



NORTHSHORE INTEGRATIVE HEALTHCARE

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Using Journaling to Aid Health

What Is Journaling?

Journaling is the process of writing about our experiences, thoughts, and feelings. One way to promote health is to write about times in our lives that were stressful or traumatic. It provides an avenue for the expression of thoughts and memories that may have been internalized (kept inside), worsening physical symptoms. A quote by William Boyd, a pathologist at the turn of the 20th century, describes this process well. He said, "The sorrow that hath no vent in tears, may make other organs weep." Journaling is one type of therapy that can be used to aid this process.

How Does It Work?

Studies have found that if we express feelings about a time in our lives that was very traumatic or stressful, our immune function strengthens, we become more relaxed, and our health may improve. Writing about these processes helps us organize our thoughts and create closure to an event that our minds have a tendency to want to suppress or hide. Journaling can be done in the privacy of the home and requires only pen and paper.

Does Anybody Need to Read It?

You can share your writings with others if you desire, but no one needs to read what is written. The most benefit comes from writing the document; the words can be thrown away if desired. In fact, burning or destroying the document can ceremonially bring closure to a difficult time in your life. Some people prefer to keep their writings to look back on and see how they have grown from the events.

Are There Any Side Effects or Things I Should Be Aware Of?

Recalling stressful memories can make you feel uncomfortable for a few days. If this were not the case, the body would not use so much energy trying to repress them. The benefits from journaling become most apparent weeks to months after writing.

For some people this process can bring back to mind some frightening events that may need the help of a licensed counselor. Please notify your medical provider if you develop feelings that would benefit from further discussion. This is often the first step in promoting healing from within.

How Is It Done?

There are many different ways to express emotions. Journaling is simple and inexpensive and can be done independently. It would be beneficial to keep a regular journal to write about events that bring anger, grief, or joy. But if that is unlikely and you just want to deal with a specific event or see whether this will help your condition, follow these steps:



LOCATIONS

1800 Hollister Drive, Suite 206, Libertyville, IL 60048 * 455 S Roselle Road, Suite 104, Schaumburg, IL 60193
233 East Erie Street, Suite 702, Chicago, IL 60611 * 2150 Pfingsten Road, Suite 2200, Glenview, IL 60026



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- Find a quiet place where you will not be disturbed.
- Using pen, pencil, or computer, write about an upsetting or troubling experience in your life: something that has affected you deeply and that you have not discussed at length with others.
- First describe the event in detail. Write about the situation, surroundings, and sensations that you remember.
- Then describe your deepest feelings regarding the event. Let go and allow the emotions to run freely in your writing. Describe how you felt about the event then and now.
- Write continuously. Do not worry about grammar, spelling, or sentence structure. If you come to a block, simply repeat what you have already written.
- Before finishing, write about what you may have learned or how you may have grown from the event.
- Write for 20 minutes daily for at least 4 days. You can write about different events or reflect on the same one each day.
- Consider keeping a regular journal if the process proves helpful.

How Can I Learn More?

Two excellent resources for more information on this subject include:

1. The book, *Opening Up: The Healing Power of Expressing Emotions* by James Pennebaker, Ph.D. (Guilford Press, 1997).
2. The website of The Center for Journal Therapy found at www.journaltherapy.com.

The information in this handout is for general education. It is not meant to be used by a patient alone. Please work with your health care practitioner to use this information in the best way possible to promote your health and happiness.

Content adapted from: Fortney, L. & Bonus, K. (2007). *Recommending Meditation*. In: Raker, DP (Ed) *Integrative Medicine, 2nd Edition*. Philadelphia, PA: WB Saunders.

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