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## #TAKECARE ~ JOURNALING FOR BETTER MENTAL HEALTH

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Our constantly connected world of ever-present mobile devices, long commutes and familial obligations can easily leave us feeling worn down and struggling to cope. To combat that daily wear-and-tear, we need a mental “port in the storm” now more than ever. One great refuge to help us weather those moments of psychological fatigue can be found in the therapeutic art of [journaling](#).

Recently, adult [coloring books](#) and sketchpads have increased in popularity as a means to soothe our troubled minds and decompress when the world around us feels like it’s too much. However, the mental health benefits of keeping a private journal are equally numerous, but are often overlooked. From helping to bolster our memories as we age to providing a beautiful emotional keepsake of our lives’ more fascinating experiences, journaling has the potential to bring clarity and calm as we move from one life hurdle to the next.

## Strength, Courage & Wisdom

As relaxing as coloring books and drawing may be, sometimes relaxation can only be truly embraced after we've worked through the recurring thoughts that keep us up at night. For many, writing is a cathartic process. As such, keeping a record of our ideas, exploits and stresses in a private diary can help us gain insight into the source of our troubles. Like a good, hard cry, journaling can take us through the mental drag that wears us down, yet we feel too busy to address in our hectic daily schedules. But once the details are before us on the page, our spirits often feel unburdened and relaxed.

If you're struggling with grief, a major life change or the uncertainty of where you are on your journey, [numerous authors](#) have also prescribed the practice of journaling to aid in the healing process. However, it is renown psychologists James W. Pennebaker and Joshua M. Smyth who wrote the literal book on how to tap into the blessings that journal writing can bring in their iconic, *Opening Up by Writing It Down: How Expressive Writing Improves Health and Eases Emotional Pain*. Now in its third edition, Pennebaker and Smyth frame a writing journal as a safe space in which to explore our thoughts without fear of judgment, opening the door to understanding and patience that may not come through other means of relaxation.

## Free Your Mind And The Rest Will Follow

To be fair, it's no real surprise writing can help us mentally, but the physical benefits of capturing our thoughts also make the act of keeping a journal incredibly appealing. Sure, we may see improvements in our battles with depression, anxiety or spiritual growth, but did you know that by putting pen to paper – or hand to keyboard – you can also see boosts in your immune system, decrease your blood pressure and positive developments in chronic ailments that affect your [lungs](#), nerves and liver? So says a [study](#) conducted by Pennebaker and Smyth over a 20-year period.

Why are there so many physiological advantages to an act as innocent as keeping a journal? The simple answer is mental health affects physical health far more than modern society wishes to admit. Scientifically speaking, psychotherapists Kathleen Adams and Deborah Ross believe it has something to do with the concept of neuroplasticity. In their book, *Your Brain on Ink*, Adams and Ross share how creating new neural pathways in the brain can help you change your life and improve your physical resilience to stress, which affects the body's ability to withstand a foreign illness. Therefore, if we focus on improving our mental health, we can strengthen our physical health along the way – and journaling is a great approach to help us benefit from both.

## Lose Yourself

Often one of the most disheartening aspects about our busy lives is the lack of an outlet that speaks to our need to create. We may nourish our bodies with food and sleep or even enjoy a fun hobby or two, but we rarely think of our minds' need to be fed and stimulated in an expressive way. Reading books, playing video games and listening to music are wonderful ways to cut loose and relax, but unless you're dancing to those amazing tunes, we're rarely creating something original in the process. That's where the beauty of journaling reigns supreme.

Whether it's an [art journal](#), a [gratitude journal](#) or just your random thoughts on everyday observations, the act of writing down your ideas will help you enjoy a sense of expression that you may be missing. Writing in a simple stream of consciousness can unleash a level of creativity in your personal revelations on the page, but can also open the floodgates to concepts you may want to introduce in other areas like painting, fashion or cuisine. In doing so, you may find you're enjoying a level of emotional contentment that eluded you before, and it's all thanks to your journal providing an outlet for the myriad of inspired ideas waiting to be heard.

By [Candace Nicholson](#)

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