

# Journaling Can Improve the Health of People with Chronic Disease

by Jo-Von Tucker

Would you like to benefit from an improvement in your overall health and well-being? Of course you would! And according to a report in the Journal of the American Medical Association, lung patients can help themselves to that kind of improvement by simply writing about their illness and other stressful issues.

For a very long time, I have extolled the virtues of keeping a journal, and have tried to encourage people in our support group to write about their experience with lung disease. It is mentioned frequently in my book on COPD. In fact, it was the reason *for* the book; after a while, writing in my journal started me to thinking about turning it into a manuscript, expressly to be able to provide help to others through my own perspective as a COPD patient.

Sir Water Raleigh said, "I can't write a book commensurate with Shakespeare, but I can write a book by me."

Here is more information about the writing study and its effects on existing illness, as reprinted by the Cape Cod Times from the AMA journal:

STONY BROOK, N.Y. -- "Writing about traumatic life experiences helps patients suffering from asthma or rheumatoid arthritis improve their health, says a study done at the State University of New York at Stony Brook.

Researcher Joshua Smyth and colleagues in Stony Brook's psychiatry department separated a group of 112 asthma or arthritis patients and asked them to spend 20 minutes daily over three days writing either about their most stressful life events or about such neutral fare as their

daily schedule. Those with arthritis who wrote about their trauma reported a 28% reduction in disease severity within four months, while the control group showed no change. Asthmatics who wrote about their trauma showed a 19% increase in lung function against no change in the control group.

We're not telling people to throw away their medicines, but what this study tells us is that we need to pay attention to psychological factors when we are talking about the treatment of chronic illness."

Do yourselves a favor, my friends... invest a couple of bucks in a notebook, or create a journal file in your computer, and then invest your time in writing each day. The blank page will listen to what you have to say, and no one else need ever read it, unless you want them to. You can express your feelings, your frustrations, your fears and your triumphs... at your own pace, in your own way. Keep it in a private place, and allow this wonderful form of self-expression to capture the thoughts that can't easily be shared out loud.

The promise of an improvement in lung function is more than enticing... it is downright illuminating! If our doctors offered us a new medication that could give us improvement, we would jump at the chance to take it. Twenty minutes of writing our thoughts in a journal each day is painless, harmful to no one, and doesn't really cost anything.

When I attended the funeral service of a departed member of our pulmonary support group, I was particularly moved when one of his daughters read from the pages of his daily journal. She said that he started writing the journal to document his

struggles with COPD, and to mark the really good days so he could remember them on the bad days. I am sure that it did not occur to him that his words would bring comfort to his family and friends after he was gone.

Even the writing in this Newsletter has helped me personally, just as writing my book was cathartic for my soul. The two projects together have probably provided me with far more than a 20 percent lift in lung function. I suspect that they are responsible for a lot of my COPD stability over the years, and for a significant lift in my spirit and heart.

I hope that these writing efforts -- labors of love, really -- have brought and will continue to provide an equal share of comfort and healing to others, as well.

*Jo-Von Tucker was a COPD patient, advocate for improved oxygen portability, and founder of the Cape Cod Support Group. She passed away unexpectedly in late 2003 from complications following surgery, but her words live on in her editorials and in her book, **Courage and Information for Life with Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease**, which can be found on <http://www.breathingbetterlivingwell.com>*

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