

Healing With Words: Journaling and Reflecting Throughout Treatment

Writing can lower stress by helping people process feelings and clarify thoughts. Regularly journaling about your cancer experience can provide a comforting outlet and help you cope. This fact sheet will cover:

- Getting started with a journal
- Reflecting on your cancer experience
- Tips for writing in a journal



How to Get Started

Few experiences in life are as difficult as cancer. Powerful emotions can be overwhelming and frightening. Writing is a way to express feelings such as fear, anger, sadness and loss. Before starting a journal, remember the following:

- It's the content that is important, not spelling or grammar.
- Find a private place to write where you feel comfortable and will not be interrupted.
- Choose the method of writing you prefer, whether it is pen and paper, a computer, a tablet or phone.
- Try to write daily, stopping if you feel tired or overwhelmed. Many people find that setting aside a specific time of day, such as the morning, helps them to collect their thoughts and put them down.



Retrace Your Experiences

Writing about your cancer experience from the earliest stages of your diagnosis will enable you to retrace your steps and reconnect with the emotions you went through. You will be able to look back and remember how you were able to cope and keep moving forward. Seeing the progress you have made through difficult and frightening times can be inspiring and motivating.



Tips When Journaling

Remember that it is okay to begin slowly. Aim to write for five minutes a day, not necessarily about your cancer but about whatever thoughts come to mind.

Find the best platform for you. You may prefer to create a blog rather than use a notebook to record your thoughts.

There is no “right” or “wrong” way to journal. Writing is whatever you decide it will be—a story, a poem, random thoughts or words, memories, hopes and fears. Journaling can also be drawings or a scrapbook of sketches. Hopefully, it will provide an emotional outlet and, in time, will decrease your stress. Dating each entry helps you look back at previous entries and reflect.

Create a journaling routine. Setting a routine can give you a sense of control. You may find writing in the morning helps you start the day or writing before bed helps you unwind.

Only you can know if journaling is a positive outlet for you. If writing causes you to feel overwhelmed, consider stopping it for now. Writing can be an important tool in your healing, but only if it helps. There are other methods of emotional support. An oncology social worker can help find other ways to cope. CancerCare offers free face-to-face, telephone and online support groups led by professional oncology social workers.

CancerCare® Can Help

For over 80 years, CancerCare has empowered millions of people affected by cancer through free counseling, resource navigation, support groups, educational resources, advocacy and direct financial assistance. Our oncology social workers improve the lives of people diagnosed with cancer, caregivers, survivors and the bereaved, by addressing their emotional, practical and financial challenges.

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