Benefits of Keeping a Menopause Journal

by ANGELA FINLAY

Journaling Your Way Through Menopause

Menopause can be isolating and confusing. Once symptoms take hold, many women find they don't even recognize themselves anymore. Unreasonable expectations and too many obligations can lead you into a sad and negative mindset, and that can lead to a lot of unnecessary suffering.

While you can't stop the natural changes from happening, there is a lot you can do to understand them better. Putting pen to paper is one of the simplest ways to take back control; keeping a journal can enhance your creativity, inspire self-confidence, and even fight off the emotional and physical discomforts of menopause. There's no wrong way to journal, but there are a few tried-and-true goals and techniques to keep your focus firmly on your health as you move through menopause.

How a Journal Can Improve Symptoms

A journal is a direct avenue to better self-knowledge. After all, the act of recording your thoughts forces you to face them, and the written record is a testament to how you've dealt with hurdles in the past, and grown through challenges and opportunities. But the advantages of journaling stretch much farther into your emotional and physical wellbeing.

Psychological benefits of journaling are well known, and though they may not be exactly the same for everyone, most people report that journaling leads to:

- Clearer thoughts and feelings
- Better, more creative problem solving
- More empathy and understanding for others
- Less stress

There are surprising physical benefits that come with keeping a daily diary, as well. Although more research is needed, there is evidence to show that regular journaling can result in:

- Stronger immune cells (T-lymphocytes)
- Fewer asthma symptoms
- Milder rheumatoid arthritis symptoms

Journaling isn't magical, it just has an important cathartic effect. The belief is that writing about stressful events helps you externalize and come to terms with them. Once you finally address your concerns, your brain and body can stop reacting to that stress. But stresses aren't the only subjects worth writing about: sudden inspirations, thoughts on the day, and assessments of your symptoms or treatment all play important roles in a constructive and therapeutic journal.

Next page: using a journal as a medical record.

Using a Journal as a Medical Record

The transition into menopause is a chaotic time, and it's easy to lose sight of the realities behind your symptoms. Luckily, you can use your menopause journal to center your thoughts and overcome the fears that work against your symptom management. And when it comes to medical intervention, an up-to-date journal could even save you from an illness, a medical emergency, or a poor treatment decision.

Ways your journal can be a helpful medical tool:

Tracking Patterns and Trends

Keeping an eye on your thoughts, feelings, and physical symptoms is crucial for better self-care. When you begin to spot problematic patterns, you can tailor your reactions for more effective treatment. For instance, if you find that one particular menopause symptom tends to creep up at a certain time of day, you can check your notes to see what other factors may be at play, and adjust them.

You should try to track your menstrual cycle and symptoms closely, so you can tell when something is out of the ordinary. Take note of the severity and frequency of your symptoms, not just their existence, and see if they fall on particular days in your cycle. You may be able to connect certain hormone fluctuations with certain symptoms, which can help your doctor gauge your response to medication, and perhaps find a better treatment.

Bridging the Gap

Many women visit several health care professionals to manage their symptoms and monitor their health, but this increases the risk of communication breakdown. A detailed journal can centralize – and simplify – all the important information you have about your own health, which will keep every doctor and therapist in the loop. Be sure to include prescriptions and instructions, as well as any changes in treatments, or suggestions from your doctors. You'll be sure to avoid confusing, contradictory advice, and you'll be able to take a more active role in your health care.

A Helpful Reminder

Memory loss is an unfortunate symptom of menopause, and that can make it near impossible to keep track of important information in your head. When you're in the habit of jotting down thoughts throughout the day, you're much less likely to let an important point slip by. If you find that you forget doctors appointments or commitments often, add a planning section to your journal pages, so you can keep all of your important info in the same place.

Tips to Stay on Track

The most important aspect of journaling is freedom of expression. While it's important to be accurate about any medical information, you shouldn't limit yourself when it comes to your thoughts and feelings. Your journal is for your eyes only (unless you choose otherwise), and you shouldn't hide any genuine feelings from yourself.

Anything that occurs to you while you're journaling is important, and it should be treated as such. Don't downplay the significance or second-guess yourself, but rather let your words spill out onto the page. Grammar and spelling don't count for anything here – it's far more important that you let your creative side (that's your right brain) takeover for a while. You may find it slow-going at first, but keep the following points in mind to help you get the most out of your note taking:

- **Write quickly**. Don't stop for re-wording or punctuation. It's very easy to lose your train of thought if you step away from the page even for a moment.
- **Forget rules**. Remind yourself that you are simply writing for knowledge, there's no competition with

yourself or with anyone else. Rules have no place in your free-flowing insight.

- **Stick with a loose structure**. If you have difficulty focusing on anything, you could give yourself a theme. In fact, many writers prefer a single, simple term to focus their ideas. Think in broad terms, like “change”, “serenity”, or “challenge”, which will give you plenty of space to explore.

Both personal and medical journals are important tools to deal with the stress and change of menopause, but it helps to keep them organized. You may want to keep separate books for different sorts of notes, or else use a journal with well-defined spaces for different sections on each page. Use coloured pens to emphasize or remind, and add images when you feel like it. If you make your journaling a time for creative expression as well as self-exploration, you’re more likely to enjoy the exercise and keep up the work.