

# Wellness Wednesday



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## Why You Should Start A Journal Right Now (And How To Stick With It)

Journaling can help you deal with stress and anxiety, while also documenting life during the coronavirus.

Living through a global pandemic has messed with our mental and emotional health in countless ways. If you're looking for ways to cope, consider starting a journal.

Mental health professionals have long touted the benefits of journaling: It can alleviate stress and act as a tool to help manage anxiety and depression. That's important right now given that the vast majority — 90% — of American adults report dealing with emotional distress related to COVID-19, according to a survey from researchers at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and Harvard Medical School. And people who dealt with mental health conditions before the pandemic may have a more difficult time handling the stress of this crisis, experts say. Meera Lee Patel, author of "Create Your Own Calm: A Journal for Quieting Anxiety," said a journaling practice can help clear a cluttered mind.



"Journaling is a great way to release stress and neutralize anxiety, allowing you to remove the thoughts that are continually cycling in your head by placing them onto paper," she told HuffPost. "Many find that after journaling, their minds are clearer, calmer and better equipped to evaluate solutions for the issue at hand."

Many of us tend to ignore or suppress difficult emotions. Journaling helps us "get acquainted with" these feelings, psychotherapist Kathleen Dahlen deVos said, so we can process them and find ways to move forward.

"[We] learn that while it may still be uncomfortable to tolerate and 'be with' our feelings, we actually have the capacity to handle them," she said.

Plus, journaling is practically free, making it more accessible than other forms of self-care. Lauren Donelson — a writer and yoga teacher who's studying to be a therapist — said she's been journaling for seven years and recommends it to almost all of the patients she sees.

"I can't afford therapy every day, but I can check in on my mental health every day by doing some stream-of-consciousness journaling," she said. "It helps me structure my mornings. This sacred time alone each morning has become really important to me over the years. It helps me to connect to myself. If I complain about the same issue for two weeks in my journal, I eventually get sick of myself and do something about it."

Another advantage of regular journaling? It can help you spot patterns in your thoughts or behaviors that don't serve you, connecting the dots between what you think and do and how you feel. Keeping a journal can also help you track progress on your goals and observe your personal growth.

## There may be benefits to documenting life during this significant moment in history, too

Between COVID-19 uprooting our daily lives, George Floyd's death spurring a moment of reckoning on race and an upcoming presidential election, 2020 is a tumultuous year by all accounts. While certain memories of the last five months may stick out to you now, they'll begin to fade over time — if they haven't already. Keeping a journal can also act as a time capsule of sorts for you to revisit down the road.

"It's incredibly useful both for us personally and on a historical level to keep a daily record of what goes on around us during difficult times," author Ruth Franklin told The New York Times in April.

In a Washington Post opinion piece, "Write It Down. Keep A Pandemic Journal," Columbia University journalism professor Ari L. Goldman notes that chronicling this time on social media isn't the same as keeping a journal.

"Facebook and Instagram are a conversation. They are for others. A journal is for you," he wrote. "You deserve a record. Write it down so you will remember how you got used to this — and how you got through this."

As humans, we are hard-wired to look for meaning in our experiences, Dahlen deVos said. It gives our lives a sense of purpose and order. Journaling during a difficult time like the one we're living through can help us "find peace in and acceptance of challenging experiences and learn from them," she said.

"We all want to know that our lives matter, that our lived and shared experiences have meaning," Dahlen deVos said. "Documenting this moment in history may help us find and create meaning in the fear, grief and overwhelm we might currently be experiencing, and offer a bit of soothing by contextualizing this moment in time in the greater arc of our lives and histories."

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- KATHLEEN DAHLEN DEVOS, PSYCHOTHERAPIST

## Here's how to start journaling — and stick with it

### Use a pen and paper instead of keeping a digital journal.

"I find that writing, as opposed to typing, helps slow us down a bit so we can be more intentional and reflective, and also activates a more creative area of the brain," Dahlen deVos said.

Donelson recommends writing in an inexpensive journal if you're someone who can be overly precious about things.

"While I love a good \$30 Moleskin, I've noticed I am more afraid to write something 'bad' if I invested in a fancy notebook," she said.

### Write stream of consciousness for 5 minutes. Then gradually add more time.

With this type of journaling, "you try to write whatever is on your mind even if it doesn't make sense," Donelson said.

### Set a timer, put pen to paper and just let the words flow out without judgment.

"This writing isn't meant to be 'good' writing," Donelson said. "You don't even have to re-read it if you don't want to! The point is to just get whatever is in your head out onto the page. I suggest starting with five or 10 minutes a day. If you enjoy it, go for 20 minutes."

### Or use a prompt to get the juices flowing.

"If a blank page seems intimidating to you, there are many journals with insightful prompts and exercises that can help you get started," Patel said. You can find plenty of ideas online, too.

### Write at the same time every day if you can.

Whether you do it right when you wake up, during your lunch break or before bed, it doesn't matter. Choose a time and stick to it.

"I'm a morning person, so journaling first thing in the morning works really well for me," Donelson said.

### Remember that your journal is just for you.

You don't need to impress anyone with your writing — not even yourself.

"I would suggest keeping your journal private and trying to be as honest and real with yourself as possible," Donelson said.

And if delving into certain subjects is too painful for you, don't pressure yourself to keep writing. It's OK to take a break or stop journaling altogether if it's not working for you.

"Experiencing symptoms of hypervigilance, stress or distress are signals to discontinue your journaling exercise," University of Wisconsin psychologist Shilagh A. Mirgain told UW Health.

Don't worry if you skip a day.

"Instead of beating yourself up for missing a day or two — or 12 — of journaling, which only creates more disappointment and resistance within you, simply begin again," Patel said. "It takes time for our brains to create new neural pathways, which means that the desire to journal will often follow after you've already taken the initiative to begin journaling."

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# SPAGHETTI WITH SAUTEED CHICKEN & GRAPE TOMATOES



330 Calories | *PREP TIME: 5 mins* | *COOK TIME: 25 mins* | *TOTAL TIME: 30 mins*  
*YIELD: 4 Servings* | *COURSE: Dinner* | *CUISINE: Italian*

## INGREDIENTS

2 skinless chicken breast halves (1 lb), diced in 1 inch cubes

cooking spray

1/2 tsp each of dried oregano and dried basil  
kosher salt and fresh pepper, to taste

8 oz spaghetti, gluten-free or whole wheat

2 cups grape tomatoes, halved

6 cloves garlic, smashed and coarsely chopped

4 tsp extra virgin olive oil

4 tbsp chopped fresh basil

This tomato basil chicken pasta recipe is bursting with flavor and is pretty easy to make. When you use in-season produce, you don't need many extra ingredients.

## TIPS:

- Use shrimp instead of chicken.
- Add extra vegetables, like spinach, onions, or mushrooms.
- Swap the spaghetti for angel hair or use zucchini noodles or spaghetti squash for a low-carb alternative.

## Nutrition Information

Serving: 1 1/2 cups, Calories: 330 kcal, Carbohydrates: 48 g, Protein: 25 g, Fat: 7 g, Saturated Fat: 2 g, Cholesterol: 17 mg, Sodium: 50 mg, Fiber: 7 g, Sugar: 5 g  
Source: [Skinnytaste.com](http://Skinnytaste.com)



## INSTRUCTIONS



### How to make:

Bring a large pot of salted water to boil.

Season chicken generously with salt, pepper, oregano and basil.

Heat a large skillet on high heat. When hot, spray with oil and add chicken. Cook about 3-4 minutes, until no longer pink.

Remove chicken and set aside.

Add pasta and cook according to package directions. Reserve about 1/2 cup pasta water before draining.

While pasta cooks, add olive oil to skillet on high heat.

Add garlic and sauté until golden brown (do not burn). Add tomatoes, salt and pepper and reduce heat to medium-low. Sauté about 4-5 minutes.

When pasta is drained, add pasta to tomatoes and toss well. If pasta seems too dry, add some of the reserved pasta water.

Add fresh basil and chicken and toss well. Serve and top with good grated cheese.

## FEATURED EXERCISE

## Grab your sneakers— let's get to work!

### This 30-Minute Treadmill Workout Beats Boredom & Torches Tons Of Calories

Unless you're surrounded by other sweaty runners and being cheered on by a coach (and a solid playlist), the treadmill isn't always the most motivating place to be. When you're by yourself, even a 30-minute treadmill workout can really drag on.

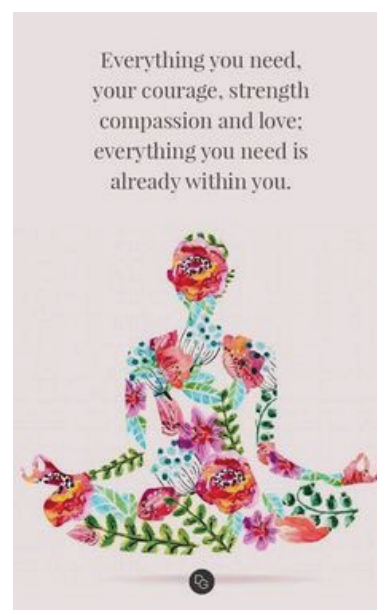
Staying mentally engaged—and torching ALL the calories—on the treadmill is as simple as this: intervals.

Interval training (typically referred to as high-intensity interval training) alternates high-intensity bursts of work with periods of rest. So, instead of slogging away at a steady pace for your entire workout, you bounce between hard efforts and easy recovery.

Remember, the intensities here are just suggestions. Everyone's cardiovascular fitness level is different; the key thing here is your effort. So, are you ready rock and roll? LET'S SWEAT!

Source: <https://www.womenshealthmag.com/fitness/a33298619/30-minute-treadmill-workout/>

*Regular exercise can help you control your weight, reduce your risk of heart disease, and strengthen your bones and muscles. But if it's been awhile since you've exercised and you have health issues or concerns, it's a good idea to talk to your doctor before starting a new exercise routine.*



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