

A Structured Journal

Journal writing is one of the healthiest things you can do for yourself. Find time at least a few times a week to write down your thoughts. You might want to add some creative writing. Write a poem or story; describe the room you are in or the neighborhood or park. Get out the bad feelings. Write your life story. Try writing about yourself in the third person. Make every effort to give yourself lots of compassion and love. You might want to gather some friends for a journal-sharing group.

Writing has been shown to have enormous beneficial effects. Middle-aged engineers who had been laid off were asked to write about the experience a few minutes a day, three days a week. A control group wrote about stress-free incidents. The experimental group not only handled the situation better emotionally, but got new jobs faster than the control group.

Studies have been done with people who have asthma, arthritis, and diabetes. Those who wrote about their experiences had fewer symptoms, took less medication and visited the doctor less frequently.

Any kind of writing is helpful. A simple chronicle of your day, mulling over a particular book you've read or the ideas of a person you've spoken with or seen on television, themes like "my favorite movies" or "funny stories about my kids" -- there are endless ideas. Here's a suggestion.

For a structured journal, answer these questions:

1. What's bothering me today?
2. What's making me happy?
3. What made me angry?
4. What have I done that I'm proud of?
5. What have I done that I regret?
6. What am I grateful for today?
7. What is my prayer for today?
8. What is one thing I will accomplish tomorrow that will move me one step closer to a life goal?

Another idea: Julia Cameron, in *The Artist's Way*, suggests "morning pages." Every morning, first thing, write three pages - whatever comes up. Promise yourself no one will ever read it - maybe not even you!

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