

Writing in a journal is an opportunity to pause at some point in the day to write down what's on your mind. If you've never kept a journal before, writing down your thoughts and feelings may seem awkward at first; it just takes some time and commitment to make journaling into a positive habit that can help provide you with valuable feedback on how you're managing your illness.

What is journaling?

Simply put, journaling is “writing life down.” Two key reasons to keep a journal:

Recapturing the moment

Spending just a few minutes a day writing in a journal is an opportunity to slow down, revisit key events of the day, and describe what happened and what you recall thinking or feeling. Writing to reflect on how you reacted and felt throughout the day can provide useful insight into how you see yourself and the world around you. This knowledge can help you gauge the progress you're making with your treatment plan.

Learning from the moment

Journaling is a great self-teaching tool. It provides a safe environment for examining how changing your thoughts or behaviors might bring about a different outcome. Many people find that once they've recounted the day's events, they can also spend a few minutes journaling about the lessons of the day, and “practicing” alternative ways to react to stress, handle relationships, and recognize and appreciate life's positive moments.

How can journaling help me take care of myself?

If you are looking to become more aware of your thoughts and more skilled at turning them around when you become counterproductive or destructive, a written journal provides a place to “catch” those thoughts and experiment with how a different way of thinking might impact a given situation. You may find it helpful to share insights you have gained through journaling with your healthcare provider.

Tips for starting a journal

- Commit time to write in your journal on a regular basis – ideally, daily.
- Find a quiet time and place to journal.

What should I write?

Every person’s journal is different. Here are a few of the things people keep track of in their journals:

- Concerns
- Accomplishments
- Disappointments
- Accounts of interactions with others, both positive and negative

For more information:

- University of Michigan Depression Center
- 1-800-475-MICH or 734-936-4400
- <http://www.depressioncenter.org/toolkit>

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