

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 the 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.

What are the 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 and sleep quality, reduce stress, and enhance social interactions, all of which result in better health.

How do I start journaling?

Follow the steps below to help you get started.

1. **Make a plan.** Choose a time of day that is most convenient 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 a day.
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. Don't 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 individuals 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

- Don't 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.

Resources

Integrative Medicine Center

The Integrative Medicine Center aims to enhance cancer care and quality of life. Programs are open to anyone touched by cancer, their family members and caregivers. You are welcome even if you are not an MD Anderson patient.

Approaches focus on the mind, body and spirit:

- Get health advice about how to pursue an integrative approach to cancer care.
- Join in free group programs. Learn about diet, meditation, yoga, music therapy and more.
- Receive massage and acupuncture for a nominal fee.

For more information, call 713-794-4700 or visit us at www.mdanderson.org/integrativemed.