

Symptom Journal

A symptom journal is a tool used to track and document symptoms experienced over time. It will help individuals connect with their bodies, identifying patterns and triggers related to their symptoms and health.

It serves to monitor daily symptoms, medication use, and lifestyle habits that may affect health. The collected data allows the person to follow up on existing symptoms, test the effects of various behavioral and medical changes, and provide valuable information to relevant healthcare providers to help them make informed treatment decisions.

Using a symptom journal can enhance a person's understanding of their health, improve communication with their healthcare providers, and empower them to become more proactive in their health management.

How to Write a Symptom Journal

A Symptom Journal can be done using one of the following:

- A weekly office calendar
- Excel Spreadsheet
- Notebook.
- WORD Document
- Digital App.

There's no right or wrong way to track symptoms. Whatever works for you is the right way.

Ideally, use something that's easy to work with.

Tracking Information

The information tracked in the symptom journal depends on several factors, including the condition you are living with and the severity of your symptoms.

These symptoms can include weakness, fatigue, nausea, pain, mood swings, cravings, and other conditions that affect your quality of life and increase stress.

Training

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You want to record the following information for each symptom:

1. Date and time. Write the date and the time of day the symptoms started and ended (including significant changes in other characteristics).
2. Body temperature. Note any changes in body temperature.
3. Medication in the system. Note any medication taken within 2 hours before the symptom started, including over-the-counter medication. Include the dose.
4. Meals and snacks. Note any meal, snack, or drink consumed within 2 hours before the symptom started.
5. Pain and physical discomfort. Use a scale from 0 to 10 to assess the intensity. Think of words and adjectives you can use to describe the nature and quality of the pain/discomfort. For example: color. Shape, pressure, texture, vibration, temperature, etc.
6. Unusual symptoms. Note any unusual symptoms, even if they seem unrelated.
7. Unexpected changes in the occurrence of one or more symptoms.

Examples of questions that can help you identify relevant symptom characteristics:

- What is the intensity of the symptom?
- Where in my body am I feeling the symptom?
- Does the symptom have a static or moving sensation?
- This symptom feels like _____ / reminds me of _____ (use metaphors)
- What emotions are coming up with this symptom?
- What did I do before this symptom started?
- What did I feel/ think about before this symptom started?

In addition, it's important to monitor the following:

1. Mood changes and emotions. For example: anxiety, depression, sadness, restlessness, etc. There is no need to elaborate. Rate them on a scale of 1-5.
2. Exercise. Write down any exercise or physical activity, including taking the stairs, taking a walk, going to the gym, or stretching at home.
3. Sleep quality. Write down any sleep disturbances (it's recommended to keep the symptom journal on the nightstand so things can be tracked in real time).
4. Appetite. Write down any changes in your appetite.

Remember, the more information you collect, the easier it is for you to notice changes, patterns, and triggers, and for your medical team to understand your condition and offer relevant recommendations.

Using the information from the Symptom Journal

1. Review all the entries and summarize anything that stands out
2. Now that you can see patterns, you can start creating a plan to manage your symptoms.
3. Set aside time before your next doctor's appointment to prepare a summary of the data you collected. Remember, Doctors and specialists are busy people; don't expect them to read through every one of your symptom journal entries. Compress and interpret the data for them. Try to keep your summary short (less than 1 page) and list any questions you want your doctor to answer.