

WELLNESS TIPS

JOURNALING

Journaling, as described by Monk and Folit, is “the practice of taking time . . . to write and reflect on thoughts, feelings and life experiences . . . the act of capturing and understanding our lives through expressive writing and stories”. It is (usually) writing down thoughts and feelings to understand them more clearly in relation to any of our life experiences. Journaling might include writing that is more list-like at times such as places visited on vacation, daily activities, or recording progress made in the weight room. Journaling can also focus on expressing thoughts and emotions that haven’t been shared with others, attempting to work through feelings of being overwhelmed, reviewing a problem and possible solutions, making important life decisions, writing about experiences to better understand them, or to getting to know yourself better. Journaling is also a way to celebrate accomplishments and successes.

Research has shown an association between journaling and improved physical and mental health.

Potential benefits of journaling:

1. Express yourself when experiencing intense emotions such as stress, anxiety, and anger in a healthy way
2. Manage symptoms (such as anxiety) and improve mood:
 - a. By prioritizing problems and concerns
 - b. Tracking symptoms to recognize triggers and ways to control them
 - c. Engaging in positive self-talk and identifying negative self-talk/behaviors
3. Helping to identify what is contributing to stress/anxiety

Getting Started

Recommendations for developing a journaling schedule vary. Choose a frequency and length of time that works for you. Some people journal daily at the same time, while others journal when they have a specific topic or difficult situation they want to write about or work through.

Writing with pen and notebook is the traditional method for journaling. Supplies might include a fancy journal or a piece of notebook paper and a pen. Keep them handy so you can journal whenever you would like. Other methods also work for journaling. Some people prefer to use their computer. Sometimes people use voice memo to record their thoughts, which can be beneficial if you are an auditory person. Art journals for sketching or doodling can be also satisfying.

Because journal writing is for your own benefit, write about whatever you would like - any topic and format can be chosen. You don't have to meet any expectations regarding spelling, grammar or how sentences flow. You can write paragraphs, or you can make bullet phrases/lists.

If you are feeling hesitant, start small and just begin writing. If you have difficulty choosing a topic at times, you might make a list of prompts to use. Prompts might include:

How you are feeling?
What you are thinking about?
The best part of your week?
What you are grateful for?

Research indicates that having a ritual is beneficial. Rituals provide cues which help create a mindset for writing. When beginning a new ritual or habit, it can be helpful to connect it to existing ones. For example, you might decide to write for 15 minutes with a morning cup of coffee or after dinner. You may want to experiment with different journaling strategies, environments, and times to journal, tuning in to how you feel afterwards. This will provide information about a preferred ritual.

Journaling is a readily accessible and flexible activity that has the potential to provide many benefits. Over your break, consider exploring to find how it might work for you.

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Phelan, Hayley. "What's All This About Journaling?" New York Times. October 25, 2018.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/25/style/journaling-benefits.html>

University of Rochester Medical Center. Health Encyclopedia. "Journaling for Mental Health."

<https://www.urmc.rochester.edu/encyclopedia/content.aspx?ContentID=4552&ContentTypeID=1>

See the MSCC Website for past Wellness Tips. <https://medicine.uiowa.edu/md/student-support/student-counseling/mscc-wellness-programs-and-resources>

Contact the MSCC with questions or concerns or to schedule an appointment with any of our counselors.

Liz Schacht elizabeth-shacht@uiowa.edu

Medical Student Counseling Center osac-mscc@uiowa.edu 319-335-8056 1240 MERF