

BMDA Journaling

Journaling or journal writing, is the act of putting thoughts, ideas, feelings and memories into written words. Writing in a journal is an effective way to handle the emotions caused by your cancer experience.

When facing a serious illness, people often find it difficult to express their feelings to others. Journal writing provides a safe and private way for you to express these difficult feelings.

It allows you to come to terms with cancer at your own pace and in your own way. Because journal writing helps you to focus on your innermost thoughts, it fosters coming to terms with illness and regaining a sense of control in your life.

Benefits of Journaling

Research has shown that writing about stressful experiences, such as illness and disease, results in better health and psychological well-being. When people confront and work through an experience, it is understood more clearly. This can improve coping skills and sleep quality, reduce stress and enhance social interactions, all of which result in better health.

How to Start

Follow the steps below to help you get started.

1. **Make a plan.** Choose a time of day that is best for you. Then make a goal to write for 15 minutes, 2 days a week at that time. Once that becomes a routine, try adding another day so you are journaling 3 days a week.
2. **Find a spot.** Choose a place to write that is comfortable and relaxing – a place where you can be alone and focus on your thoughts.
3. **Start writing.** Write down whatever comes to mind. Let your mind wander and your words flow. Do not edit yourself.

Once you are comfortable journaling, do not limit yourself to certain days or times. Journal whenever you have time or when you feel it can help you the most. Some people find it helpful to journal while they are waiting for appointments, as it helps to calm nerves and pass the time.

If you have a hard time thinking of what to write about or find yourself staring at the blank page, begin by writing “I don’t know what to write” over and over. Eventually, other words will come. You can also try writing about stories of your past to help begin the writing process. For example, you can journal about your first car or your experiences on your first day of school.

If writing does not come naturally to you, try making lists.

Ideas for lists include:

- Your best qualities
- What you need and want from your doctor
- Things that make you happy

Journaling Tips

- Try not to be hard on yourself if you miss a journal entry.
- Always date your entries.
- If you prefer journaling on a computer, print off the pages and keep them in a notebook. This makes it easier to look back on and read later.
- Write what you want to write. Remember, the journal is for you.
- Allow yourself to buy a nice journal. Your words are worth it.

Journaling – Ideas for Getting Started

Diagnosis Reflection: How did you feel when you first received your cancer diagnosis? What thoughts and emotions overwhelmed you at that moment?

My Support System: Write about the people who have been there for you during your cancer journey. How have they supported you, and how has it impacted you emotionally?

Daily Gratitude: List three things you are grateful for today, no matter how small or insignificant. How does focusing on gratitude impact your outlook on your situation?

Coping Strategies: What coping mechanisms or strategies have helped you deal with the physical and emotional challenges of cancer? Have you discovered any new ones during your journey?

Self-Care Rituals: Describe your favorite self-care rituals that help you relax and find moments of peace amid the chaos of cancer.

Good Days vs Bad Days: Describe a recent good day and a recent bad day in your cancer journey. What made them stand out, and how did you cope with each?

Self-Reflection: How has cancer changed your perspective on life, relationships, and your future? Have you discovered new priorities or values?

Body Image and Self-Esteem: Write about your feelings regarding the changes in your body due to cancer and its treatments. How do you maintain or rebuild your self-esteem?

Health Milestones: Record the significant milestones in your cancer treatment, such as surgeries, chemotherapy sessions, or radiation therapy. How did you feel before, during, and after each one?

Strengths: Reflect on your existing strengths that will help you in your healing and list them. How did you develop those strengths and in what other situations have you used them?

Patient Education



Life Lessons: What valuable life lessons have you learned through your cancer journey? How have these experiences shaped you as a person?

Hopes and Dreams: What are your hopes and dreams for the future? How do you envision your life after cancer treatment?

Adapted from redslipperwarrior.com/and pennmedicine.org

For more information, call 904-202-7300 or speak with your physician or clinic team.

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