

# ***CHRONIC DISEASE MANAGEMENT THROUGH THERAPEUTIC WRITING:*** A Self-Care Tool

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## OVERVIEW

**Therapeutic writing** is a kind of structured journal writing. It is a self-care tool to encourage deeper and clearer reflection, processing, and discovery. Therapeutic Writing can help you heal, grow, and thrive. Each writing prompt is offered as a frame—it's up to you what content is most useful to examine through these frames. In therapeutic writing, the *process* is more important than the product: it is not about the sentences that you craft on the page but the *experience* of writing. You can also refer to your journal entries later as a resource—to read what you've written and track your progress.

Therapeutic Writing, like any form of journal writing, is a place where you can have a conversation with the person who knows you best: *you*. Some people find further healing through sharing their reflections with others. But whether you share your work is up to you. Therapeutic writing is a deeply personal process, so for it to be profound and meaningful just to *you* is enough.

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## MANAGING STRESS AND ANXIETY THROUGH WRITING

Writing has been found in many studies to reduce feelings of depression, anxiety, and stress that can come when your body lets you down. Learning to tolerate and decrease feelings of distress can have physical, psychological, and emotional benefits—including improved sleep, reduced bodily expressions of stress (headaches, stomach pain, digestive issues, rapid heart rate, neck and shoulder tension, etc.), resisting catastrophic thinking, developing more rational thought reframing, and de-escalating emotional responses to more manageable levels.

If you are ready, grab a journal and a pen, and start writing with the help of the prompts that we have provided. Take the first step on your healing journey today!

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## THERAPEUTIC WRITING PROMPTS

**Chronic disease and identity:** When you feel overwhelmed by chronic disease, it can seem like you are losing your entire identity. But there is much more to *who you are* than these physical challenges. To get back in touch with your full sense of self, make a list of five things that define you in some way—just one word, phrase, or a sentence (at most). Your bodily condition may be one of those things (or it may not)—but what *else*? This defining characteristic could be a role you play (mother, teacher, son), a quality of your personality or physical appearance, a skill or strength or weakness, a meaningful experience or object, even another person. See what rises to the surface without overthinking; you could do this exercise again in a month and come up with five completely different things. Once you have your list, think about each item, and expand on it, exploring more how it defines your sense of self.

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**Good enough and self-forgiveness:** When you have a chronic disease, feelings of guilt can arise, especially if your physical condition limits your ability to engage in relationships in certain ways you depend on others more. Perhaps you can't be as involved in your children's activities as you used to be and worry about their disappointment. Perhaps you struggle with asking for and accepting help, feeling undeserving. Identify three situations in your life where you feel this guilt arising, and for each, explore what feels "imperfect" due to your chronic illness, investigating, without judgment, the very real reasons for this limitation or your need. Can you allow for the possibility that your engagement is enough, that your requests for help aren't a burden? Can you accept what you cannot change—your chronic illness and its effect on your life—to let go and forgive yourself?

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**Concepts of home:** Joseph Campbell said, “Your sacred space is where you can find yourself again and again.” Write down five concepts of home. These can be places, another person, an activity, a ritual (ways of keeping a home), an object, a scent, a taste/food, a sound/music, a time of day—whatever makes you feel fully at home. How does something transform from a house to a home? What makes a mere physical structure, or space, feel like *home*? Is it because important things happen here? When we feel “homesick,” what exactly are we yearning for? The idea is that the feeling of “home” is positive (grounded, centered, safe), which may or may not have been the case in your official home growing up—or in your current home. How is an environment an extension or reflection of identity?

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**Spring cleaning:** What are five things that you could let go of? What can you purge, what don't you need, and what no longer serves you? Feel free to be abstract here. Your "items" can be actual objects or people, habits, attitudes, etc.

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