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Impact Factor/Ranking: Impact factor is 7.235 – Ranks #3 among 60 journals in the Peripheral Vascular Disease category and #6 among 61 journals in the Hematology category (2009 Journal Citation Reports® (Thomson Reuters, 2010) ATVB Arteriosclerosis, Thrombosis, and Vascular Biology An Official Journal of the American Heart Association Editor-in-Chief Alan Daugherty Senior Deputy Editor Daniel J. Rader Senior Associate Editors Associate Editors Chantal M. Boulanger Mat J. Daemen Jie Du Catherine Hedrick Mark Majesky Ziad Mallat Ruth McPherson Peter J. Newman Janet Powell Hiroaki Shimokawa Renu Virmani Karin Bornfeldt Zahi Fayed Kathryn Moore Karlheinz Peter Phillip Tsao Qingbo Xu Robert Hegele Theo van Berkel Anne Tvibjaerg-Hansen Ryozo Nagai Jun-ichi Abe Elena Aikawa Masanori Aikawa Matthew A. Allison Jean-Francois Arnal Matthias Barton Michelle P. Bendeck Bradford C. Berk Judith A. Berliner Christoph J. Binder Joyce Bischoff Alex Bobik William A. 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Everything pours, streams, flows, out of you aimlessly," writes Samara O'Shea in her beautifully written book Note to Self: On Keeping A Journal And Other Dangerous Pursuits. Here's another: Journaling is a profound — and simple — way to get to know yourself better. To figure out what makes you tick. What makes you happy. What makes you defensive. What makes you giggle or grateful or grieve. What makes you who you are. Quite simply, it's a great tool to help you grow. Throughout Note to Self, O'Shea shares excerpts from her journals, along with journal entries from others, including Anne Frank, Sylvia Plath and Tennessee Williams. She also shares how to get started. These are a few of her tips: "Say anything." There are no shoulds, only woulds, she writes. Don't think about what a journal should be. "Write the good, bad, mad, angry, boring, and ugly." Don't lose faith if you don't feel better instantly. As O'Shea writes, "Sometimes, a writing session will be the fast-acting mental medicine needed to release pent-up emotions, and other times, it will just be the beginning of getting to know yourself or dealing with a problem." She says to focus on the long term. Over time, you'll be able to witness "your emotional evolution." Just start. Remember that your journal will develop on its own. Still got nothing? Try a few prompts, such as answering questions or describing your life. Several of the questions she suggests: How am I feeling? How do I want to be feeling? What do I want to learn about myself? What do I want to change about myself? What would I never change about myself? Describe the room. Describe the people in your life. Describe yourself. Describe the aspects of your life that you're pleased with and those areas you're displeased with. Stream of Consciousness Journaling Stream of consciousness writing is very freeing — and perfect for journaling! It gives you permission to just start and let it all hang out. O'Shea writes: "Stream-of-consciousness writing is mental anarchy and spring-cleaning all in one. It's like going into the basement, turning the tables over, breaking the records in half, cutting the stuffed animals open with a sharp pair of scissors (and feeling much better afterward), then putting it all out just in time for the garbage man to collect." I love that there's no pressure to write things "right," to transcribe a certain event with precision or create some powerful poem. You just open up your mind — and heart — to write the messy stuff. To get started, O'Shea suggests beginning with any word (which will inevitably lead you somewhere): picking an emotion that's been overwhelming you lately or one that you haven't felt in a long time; or asking yourself a question. Need more inspiration? Borrow from others! O'Shea suggests writing down lines from a poem that inspires you, transcribing song lyrics or copying quotes. Each of her journals includes one quote that represents the theme of that journal, along with a slew of quotes throughout. Many people just don't have the time to devote to journaling. If that's the case, try writing a sentence most days — a great tip from Gretchen Rubin. Do you like to journal? Why? Does journaling give you insight into yourself? What are your tips for starting? The Pain Research Core (PRC) is a multidisciplinary team dedicated to preclinical pain research, offering researchers state-of-the-art resources for assays in the following areas: Studying pain mechanisms Identifying new drug targets Developing novel analgesics Crafting innovative strategies for pain treatment Co-founded and financed by the Blaustein Pain Research Fund and the Neurosurgery Pain Research Institute, PRC comprises two parts: the Cell Imaging and Electrophysiology Core and the Pain-related Quantitative Behavioral Core. Together these groups provide critical elements of modern pain research and helping investigators from all specialties across the Johns Hopkins University. Our Mission The mission of PRC is to: Facilitate and expand multidisciplinary preclinical pain research Create an infrastructure to improve interactions among laboratories Attract extramural funding Bring together fellows and faculty to recruit and retain top research talent Promote efficient use of equipment, resources and space Maintain a consistent and high standard of technical expertise Collaborate with PRC Access to the Pain Research Core will be offered to investigators from participating departments and others at the discretion of the administrative board. Download a Pain Research Core Service Request CC0/mohamed_hassan/Pixabay Back pain is one of the most common reasons people visit a doctor. In fact, more than 80 percent of adults, according to one survey, have a problem with lower back pain at some point in their lives, and a large percentage have pain that is chronic in nature. This annoying and sometimes debilitating pain can be caused by a variety of reasons, some that are minor and temporary and others that require medical care. Many people are obese, and that obesity can lead to constant back pain. Excess weight puts strain on your back muscles and inhibits the desire to exercise, and that strain is particularly difficult on muscles that are already weak. Weaker muscles get sore much more easily, even from simple standing or walking. In most cases, losing weight helps reduce the strain on your back and alleviates the pain. Try to adopt an exercise regime to strengthen weak muscles. Even if you aren't overweight, you could experience back pain due to weak muscles that are easily strained from even light activity. If you're a couch potato or work sitting down all day, you may not spend enough time standing, walking or climbing stairs. If this is the cause of your misery, the natural back pain treatment for you is to adopt an exercise regimen to strengthen your back. Examples of such exercises include squats, deadlifts, planking and walking. Pregnancy comes with a host of unpleasant symptoms, including lower back pain. The extra weight gained from the growing fetus and the expanding uterus put pressure on the muscles of the lower back and the spine, causing a persistent backache in many cases. Most of the time, the pain lessens or disappears immediately after childbirth. In the meantime, you can try using a heating pad at a low temperature or some simple stretching to alleviate the pain. CC0/Camila Cordeiro/Unsplash If you've ever felt a sudden sharp pain in your back when you picked up something heavy, then you understand how painful muscle tears and overextension can be. Sometimes, the pain occurs after a sudden awkward movement of the torso as well. Back pain from lifting can be prevented by practicing good lifting posture, including always bending your knees when lifting something off the ground. You should also warm up before exercising and avoid making sudden movements with your torso. When part of the spine or back presses down on a nerve, it can cause pain in various parts of your back. Slipped discs, ruptured discs, bulging discs and sciatica are among the conditions that can cause nerve issues. This type of issue is typically serious and requires back pain treatment from a medical professional. If diagnosed with a nerve issue of the spine, be sure to follow your doctor's orders, take it easy and avoid doing anything to make the situation worse. The kidneys are situated slightly below your middle back, and that means any health issue involving the kidneys often manifests as back pain. The discomfort may come solely from the kidneys, rather than the back. If your backache is accompanied by urinary problems or pain in the lower abdominal area, it's a good idea to see your doctor as soon as possible. It could be a stone or an infection, and kidney infections can lead to kidney failure if left untreated. CC0/mohamed_hassan/Pixabay Another common cause of backaches is osteoporosis. This condition occurs when the body loses bone, makes too little bone or a combination of both. You can get osteoporosis as a side effect from other diseases, from medication, or as a result of poor nutrition. Either way, it's a pretty unpleasant health issue that can result in persistent pain due to the bone's inability to fully support your body weight. Osteoporosis can be managed with medication and changes in lifestyle. CC BY-SA 4.0/BruceBlau/Wikimedia Arthritis is another common health issue, and while it primarily affects the joints, it can also cause back pain when it affects the joints of the hips or back. In some cases, the inflammation is bad enough to make the space around the spinal cord narrow, causing spinal stenosis. Spinal stenosis can cause tingling, numbness or pain in the back area and can even radiate down to the legs. Like osteoporosis, arthritis can be managed with medication from your doctor. Any injury to the spine, whether by accident or due to a medical condition, can result in varying degrees of back pain. Some common spinal issues include scoliosis and vertebral fractures from accidents. Spinal issues require medical intervention or structural support to treat them. If you suspect a problem with your spine, then it's time to head straight to the doctor for a checkup. Unfortunately, it's true that some forms of cancer manifest as back pain. Examples include spinal cancer, pancreatic cancer and kidney cancer. This symptom also appears with metastatic cancers, or those that occur as secondary tumors spread throughout the body in some patients suffering from stage 4 cancer. If you have unexplained back pain for a period of time, it's a good idea to see a doctor to rule out any serious issues.

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