

A New You: Health for Every Body

Journaling for Health



Common sense and research indicate a connection between the mind and body. Meeting your psychological needs has both psychological and physical health benefits. One technique that seems to improve physical and emotional strength is writing. Studies have shown that people can benefit from expressing their feelings and thoughts in writing.

What is journal writing?

Your journal is a written record of what is important to you. Journaling can take many forms, including prose, poems, lists, drawings, photographs, doodles, and sketches – anything done by you for you. All forms of journal entry are appropriate if they help you tell your story. A journal is a type of autobiography. The focus is on how important events and people in your life affect you as a person, how you feel about what has happened, and how you use this information to direct your future personal growth and development.

Your journal can be anything you want it to be. It can be a written record of your thoughts, feelings, ideas, values, and goals; a means of documenting the flow of your life; an inventory of changes, events, and accomplishments; a tool for self-understanding; and a tool for improving your health.

How can journaling impact one's health?

Studies have shown that people benefit from expressing their feelings and thoughts in writing. In studies involving individuals with asthma and arthritis, journaling was done in conjunction with their medical treatment. Individuals who wrote about their feelings were more likely than those who didn't to have fewer doctor visits, have improved immune system functioning, report fewer symptoms, and enjoy a greater sense of well being.

Your journal is also a tool for health improvement. You can use your journal to set behavior change goals, track progress toward reaching those goals, and engage in positive self-talk. Self-talk can keep you going when there is pressure to give up. Your journal can help you explore barriers (actions, feelings and attitudes that get in your way) and help you think creatively about potential solutions. Through your journal, you can explore feelings about successes and slips, highlight accomplishments, and give yourself a pat on the back.

How do I begin?

There are no rules or limits on how you keep your own journal. The following tips might be helpful.

- Start with the basics – paper and pens. Choices are endless – lined or unlined paper, spiral notebooks, three-ring binders, or commercially produced journals. When selecting a pen or pencil, pick something that is comfortable to use. Ink is more permanent than lead. If you want to add drawings, consider colored pencils, crayons, or paint. If writing is difficult, try a tape recorder or voice activated computer.

- For your journal to be a useful for personal growth, you will want to find things easily. At the top of the page write down the date, time, and location for each entry. Number each page of your journal and keep them in chronological order. Some individuals use a table of contents or special coding system.
- Don't worry about grammar, spelling, punctuation, or quality of artwork. Get your thoughts and ideas on paper quickly. Record your "gut" reactions and true feelings, the good and the ugly. Play, experiment, be humorous and have fun.
- The physical setting is important. Find a quiet comfortable relaxed place free from interruptions or distractions. Many people find evenings are a good time of day to reflect. You may want to schedule a specific time for journal work. For example, three times a week, before bedtime, for at least ten minutes.
- Self-reflection and journal writing are learned skills. You'll get better with practice. Many journal writers use exercises to improve their skill. Following are some examples.
 - ☑ Make a list of things that make you laugh or smile.
 - ☑ List the 10 worst things about living with your illness or current challenges.
 - ☑ Write a letter to your doctor explaining how you feel about the state of your health.
 - ☑ Write a poem that describes how you feel about your health.
 - ☑ Draw a picture showing the best thing about your day.
 - ☑ Draw an outline of your body and mark any area that you think of as a problem. Pretend that the body part can speak. What does it say? What is the problem? How does it feel? Why does it feel that way? What can you do to make it better?
 - ☑ Draw a line down the middle of a sheet of paper lengthwise. In one column list barriers or obstacles to making health behavior changes. In the other column, list potential solutions.

Where can I learn more?

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