



Journaling for Sense of Self After Cancer

As a survivor of cancer, rehabilitation is crucial for managing treatment side effects and improving your quality of life. One common side effect of cancer and cancer treatment is decreased sense of self, or a loss of personal identity, which can cause significant decrease in quality of life and functional

limitations.

What is sense of self and how is it affected by cancer?

Sense of self refers to an individual's awareness and understanding of who they are, including their beliefs, values, personality, and experiences. A strong sense of self helps guide decisions, relationships, and personal growth, while changes or challenges—such as illness, trauma, or major life transitions—can lead to a need for rediscovery or redefinition of one's identity.

Cancer and its treatment can profoundly alter a person's sense of self by causing physical changes (such as hair loss, weight fluctuations, or scarring) and emotional shifts (like anxiety, depression, or loss of independence). These changes may challenge identity, self-esteem, and the way individuals relate to themselves and others, often requiring them to redefine their sense of normalcy and purpose.

How can journaling for sense of self be beneficial?

Journaling for sense of self is highly beneficial for cancer patients because it helps them process their experience, reconnect with their identity, and navigate emotional healing.

Journal Prompts to help navigate changes in sense of self after cancer

1. In what ways do I feel different from who I was before cancer?
2. What emotions come up when I think about how cancer has changed me?
3. What are some fears I have about the future and how they might shape my identity?
4. What values or beliefs have become more important to me?
5. What activities or passions make me feel alive and true to myself?
6. How do I want to define myself beyond cancer?
7. What are some personal strengths I have discovered through this experience?

8. How can I be gentle with myself in moments of struggle?

Creative Journaling Ideas

1. **Letter writing:** Write a letter to your past or future self.
2. **Gratitude list:** Note 3 things each day you're grateful for.
3. **Vision mapping:** Sketch, collage, or describe what your ideal future looks like.
4. **Affirmations:** Write empowering statements that remind you of your strength and resilience.

Remember

Change in sense of self can be challenging, but with early intervention and a comprehensive management plan, you can improve your symptoms and quality of life. Always consult with your healthcare team to tailor these strategies to your specific needs.



International Cancer
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References: Hurley-Browning, L. *Writing for Healing During Cancer*. Pennmedicine.org. <https://www.pennmedicine.org/cancer/about/focus-on-cancer/2018/october/writing-for-healing>. Wang Y, Feng W. Cancer-related psychosocial challenges. *General Psychiatry* 2022;35:e100871. doi:10.1136/gpsych-2022-100871. Amanat, Y., Morikawa, S., & Newman, R. (2023). Systematic Review Brief—Interventions for anxiety and depression for adults living with and beyond cancer (2018–2022). *American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 77, 7710393280. <https://doi.org/10.5014/ajot.2023.77S10028>

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