
Make it a habit. Pick a time of the day that's good for you. It could be the first thing you do when you wake up or the last thing you do before going to sleep.

Keep it simple. When you're first starting out, keep it simple. Journal only for a few minutes and set a timer.

Do what feels right. There's no hard-and-fast rule on what you should write. It's your space to create whatever you want to express your feelings. Don't worry about spelling or sentence structure or what other people might think. Some people may prefer to write only if something is bothering them, but you should do what feels right for you.

Write on anything. While a beautiful notebook might inspire some, it can intimidate others. But it doesn't matter what you write on. It could be a specific journal, random scraps of paper, or your phone. If you don't feel like writing, you could even try a voice memo.

Get creative. You might not be sure where to start with journaling or you might be reluctant if you're not fond of writing. But journaling doesn't have to be just about writing sentences. Try different formats. Write lists, make poetry, compose a song, write a letter, draw some art, or try bullet journaling. You can also find journaling prompts online that might inspire you.

Try expressive writing. Writing about an event that was stressful or emotional for you may be more beneficial to your mental health than just diary writing.

Start a gratitude journal. Giving thanks is good for your mental health. Start off by listing three things that you're grateful for. These can be small things like a walk in the park, a delicious cup of coffee, or good weather. You can make a list or write full sentences. Details may help you relive the positive moments of your day. How did the sunshine feel on your face? What feelings did the smell of coffee bring?

Don't set your expectations too high. A journal isn't going to solve all your problems. It isn't a therapist or counselor. But it can help you learn more about yourself.

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SOURCES:

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Mental Health Benefits of Journaling



Medically Reviewed by [Dan Brennan, MD](#) on October 25, 2021 | Written by [WebMD Editorial Contributors](#)

[Benefits of Journaling](#) [How to Start Journaling](#)

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Journaling is the act of keeping a record of your personal thoughts, feelings, insights, and more. It can be written, drawn, or typed. It can be on paper or on your computer. It's a simple, low-cost way of improving your mental health.

It isn't easy to start journaling. It can feel like work, and the expectation of writing every day may deter some people. But the positive effects of journaling can be felt even if it's not done daily.

Benefits of Journaling

Whether you're dealing with stress from school, burnout from work, an illness, or anxiety, journaling can help in many ways:

It can reduce your anxiety. Journaling about your feelings is linked to decreased mental distress. In a study, researchers found that those with various medical conditions and anxiety who wrote online for 15 minutes three days a week over a 12-week period had increased feelings of well-being and fewer depressive symptoms after one month. Their mental well-being continued to improve during the 12 weeks of journaling.

It helps with brooding. Writing about an emotional event can help you break away from the nonstop cycle of obsessively thinking and brooding over what happened — but the timing matters. Some studies show that writing about a traumatic event immediately after it happens may actually make you feel worse.

It creates awareness. Writing down your feelings about a difficult situation can help you understand it better. The act of putting an experience into words and structure allows you to form new perceptions about events.

It regulates emotions. Brain scans of people who wrote about their feelings showed that they were able to control their emotions better than those who wrote about a neutral experience. This study also found that writing about feelings in an abstract way was more calming than writing vividly.

It encourages opening up. Writing privately about a stressful event could encourage some to reach out for social support. This can help with emotional healing.

It can speed up physical healing. Journaling may also have an impact on physical health. A study on 49 adults in New Zealand found that those who wrote for 20 minutes about their feelings on upsetting events healed faster after a [biopsy](#) than those who wrote about daily activities. Similarly, college students who wrote about stressful events were less likely to get sick compared to those who wrote about neutral topics like their room.

[Women with breast cancer](#) who wrote positively or expressively about their experience with the disease had fewer physical symptoms and fewer cancer-related medical appointments. But researchers also noted that writing about negative emotions may increase anxiety and depression levels.

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How to Start Journaling