



## WRITING FOR HEALTH

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Open just about any popular magazine and you're likely to see something about the virtues of exercise and eating properly as ways of managing stress and promoting health. The benefits of these activities can't be denied, but there are other things you can do too. Writing is one of them.

Writing is a way of creating a dialogue with your self. It may be especially helpful for anyone who finds it difficult to talk to others about their experiences or feelings. Some people who journal say that it has made communication with others easier.

Writing down your experiences, thoughts and feelings, and organizing them, can bring order out of confusion and chaos.

Writing can be useful for anyone experiencing emotional turmoil, or for anyone who has a chronic health problem. Often these are misunderstood and/or not believed by others. By keeping a journal we can validate ourselves, our thoughts and our feelings.

Writing is of benefit to those who want to work on building self-esteem. It helps us regain contact with our inner selves, and discover who we really are. A diary or journal can become a mirror of our inner life.

Writing down your experiences, thoughts and feelings, and organizing them, can bring order out of confusion and chaos. When your thoughts and feelings are racing around inside you it's difficult to keep track of them, and even more difficult to figure out what brought them about. Once you have written out what you're thinking and feeling, you may arrive at new and more positive conclusions.

Putting your thoughts down on paper enables you to sort and examine your ideas and emotions, and put a little distance between them and you. Doing this can help silence an inner negative dialogue and give you a greater measure of control over your life.

Writing can provide you with a record of daily life that you can use if you want to search for situational, behavioural, or emotional patterns that provoke stress or anxiety. Stress is a major factor in feeling unwell, and in the dailiness of life we may not see what our obvious patterns are until we reread a week's, a month's, or a year's worth of journal entries.

It's a good idea to reread your journal entries at least once every few months, and think about what you wrote and why you chose to write about it. You get a chance to experience detachment from the emotions you had at the time, and from this you will gain new insight that only the passage of time allows.

You may find that writing has a cleansing effect and that somehow when you're finished, difficult feelings have lost some of their intensity, and you feel less stressed. Or you may be able to think more clearly, or to think new thoughts. You may find that solutions to problems that once seemed unsolvable will present themselves.

Some people come to enjoy writing so much that they decide to keep more than one diary or journal - for example, one like a daybook with brief entries and another more like a diary of feelings.

If you decide to give writing a try, it's important to find a time and a place to facilitate it. You might want to write in a particular room, where you have lots of privacy and quiet. You might want to write while listening to your favourite music. If you're keeping a dream journal, you'll likely want paper and pen by your bed. Just let the writing flow, don't think too much about what or how you're writing. Do give some thought to where you keep your writing,

as you may not want others to read it. We are all entitled to have something that's completely our own, and not shared with anyone else.

Date your entries to help keep things in perspective and help you pinpoint patterns if you're looking for them. You might want to draw or paste pictures in with your writing, if they seem to go along with what's on your mind. Doodling is OK too. Making images can help loosen us up when we're stressed.

Some people like to have specific goals to help keep their writing more focused. This could be done in the first writing session. Here are some suggestions:

- to work on a problem
- to help understand issues that affect my physical or mental health
- to guide me on a journey of self-discovery
- to help achieve certain life goals
- to write my own personal history
- to examine my childhood and how it affects me now
- to keep a record of counselling sessions
- to work on a relationship
- to get over a relationship that has ended
- to grieve a loss
- to develop spontaneity
- to explore my dreams
- to get in touch with, or vent, difficult emotions
- to become more comfortable communicating
- to keep track of the good things in my life
- to keep track of changes and personal growth
- to tie up loose ends
- to explore and enhance creativity
- to examine my beliefs and behaviour

If you don't want to write in an ongoing way, shorter writing projects can also be helpful. You might want to write a letter to someone you are angry or disappointed with - not to give to them, but for your benefit, to help get in

touch with what you feel and why, and to help you vent. It can be particularly useful when you can't express your feelings directly.

Write a letter to yourself, pretending you are your own best friend, and tell yourself why you like yourself. Mention how your day went, and what tomorrow holds.

List the best things that have happened to you today (or this week, this month, this year).

Describe the worst thing that ever happened to you.

Prepare for a difficult conversation by writing out things you could say, and things the other person might say.

Write a poem about someone or something that has inspired you.

List the things both small and large that make your life worth living.

Write down five things you need to do this week and how you feel about doing them.

Describe your ideal place to live and work.

If you decide to give writing a try, have some fun with it, and as the old adage goes,

Never underestimate the power of the written word.

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