**Journaling for Mental Health**  
Source: University of Rochester Medical Center  
<https://www.urmc.rochester.edu/encyclopedia/content.aspx?ContentTypeID=1&ContentID=4552>

When you were a teenager, you might have kept a diary hidden beneath your mattress. It became your confidant and a place to confess your struggles and fears without judgment or punishment. It probably felt good to get all of those thoughts and emotions out of your head and down on paper. The world seemed clearer.

Although you may have ditched the diary once you reached adulthood, the concept and its benefits still apply. Now it’s called journaling. It's simply writing down your thoughts and feelings to understand them more clearly. And if you struggle with stress, depression, or anxiety, keeping a journal can help you gain control of your emotions and improve your mental health.

**Journaling benefits**

One of the ways to deal with any overwhelming emotion is to find a healthy outlet in which to express yourself, which makes a journal a helpful tool in managing your mental health. Journaling can help:

* Reduce stress
* Cope with depression
* Journaling helps control your symptoms and improve your mood by:
* Helping you prioritize problems, fears, and concerns
* Tracking any symptoms day-to-day so that you can recognize triggers and learn ways to better control them
* Providing an opportunity for positive self-talk and identifying negative thoughts and behaviors

When you have a problem and you're stressed, keeping a journal can help you identify what’s causing that stress or anxiety. Then, once you’ve identified your stressors, you can work on a plan to resolve the problems and, in turn, reduce stress.

Keep in mind that journaling is just one aspect of a healthy lifestyle for better managing stress, anxiety, and mental health conditions. To get the most benefits, be sure you also:

Relax and meditate each day.  
Eat a nutritious, balanced diet.  
Exercise regularly—get in some activity every day.  
Treat yourself to plenty of sleep each night.  
Use your journal to make sure you follow these guidelines daily.

**How to journal**

Try these tips to help you get started with journaling:

* Try to write every day. To encourage yourself to write in your journal regularly, set aside a few minutes every day.
* Make it easy. Keep a pen and paper handy at all times so that when you want to jot down your thoughts, you can. You can also keep a journal in a computer file.
* Write whatever feels right. Your journal doesn't need to follow any particular structure. It's your own private arena to discuss whatever you want. Let the words flow freely without worrying about spelling mistakes or what other people might think.
* Use your journal as you see fit. You don't have to share your journal with anyone. If you do want to share some of your thoughts with trusted friends and loved ones but don't want to talk about them out loud, you could show them parts of your journal.

Keeping a journal helps you establish order when your world feels like it’s in chaos. It helps you get to know yourself by revealing your innermost fears, thoughts, and feelings. Look at your writing time as personal relaxation time, a time when you de-stress and wind down. Write in a place that's relaxing and soothing—maybe with a cup of tea. Look forward to your journaling time, and know that you're doing something good for your mind and body.