



## THE PERILS AND PROMISE OF JOURNALING

BY TONISHA MELVIN

The last two years brought a pandemic and social distancing, which meant a greater risk of loneliness and other challenges in maintaining physical and mental health.

Loneliness can increase the risk of depression, obesity, or even death. One way to address such challenges is through journaling.

Many of us have heard about the great benefits of journaling as a way to enrich our inner life. People often have a difficult time expressing their emotions, and journaling can help. It's an outlet for decreasing anxieties with positive self-talk, managing a health condition, and weighing the pros and cons of ideas or opportunities. Journaling can also be beneficial when dealing with medical conditions such as obesity, since keeping track of the foods we eat can help limit weight and control blood sugar.

While journaling has benefits, it can also have negative impacts on some people — factors that come into play if a person does not learn how to refocus emotions. In journaling, some people may focus too much on the negative aspects of their problems, blame others, or indulge the writing to live passively rather than actively.

Here are some tips for effective journaling:

**1. Evaluate how much time you have to journal.**

**2. Set a realistic goal** that fits the purpose of your journaling (i.e., “I will journal at least three times a week for at least 5-10 minutes the first week” or “I will journal every evening before bed about the food I ate today”).

**3. Make your goal achievable** by placing your journal in the same place each day (at your bedside or near your daily medications).

**4. Be positive** and make journaling fun! Be creative and uniquely express your thoughts and ideas but avoid negative self-talk.

Journaling can be a great tool in recovering from mental and emotional wounds. Keeping a journal can be as simple or as difficult as you want it to be. It may even change over time as you change — and that's OK. The goal should be, in putting down words, to get to know yourself a little better.



**TONISHA MELVIN, DNP, CRRN, NP-C** (Mercer University), is a nurse practitioner at the Washington, D.C., VA Medical Center, where she serves as a mental health/primary care provider, program director, and assistant clinical professor for adult gerontology NP graduates. She was named one of 68 African American Leaders in Healthcare by *Becker's Hospital Review* and is a contributing author of *The Charge Nurse Leader Program Builder: A Competency-Based Approach for Developing Frontline Leaders*, a comprehensive curriculum and road map for developing nurse leaders and ensuring charge nurses are trained, mentored, and supported in their roles.