

Learn About Journaling

Self-reflection helps you understand your thoughts and emotions so you can respond to them in healthier ways. Simple practices like journaling can build awareness, reduce stress, and support emotional growth. Journaling can be especially helpful for people who have a mental health condition.

What is journaling?

Like a diary, journaling is simply writing your thoughts, feelings, experiences, and ideas down in a notebook or even on your computer. Your journal is personal; you don't have to share it with anyone. You may decide to bring it to appointments with your health care provider to help describe how you've been feeling and functioning over time. Journaling can help you:

- **Recapture the moment:** Writing a few minutes a day helps you slow down, reflect on your day, and notice your thoughts and feelings. This can help you see how you react to events and track your progress over time.
- **Learn from the moment:** Journaling gives you a safe space to think about how changing your thoughts or actions could lead to better outcomes. You can practice new ways of handling stress, relationships, and daily challenges.

Getting started

Writing may feel awkward at first. Like any new habit, it takes practice. Here are some tips:

- **Write regularly:** Set aside some time daily. Start with just 10 minutes per day.
- **Pick a quiet time and place** where you can focus and won't be interrupted.
- **Write freely and honestly:** There's no right or wrong way to share your thoughts.

What to write about

Everyone's journal is different. You might include:

- Thoughts, feelings or concerns
- Ideas or goals
- Accomplishments or disappointments
- Interactions with others (good or bad)
- Symptoms you notice, including severity and timing
- Side effects from medication or treatment, or note mood changes over time

Journaling prompts

Writing prompts can help get you started. Start with these questions in mind and see where your mind takes you:

- Did I feel anxious, frustrated, or angry at any point today?
- Did I have a positive or negative interaction with someone today?
- Was there something that made me laugh or upset today?
- What problem, decision, or issue am I thinking about the most lately?
- How did I feel today? Did I experience any symptoms or medication side effects?
- What was the biggest challenge I faced today?

Looking back at your journal can help you see patterns, notice improvement, and understand yourself better. You can keep your journal private or share insights with your health care provider. Sharing what you notice about your symptoms and treatment can make your appointments more helpful.

For more mental health educational resources, visit depressioncenter.org/toolkit.

This document provides general educational information developed by the Eisenberg Family Depression Center. It is not a substitute for professional medical advice. Please consult your health care provider if you have questions about your health or treatment options.