

# *How to Start Journaling*



**CAREGIVERS**  
NETWORK for East Kootenay Seniors

To start journaling, all you need is a paper notebook.

Keep it private so you won't have to worry about anyone reading what you wrote.

It's a wonderful ritual if you're able to journal for a set amount of time each day, but you don't have to follow any rules to get the full benefits of journaling.

Write for as long as you want as often as you'd like.

The one thing many people recommend is to write continuously and use a "stream of consciousness" approach. That means writing down whatever thoughts come into your mind.

It's important to let it flow and not edit your thoughts or worry about grammar or spelling. You don't even have to use full sentences – anything goes.

# 6 Benefits of Journaling for Caregivers

## 1. Reduce caregiver stress

Writing about anger, sadness, resentment, and other painful emotions helps to release the intensity of these feelings. After getting these thoughts out, you'll likely feel calmer and less stressed.

## 2. Improve your health

It has been proven that when people write about emotionally difficult events or feelings for just 20 minutes at a time over 3 or 4 days, their immune system functioning increases. The relief gained by writing also improves the body's ability to withstand stress, infection, and disease. The benefits of journaling include decreased blood pressure, improved sleep, less need to visit the doctor, faster healing, greater mobility in people with arthritis, and more.

## 3. Find solutions to tough challenges

Journaling can also be used for problem-solving.

Writing out your thoughts helps you connect dots and come up with solutions that you wouldn't have otherwise thought of. Next time you're up against a sticky caregiving challenge, try writing about what's going on. It could help you think of a creative way to solve the problem.

## 4. Make caregiving easier

Journaling makes caregiving easier because writing things down can help you to see patterns. That gives you the ability to spot things that could be improved, simplified, or eliminated to make life run more smoothly. Maybe you'll start to notice that mom gets upset every time you talk about leaving the house, but doesn't make a fuss if you just leave. Or maybe you'll find that your spouse is much more willing to bathe during the early afternoon than in the evening.

## 5. Resolve arguments with other people

Writing about fights or misunderstandings helps you keep from stewing over it in your mind. It might even help you see the other person's point of view or figure out a way to resolve the conflict.

## 6. Get in touch with yourself

It's easy to lose yourself to the pressures of caregiving and your older adult's needs. Journaling helps you clarify your thoughts and feelings. Taking a few minutes to write down your unedited thoughts and emotions will help you get in touch with your true self.

# 5 Ways to Use a Journal to Reduce Caregiver Stress



## 1. Keep a gratitude list

When you're tired and stressed, it's easy to get caught up in negative thoughts. To reduce those bad feelings, focus on the things you're grateful for. This gets you into the habit of noticing the positive things that happen. Gratitude helps you shift perspective and see that the world is not 100% terrible. In your journal, make a list of things you're grateful for. Keep adding to this list, daily or whenever you think of something. Then when you're feeling negative or discouraged, read through your list to get a dose of positivity.

## 2. Track your accomplishments

Caregiving involves many thankless tasks and exhausting battles. Those struggles overshadow the times when you've been successful. To help you remember, write a list of your accomplishments and successes. For example, you might have gotten mom to take a bath without struggle. Or maybe you finally got home and community care to come and do an assessment. Whenever you're feeling beaten down, review your list to remind yourself of all the things you've achieved as a caregiver.

## 3. Give yourself wise advice

If you're struggling with a big decision, something's bothering you, or there's a problem you haven't been able to solve, write about it using the third person. Writing in the third person gives you distance from what's happening because it focuses on facts. That changes your perspective and helps you reach important realizations or find solutions. For example, if you're struggling with your dad over taking medicine, you might write "Jeff (your dad) refuses to take his medicine. He says the pills are making him sick. After he takes them, he often isn't hungry at lunchtime and wants to lie down. When Susan (that's you) told him that the pills were good for him, Jeff got mad and said Susan didn't care about him." Writing that scene in the third person removes the emotion from the situation. Without the frustration you were feeling in the moment, you might wonder if the medication has negative side effects – he seems to feel unwell after taking the pills. That might be what's making him refuse. Now, instead of feeling frustrated and helpless, you have a theory and plan to call the doctor and ask about side effects.

## 4. Make a list of things that lift your spirits

When you're in a negative mood, it can be hard to remember how to get out of it. Make a list of things you enjoy, activities that relax you, or music that always boosts your mood. When you're feeling down, take out your list and do one of your happy things.

## 5. Enjoy more nature

Spending time in nature is one of the best ways to refresh your senses and relax your mind. You might not be able to get outside on a regular basis, but you can keep some of that nature in your journal. Write about being outside in a favorite location – describe the sky, the weather, and the landscape in detail. Record how being there makes you feel. When you need a boost, but can't get outside, read your descriptions and imagine that you're there.





# CAREGIVERS NETWORK

for East Kootenay Seniors

*Toll Free: 1-877-489-0803*

*Office: 1-250-489-0802*

*Email: [info@caregiversnetworkek.com](mailto:info@caregiversnetworkek.com)*

*Website: [www.caregivernetworkek.com](http://www.caregivernetworkek.com)*



**Family Caregivers  
of British Columbia**



**United Way  
British Columbia**

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