

How Journaling Helps

Why Journal?

Journaling is simply recording your thoughts, feelings, experiences, reflections and observations. The practice of journaling can help reduce stress, improve health and well-being, provide a way to process emotions, and help clarify next steps [1]. It can also help treat anxiety, reduce symptoms of depression, create space for reflection, and support recovery [2].

Psychological symptoms for hair loss can include “anxiety, anger, depression, embarrassment, decreased confidence, reduction in work and sexual performance, social withdrawal These are similar to those usually seen with chronic and severe life-threatening diseases” [3]. This is a lot to process, deal with, and accept.

Beautifully stated by Dr. Alice Boyes, “we know that our brains get stressed out by ‘open loops’. Open loops begin when we push intrusive thoughts, and the emotions they’re connected to, aside. When we do that, the loops of those emotions are kept open in the brain. As you get into a tug-of-war, where these thought intrusions and emotional intrusions pop in and out, you fail to complete the necessary emotional processing. The idea is that journaling can help us more fully process what we’re going through by building awareness of our emotions and encouraging us to process, and ultimately let go of, our feelings. In other words, rather than pushing emotions away, journaling helps us close those loops by providing us with a space to directly deal with and understand them.” [4]

How to Get Started

Choose a Format: While many journalers write out their thoughts via pen and paper, computer, or a phone app, it can also be done with voice memos, photographs, or even art. Choose a format that appeals to you. Do you like to physically write things down? Would you prefer to type or use your phone? Are you a visual person who would like to try art or photo journaling? Consider what format will be most conducive for you to easily access and engage with on a regular basis.

Choose a Duration: A journal writer can spend as little as five minutes at a time on this activity or sometimes much longer, depending on the format and preference. If you are new to the practice of journaling, choose a timeframe that feels approachable and repeatable to you.

Choose a Time: Think about when you’d like to journal. First thing in the morning? Before bed? As the need arises? Consider your needs and what would work well in your day-to-day life.

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Types of Journaling

There are many ways to journal. Below are a few easy ways to get started, and I will post additional resources about specific journaling methods on my website.

- Freewriting - Simply write your stream-of-consciousness, without regard to format, grammar, or logical order. Use this as an opportunity to get what's on your mind out of your system. Try setting a timer for anywhere from 5-20 minutes to help stay focused.
- Focused Freewriting - Choose a specific topic, set a timer and write your stream-of-consciousness thoughts about that subject for a specified amount of time.
- Gratitude Journaling - Write a list of 1-3 things you are thankful for each day.
- Record Keeping - Write down the story of what you have experienced. Don't do this all in one sitting, but break it up into bite-sized pieces over the course of days or weeks.

If the idea of journaling feels daunting, choose a shorter method to start such as Gratitude Journaling or a 5-minute Freewrite. Commit to this for a specified time period, then intentionally review whether it has been beneficial and how you'd like to move forward.

Sources

[1] Tartakovsky, M. (2022, February 22). 6 Journaling Benefits and How to Start Right Now. Healthline. Retrieved March 22, 2024, from <https://www.healthline.com/health/benefits-of-journaling>

[2] Sutton, J. (2018, May 14). 26 Feb 2024 42 5 Benefits of Journaling for Mental Health. Positive Psychology. Retrieved March 22, 2024, from <https://positivepsychology.com/benefits-of-journaling/>

[3] Dhimi L. Psychology of Hair Loss Patients and Importance of Counseling. Indian J Plast Surg. 2021 Dec 31;54(4):411-415. doi: 10.1055/s-0041-1741037. PMID: 34984078; PMCID: PMC8719979.

[4] Boyes, A. (n.d.). Explaining the Psychological Benefits of Journaling. Olympics.com. Retrieved March 22, 2024, from <https://olympics.com/athlete365/well-being/explaining-the-psychological-benefits-of-journaling/#:~:text=Journaling%20is%20when%20you%20spend,out%20by%20%E2%80%99Copen%20loops%E2%80%9D>.