wasn't dumb; I could cover up the sites I chose. One day I cut too deep, and I couldn't stop the bleeding. It took hours to stop it, but obviously I didn't want people to know so I didn't go to the hospital. That's when I stopped cutting. I didn't want to die anymore, I just wanted to feel something, anything, but it was getting out of control. If you look closely you can still see the scar on my arm.

It was Christmas before the meds really took full effect. I was better by then, those things really do work. The beast was gone; he was no longer telling me to hurt myself, no longer putting those disturbing thoughts in my head. It was a great feeling of relief, not only for me but for those around me that had to talk to and live with the beast.

It has been over a year now since I started on the meds. I decided a few months ago that I could wean off them, but I relapsed. I had a few ugly weeks after the New Year and decided to continue on the course. The beast is caged, and as long as I keep thinking positive and keep taking the medications, I believe that he will stay there. I still get bad days where I secretly lay in the fetal position in my room all day, staring at the wall, but it's only once in a while now, and I can deal with that. I hope to someday slay the beast and be done with him once and for all, but as it stands right now, caged is alright too. My three year battle is won, and someday I know I can win the war.

THE END

Depression

In order for your doctor to diagnose you with a major depressive episode, you must display at least five (5) of the following symptoms for at least a 2 week period...

1. depressed mood most of the day, nearly every day, as indicated by either subjective report (e.g., feels sad or empty) or observation made by others (e.g., appears tearful). **Note:** In children and adolescents, can be irritable mood
2. markedly diminished interest or pleasure in all, or almost all, activities
3. significant weight loss when not dieting or weight gain (e.g., a change of more than 5% of body weight in a month), or decrease or increase in appetite nearly every day
4. insomnia or hypersomnia nearly every day
5. psychomotor agitation or retardation nearly every day (observable by others, not merely subjective feelings of restlessness or being slowed down)
6. fatigue or loss of energy nearly every day
7. feelings of worthlessness or excessive or inappropriate guilt
8. diminished ability to think or concentrate, or indecisiveness, nearly every day
9. recurrent thoughts of death (not just fear of dying)

However, saying that, you should not wait until you have five of the above symptoms before seeking professional assistance. Depression, even minimally, can make everyday activities difficult and/or unpleasant. The earlier you seek help, the easier it may be for you to recover.

Depression is typically treated with counseling, and if necessary your doctor may prescribe antidepressants. Antidepressants can make the symptoms of depression more bearable, and help with thought processes. Antidepressants are not a cure for depression, and counseling is still a very good idea. NOTE: antidepressants take a minimum of 4-8 weeks to take effect, depending on the particular medication. The medication will *not* work faster if you use more. Take medications only as prescribed by your doctor.

Some myths about depression...

- Myth #1: Depression is not a medical illness.
 - o Depression can cause both mental and physical symptoms, and studies have shown that it has both a genetic and biological component.
- Myth #2: Depression is the same as getting the blues; it's a normal part of life.
 - o That's like saying the common cold is the same as having pneumonia. Depression is not a part of everyday life; it can last for years and cause serious bodily illness. Its not the same as feeling a little sad once in a while.
- Myth #3: You can will your depression away, if you can't your weak.
 - o Depression is an imbalance in your body; you can't will it away anymore than you could will away heart disease or diabetes. And going forth to ask for help shows courage, not weakness.
- Myth #4: If you are under 18 you can't get depression, it's just a problem with growing up.
 - o The Canadian Mental Health Association states that 1 in 33 children and 1 in 8 adolescents suffer from depression every year. Youth may not know how to tell someone about this, or may think it's normal, so it may take an adult to notice problems.

Anxiety

In order for your doctor to diagnose you with anxiety, or general anxiety disorder, you must experience difficulty controlling anxiety and at least three (3) of the following:

1. Feeling wound-up, tense, or restless.
2. Easily becoming fatigued or worn out.
3. Concentration problems.
4. Irritability.
5. Significant tension in muscles.
6. Difficulty with sleep.

Anxiety is an overwhelming feeling that something is horribly wrong. Anxiety can be short and just make you feel stressed out, or can progress to anxiety or panic attacks. Anxiety attacks cause you to feel shaky, sweaty, chest pains, short of breath, feeling of doom, dizziness, tearful, and sometimes you may feel nauseous or pass out.

Anxiety can be a very uncomfortable feeling. Prolonged anxiety is also very stressful and can cause serious physical illness. Anxiety is very common, affecting more than 2 million people in Canada. Anxiety may be caused by a situation (for example, a phobia) or may be generalized, meaning that you may feel anxious most of the time for no particular reason. Either way, the treatment is usually therapy or counseling. If necessary, your doctor might add a light sedative to help make the anxiety more bearable, or antidepressants for a more long term treatment. But again remember, medications *do not* work better or faster if you take more.

Some myths about anxiety...

- Myth #1: Feeling anxious all the time is not an illness. Everyone feels like that sometimes.
 - o Everyone feels anxious sometimes, but it is not normal to feel anxious ALL the time.
- Myth #2: If you can't step on cracks, or are fussy about your things, or wash your hands a lot you are OCD (have obsessive compulsive disorder)
 - o OCD is very serious, often affecting people's relationships, daily activity, and takes up a lot of time. Everyone has little quirks but that does not necessarily mean you have a problem.
- Myth #3: Anxiety attacks can kill you.
 - o Anxiety attacks cannot kill you, although sometimes it feels like they can. Symptoms may last long enough to seek medical attention, but they will not last forever.
- Myth #4: Eliminating anxiety triggers will eliminate anxiety.
 - o Anxiety may be reduced by avoiding triggers, but often times anxiety attacks are spontaneous and occur for no reason. The best way to prevent them is to learn different coping skills and how to reduce the anxiety before it becomes an attack.

What does THAT mean?

If you have **any** symptoms that you are unsure about, it is important to talk to your doctor. This page will define different problematic symptoms and terms.

Hallucination – a false perception. This is when you feel, smell, taste, hear, or see things that are not really there (For example, hearing voices, seeing ghosts, etc.). Often it is difficult for us to recognize that we are having hallucinations as they seem real to us. When in doubt, ask someone you trust and talk to your doctor.

Delusion – a false belief or opinion. This is when you believe that you are something that you are not (For example, believing that you have magical abilities, believing that the government is after you, etc.). Like hallucinations, delusions are difficult for us to recognize in ourselves as they seem so real at the time. When in doubt, ask someone you trust and talk to your doctor.

Suicidal Ideation – having thoughts of committing suicide. This is when you feel that the only way out is through suicide. It is easy for you to recognize in yourself, but often is difficult for others to see. Talk to someone you trust, you are not alone. If you are going to hurt yourself or someone you love, go to the nearest emergency room immediately.

Insomnia – chronic inability to fall asleep or to enjoy uninterrupted sleep. This is when you have a hard time getting to sleep and staying asleep. 6 or more hours of sleep is usually enough for the average person, but the person with insomnia may only get 2-3 hours of sleep.

Hypersomnia- a tendency to sleep excessively. This is when you are tired all the time, and all you seem to do is sleep. It is nice sometimes to sleep in and get a long peaceful sleep; however people with hypersomnia require an excessive amount of sleep every day to function properly.

Psychomotor Agitation – restlessness brought on by tension or stress. This is when you feel so stressed out and so upset that you cannot seem to sit still. For example, pacing the room, constantly fidgeting, pulling your hair, etc. This is a sign of severe distress, and you should see your doctor as soon as possible.

Racing thoughts or flight of ideas – This is a common symptom of mania or schizophrenia. It is when you talk excessively fast, and switch from one topic to another rapidly, and the topics are usually not related.

Catatonic Behaviour - Behavior characterized by muscular tightness or rigidity and lack of response to the environment. In some patients rigidity alternates with excited or hyperactive behavior. This is when you experience symptoms such as holding rigid poses for long times, being extremely negative, repeating meaningless words or phrases, and sometimes loss of memory. This is a very extreme symptom, and it is important to seek medical attention immediately if you experience this.

Phobia – an anxiety disorder characterized by extreme and irrational fear of simple things or social situations. This is more than just a fear; a phobia is when you may feel extremely stressed when you are confronted with something simple, like going into a crowd, seeing a dog, etc.

Rerouting your Thinking

The basis of therapy and counseling for any of these disorders is to reroute your thinking. Often times we find ourselves thinking very negatively, which can add to our stress and bad mood. Consider these different ways that you can reroute these negative thoughts and turn them into something positive.

Step one: Cultivate Supportive Relationships.

Talk to those who you know will be supportive to you throughout your challenges such as your family, friends, support groups, your doctor or nurse. Try to keep up with your usual social activities to keep yourself busy and distracted, even though at first it may be unpleasant.

Step two: Take Care of Yourself

Keep yourself on a schedule. Try to go to sleep and wake up at regular times, even if you are too tired to get up. Keep up with eating; eat well balanced meals at regular meal times even if you aren't hungry.

Plan ahead to where you are going to go, what you are going to do, who you are going be with and when you are going to go home. This may help you to ease your stress.

Try to get a little sunlight everyday. Vitamin D can help elevate your mood. Plus, exercise releases endorphins that also elevate your mood.

Step three: Get Regular Exercise

Scientists have not yet discovered the exact reason why exercise is such a potent antidepressant, but studies have proven that 30 minutes of exercise per day can help to elevate your mood, relieve anxiety, and relax tensed muscles.

Step four: Eat Healthy

Don't skip meals, going too long between meals can make you feel irritable and tired. Minimize the sugar and refined carbs as they often lead to a crash in mood and energy. Finally, boost your B vitamins, as deficiencies can trigger depression.

Step five: Challenge Negative Thinking

Think outside yourself. Ask yourself what you would say to someone else if they were saying what you are thinking. Think about good statements that offer more realistic descriptions.

Keep a "negative thought log". Whenever you experience a negative thought, jot it down and write what triggered it in the notebook. When your in a good

mood review the thoughts and consider if you were over reacting.

Replace negatives with positives. Review your thought log, and think about each negative thought and replace it with something positive. For example, if you wrote “my boss hates me and gives all the work to me”, consider replacing it with “my boss has a lot of faith in my ability to complete tasks, that’s why she gives me so much responsibility.”

Socialize with positive people. Hanging out with negative people all the time can cause you to think negatively too.

Step five: Raise your emotional intelligence

Think about your thoughts, and don’t let them over ride your emotions. When you think negatively, you tend to develop negative emotions. Remain hopeful during challenging times; continue to think positively. Manage your strong feelings and impulses, don’t let them take over. And finally, don’t be afraid to ask for help. Emotions are powerful things, and you don’t need to beat them on your own. (see page 9 for more information about emotional intelligence).

Emotional Intelligence

What does emotional intelligence mean? Emotional intelligence (or EQ) is a term that is used to describe your ability to perceive emotions, or in other words, if you are able to tell what you or others are feeling. There are many quizzes available to score your emotional intelligence (see page 10), having a high emotional intelligence means that you are well able to read your own emotions as well as the emotions of people around you.

Increasing your emotional intelligence is important in overcoming mental illness, as you need to be able to gauge your own emotions, as well as be able to read how other people around you may be feeling about your situation.

Four steps to increasing your emotional intelligence...

1. Develop your emotional self awareness. Whenever you feel an emotion that you are not comfortable with, ask yourself “what is the feeling trying to tell me?” Observe your thoughts as they come and go. Consider keeping an emotional journal and take 5 minutes each morning to write down how you are feeling; and 5 minutes each night to review those feelings.
2. Remember, you are not your emotions. Feelings matter and they are a big part of what drives our decisions and our mood. They are not however, a being of their own, and they are not a part of what makes you who you are. Whatever your emotion is, you have a choice on how to act on it. Stand up to your failures, count to ten, deep breathe, judging yourself based on your emotions will not make you a better person.
3. Put yourself in the other person’s shoes. Everyone sees the world in a different way and that world view makes sense to them even if it doesn’t make any sense to you. By putting yourself in another’s shoes, you will be able to see where they are coming from and how their emotions are driving their decisions. It will allow you to understand people better and thus foster stronger and more meaningful relationships with those around you.
4. Get some distance from the bad stuff. Human beings by nature tend to spend a lot of time worrying about things, most of which never end up happening. Distance yourself from this worry. Don’t allow yourself to sink into your self-pity or depressed thoughts; they are more dangerous than the worry. Trade your worry for positive thoughts. For example, if you are worrying about if your plane won’t come in because of the weather, think about how lucky you are that your plane wouldn’t come in and take you out into the bad weather that is dangerous.

Relaxation Tips

1. Meditate. Get a cd of calming music, ex. piano music, waterfalls, soothing sounds, or even a progressive relaxation cd. Designate some “me” time everyday, where you sit in a quiet place and focus on the music. Do not let your mind wander, if your mind wanders, get it back on track quick, don’t let your thoughts interrupt your me time. If you find it difficult to stay focused, consider taking a meditation class at your local community center or gym.
2. Take up yoga. This is a very relaxing technique focusing on your body mechanics, and working your muscles, all while focusing on your inner strength and relaxation. Try it at home with a home video dvd you can get at your library, or take it up at a local community center or gym.
3. Deep breathing is like hitting a reset button on your brain. Your body automatically breathes very quickly and shallowly when you are stressed. Slowing down your breathing and getting in that extra oxygen tells your brain that nothing is wrong and can help you to relax in stressful situations, or times when you are just feeling anxious.
4. Exercise will keep you both physically and mentally fit. It raises your endorphin levels and relieves stress. Try to exercise 30 minutes per day. If you do not have time to do this, take the stairs at work, walk to the second closest bus stop or park farther away from your work, do lunges while you vacuum, etc. Be creative, exercise isn’t just going to the gym, its part of our everyday life.
5. Visualization is a very effective method of relieving stress. It involves closing your eyes and imagining something that makes you happy. Maybe it is the beach, or the mountains, or maybe it is the family picnic you took last summer; whatever the image, make it a happy calming one. Imagine that you are there, and that all is well. Imagine what it smells like there, the sounds you will hear, the feeling of the wind, the taste of the air, etc. This can help ease your anxiety by creating a feeling of peace. The best part is that it takes very little time to do, and you can do it anywhere!

Remember, not all relaxations tips will work for you all of the time. Try new things and keep at it. Don’t be discouraged, overcoming a mental illness is just as physically and mentally challenging (if not more so) as overcoming a physical illness. Focus and be patient with yourself.

Diet

No matter how crummy you may feel, it is important to your health that you continue to eat properly. Following the Canada's food guide is a very good place to start, but also consider increasing your intake of the following foods:

- Damaging molecules called “free radicals” are produced by the normal functions of our bodies daily. These free radicals can contribute to aging and dysfunction of our bodies. To combat free radicals we use anti-oxidants, which have been proven to decrease their damaging powers. Foods high in antioxidants include those that are high in beta-carotene (ex. apricots, broccoli, carrots, peaches, pumpkin, sweet potato), those high in vitamin c (ex. blueberries, kiwi, oranges, peppers, potatoes, strawberries, tomatoes), and those high in vitamin e (ex. margarine, nuts and seeds, wheat germ, vegetable oils).
- Smart carbohydrates increase the amount of mood-boosting chemicals in our brain (serotonin), which is known to lower anxiety to bring forth a calming effect. Make smart choices, such as whole grains, fruits, vegetables, and legumes.
- Protein rich foods boost alertness by providing an amino acid known as tyrosine that helps you feel more alert and makes it easier for you to concentrate. Foods high in healthy protein include beans and peas, lean beef, low-fat cheese, fish, milk, chicken, soy products, and yogurt.
- Get plenty of vitamin D which can increase your level of serotonin in the brain. Health care providers recommend a minimum of 600 units of vitamin D per day from food when possible. Foods rich in vitamin d include milk, fish, and whole grain cereals.
- Pick out foods that are high in selenium. Studies prove that people with lower moods; and mood disorders tend to have a lower selenium level, although it is unclear why. Foods that are high in selenium include nuts and seeds, dairy products, beans and legumes, sea food, and whole grains.
- Include Omega-3 fatty acids in your diet which have an affect on increasing your mood. Foods that are rich in omega-3 fatty acids include fish oils, flaxseeds, nuts, canola oil, and dark leafy green vegetables.
- Avoid alcohol which acts as a *depressant*. Although you may feel happy while you are intoxicated, you will crash after the effects wear off.
- Avoid caffeine and street drugs as they can trigger anxiety and hallucinations.

If you feel that you are not getting enough of these minerals and vitamins through your diet, talk to your doctor about starting on a multivitamin specific to stress relief.

Who Can Help?

If you are overwhelmed with your stress or feel as though you may hurt yourself or others, don't hesitate to go to the **emergency department at Thunder Bay Regional Health Science Center** for help.

Thunder Bay Counseling Center

Free walk in counseling center every Wednesday from 12pm to 6:30pm first come first serve.

1st & 3rd Wednesday of the month at Thunder Bay Counseling Center 544 Winnipeg Ave.

2nd & 4th Wednesday of the month at Children's Center Thunder Bay 283 Lisgar St.

Crisis Response Thunder Bay

24 hour hotline (807) 346-8282

GAPPS if you don't know where to turn

Tiffany (807) 629-1073

Dave (807) 620-5035

Kari (807) 252-6244

Roots of Life counseling for first nations people

(807) 344-1944

or drop in at 297 Parn Ave.

Catholic Development Center

(807) 345-7323

or drop in at 380 Dufferin St.

Children's Center Thunder Bay

(807) 343-5000

or drop in at 283 Lisgar St

Kid's Help Phone

Call the 24 hour toll free hotline at 1-800-668-6868

ALSO CONSIDER...

- your school counselor
- your religious leader (ex. minister, chaplain, etc.)
- Various private counselors (see yellow pages in phone book)
- any counseling that you may have available through work
- your family doctor
- walk in clinics
- people who you trust (ex. family, friends, teachers, etc.)

Call 211 for a directory of services in your area

Books and Websites

- **Canadian Mental Health Association** (www.cmha.ca)
- **Health Canada** (www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hl-vs/mental)
- **Suicide and Crisis Hotline Index for Canada** (www.suicidehotlines.com/Canada.html)
- **Mood Disorders Society of Canada** (www.mooddisorderscanada.ca)
- **The Organization for Bipolar Affective Disorder** (www.obad.ca/Canada_supports)
- **Bipolar Canada Magazine** (www.bphope.ca)
- **Schizophrenia Society of Canada** (www.schizophrenia.ca)
- **Schizophrenia: a Handbook for Families by the Public Health Agency of Canada**
(www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/mh-sm/pubs/schizophrenia-schizophrenie/index-eng.php)
- **Canada's Food Guide** (www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/food-guide-aliment/index-eng.php)
- **The Anxiety and Phobia Workbook by Edmund Bourne**
Bourne teaches specific skills for overcoming problems with panic, anxiety and phobias. There is information on the appropriate use of medications and herbal supplements. This is a practical and highly regarded resource on the treatment of anxiety.
- **The Self Esteem Workbook by Glenn Schiraldi and Matthew McKay**
The Self-Esteem Workbook presents a course in self-esteem based on new research and sound principles. Checklists, fill-ins, and exercises show readers how thoughts, emotions, physical health, and behavior impact their self-esteem. Periodic check-ups help them gauge their progress, and final sections offer strategies for preventing relapse.
- **Thoughts&Feelings: Taking control of your moods and your life: A Workbook of Cognitive Behavioural Techniques by Matthew Mckay, Patrick Fanning, and Martha Davis**
This book offers a simple and easy to understand discussion of how to use the principles and techniques of cognitive behavioral therapies to help control anxiety, depression, moods and build self-esteem in your life.
- **The Relaxation and Stress Reduction Workbook by Martha Davis**
This fifth edition self-help classic offers many self-assessment tools and calming techniques to help overcome anxiety and promote physical and emotional wellbeing. It presents a comprehensive look at stress, its physical manifestations and the multiple ways it can be managed. Chapters on breathing, relaxation, meditation, thought stopping, stress management, time management, assertiveness training, and body awareness offer the reader focused approaches to dealing with the many varieties of stress.

