

Writing in a journal is an opportunity to pause at some point in the day to write down what's on your mind. If you've never kept a journal before, writing down your thoughts and feelings may seem awkward at first; it just takes time and commitment to make journaling into a positive habit that can help provide you with valuable feedback on how you're managing your illness. It can also be a helpful tool for you to share - if you choose - with your clinician.

What is journaling?

Simply put, journaling is "writing life down." Two key reasons to keep a journal:

Recapturing the moment

Spending just a few minutes a day writing in a journal is an opportunity to slow down, revisit key events of the day, and describe what happened and what you recall thinking or feeling. Writing to reflect on how you reacted and felt throughout the day can provide useful insight into how you see yourself and the world around you. This knowledge can help you gauge the progress you're making with your treatment plan.

Learning from the moment

Journaling is a great self-teaching tool. It provides a safe environment for examining how changing your thoughts or behaviors might bring about a different outcome. Many people find that once they've recounted the day's events, they can also spend a few minutes journaling about the lessons of the day, and "practicing" alternative ways to react to stress, handle relationships, and recognize and appreciate life's positive moments.



How can journaling help me take care of myself?

The more you know, the more active role you can play in overcoming depression. That's true for understanding your diagnosis and the specifics of your treatment plan, *and* for knowing yourself as well. For individuals looking to become more aware of their thoughts and more skilled at turning them around when they become counterproductive or destructive, a written journal provides a place to "catch" those thoughts, hold on to them long enough to reflect on where they came from, and experiment with how a different way of thinking might impact a given situation.

Although your journal is a confidential tool, you may find it helpful to share insights you have gained through journaling with your healthcare provider. For example, if you use your journal to track your symptoms and any side effects of your treatment, this can be very useful information to share during your regular appointments.

Getting started

Writing down your thoughts and feelings may seem awkward at first. Remember, just like developing any other positive new habit, it takes time.

Tips for starting a journal:

- Commit time to write in your journal on a regular basis – ideally, daily.
- Find a quiet time and place to journal.



What should I write?

Every person's journal is different. Here are a few of the things people keep track of in their journals:

- Thoughts
- Feelings
- Ideas
- Concerns
- Accomplishments
- Disappointments
- Accounts of interactions with others, both positive and negative

People recovering from a depressive illness may choose to also include information in their journal specific to their symptoms and treatment. For example:

- Symptoms experienced, including the symptom, severity, time of day, and other factors (stress, challenging relationships, etc.) that may have been involved.
- Side effects experienced, noting the side effect, time of day, etc.
- Changes in mood, feelings, or thought patterns – a journal is a good place to gauge whether you are feeling better, worse, or the same over time, allowing you to look back and see important trends in your recovery.

U-M Depression Center ■ 800-475-6424 ■ www.depressioncenter.org

Please visit the UMDC online toolkit at www.depressiontoolkit.org. This toolkit was made possible by the Friends of the University of Michigan Hospital and Health System.

Disclaimer: This document is for informational purposes only and is not intended to take the place of the care and attention of your personal physician or other professional medical services. Talk with your doctor if you have Questions about individual health concerns or specific treatment options.

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