

Writing and Good Health

Getting better all the time:

Writing is a helpful - and cheap - means of expressing yourself. Writing down privately, in a journal or notebook, exactly what you feel when you feel it can be amazingly effective. This is because it allows you to speak out free of censorship or interruption. Later, you can re-read what you put down in print and learn from it. Writing is more private than talking, and is often easier to do. You don't have to respond to another person's looks or comments, and that can allow you to feel safe in expressing exactly what you feel.

It is rare for us to be able to do this with other people, even those we love. Sometimes that love, their understanding, can actually get in the way of us understanding ourselves. You only write what you are ready to write - and sometimes this surprises you. The energy that comes from writing down what we think, what we need, what we want to do often frees us up to speak out and then act for our own good. Indecision is often the result of un-knowing, and the things that have power over us are the things we are unwilling to reveal. In private writing, you can concentrate on what hurts now and has hurt for a long, long time.

The effectiveness of writing something down is now being utilised in therapy - - not only by clients and families in trouble, but by carers, doctors and nurses, too. Writing it out helps you to make sense of what happened, or what is presently occurring. Writing it out helps you to identify where direct communication is failing, or where your own doubts, fears and desires are being projected on to the other person. This leads to a clearer understanding and to a more beneficial interaction. What we resist, persists – and writing it out is often the first stage to engaging with, re-interpreting, and changing.

Even if you have no major problems or traumas, writing things down is a helpful and enjoyable method of keeping in touch with who you are, what you want, and where you want to get to.

For many of us, 'A description a day/ Keeps prescription away.' So next time you're passing the \$2 Shop, pop in – and buy yourself a writing book and a couple of roller pens. Then give yourself permission to write, a place to write, and get writing.

Here's some exercises to help you on your way. They're not compulsory! You may want to write something completely different.

- Write 10-12 lines to do with your health - a story/incident, or how you feel about an aspect of your health. Funny, sad, disturbing, angry - as you wish. Write a few more lines saying how writing this has made you feel.
- Or if you prefer, write a letter to a part of your body that is giving you pain or that marks the site of some old injury. and tell it what it feels like to have that pain, or carry that scar around with you.
- Write a poem of about 6 - 8 lines. Choose from the following: waiting for the doctor; your

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mental or physical health at present; getting to sleep. The poem need not rhyme, and could include the following words to get you started: curtain, song, dark, open, blue.

· Write 10-12 words about today, like a very quick diary entry. Jobs to do, things to look forward to, etc. Write the date to make it a record. For example: February 18th. Tried to work, phone ringing, irritated, warm beetroot yuk, worry about Mum, knit tonight or watch a good movie - or both?

· Write a personal ad. in up to 25 words summarising yourself and your life at present, and saying one or two things you'd like to change: not another person, but perhaps a different quality to your life, or some object you'd like to own, or a feeling you'd like to experience. For example: 35 year old romantic male, reasonably happily married, enjoys music, a sense of mischief, but has miserable weekends, now seeks comfort from either a new house or a clearer idea of the future.

If you'd like some feedback on what you wrote, please send it to twinfo@clear.net.nz.

Some good books to read (ask at your local library or bookseller):

Adams, K. *The Way of the Journal: A Journal Therapy Workbook for Healing*. 2nd rev. ed. Sidran Press, 1998.

DeSalvo, L. *Writing as a Way of Healing: How Telling Our Stories Transforms Our Lives*. HarperSanFrancisco, 1999.

Lepore, S.J. & Smyth, J.M., eds. *The Writing Cure: How Expressive Writing Promotes Health and Emotional Well-being*. American Psychological Association, Washington, DC, 2002.

Vance, T. *Letters Home: How Writing Can Change Your Life*. Pantheon, 1998.