

## **Writing Can Improve Your Health.**

Did you know that studies have shown that in addition to helping improve emotional wellbeing, writing can actually prevent symptoms of chronic illness from getting worse, and can often contribute to their getting better?

In one study, participants with asthma or rheumatoid arthritis were divided into two groups. Those in the test group wrote about emotionally stressful incidents they had experienced, while those in the control group wrote about their plans for the day. Each group wrote for 20 minutes a day for three days.

Four months after they wrote, almost twice as many participants in the test group (47% vs 24%) showed substantial improvement of their symptoms compared to participants in the control group, while over five times as many participants in the control group, compared to those in the test group (21% vs 4%) had symptoms that were worse than they were before the study began.

It makes sense to me that writing about stressful experiences can lessen chronic illness symptoms. Stress has been shown to weaken the immune system, and I would expect writing about a stressful experience to lower a one's stress. However, what really surprised me about this study is that just a 20-minute writing session each day for three consecutive days made such a significant difference for so many of the participants four months after they did their writing.

A subsequent study using people with fibromyalgia showed that the changes weren't permanent, at least not for that group; an evaluation done 10 months after the participants completed the writing assignments showed that the changes had disappeared.

Given the impressive results described above, I would suggest that everyone with a chronic illness, whether or not it's one of the three that were studied, write about emotionally stressful experiences from time to time. The results of these studies lead me to believe that the effort will be worthwhile. And in stark contrast to many of the medicines we take for our illnesses, writing costs nothing and has no serious, sometimes dangerous side effects.