

What Neuroscience Says About the Benefits of Art Journaling

Research shows that art journaling promotes mental wellness through several neurobiological mechanisms, including activating the brain's reward centers, regulating emotions, and reducing stress. The combination of artistic expression and journaling provides a unique pathway for healing and personal growth. [[1](#), [2](#), [3](#), [4](#), [5](#)]

Brain Mechanisms and Processes:

REWARD AND PLEASURE ACTIVATION:

Engaging in creative activities, like art journaling, activates the brain's reward system, which is associated with feelings of pleasure and motivation.

- A 2017 study found that all forms of visual expression—coloring, doodling, or drawing freely—increased blood flow to the brain's medial prefrontal cortex, a key part of the reward center.
- The activation of this reward pathway triggers the release of dopamine, a neurotransmitter that contributes to feelings of happiness. [[1](#), [7](#), [8](#), [9](#), [10](#)]

STRESS AND ANXIETY REDUCTION:

Art journaling helps reduce the body's physiological stress responses by calming the nervous system.

- Studies have shown that making art can significantly lower cortisol levels, the body's primary stress hormone.
- Coloring or doodling can help reduce activity in the amygdala, the brain's fear center, which helps to calm the fight-or-flight response and promote a state of mindfulness. [[4](#), [11](#), [12](#)]

EMOTIONAL REGULATION AND PROCESSING

Art journaling offers a non-verbal outlet for processing complex emotions, which is especially beneficial for those who struggle to articulate their feelings.

- By externalizing thoughts and emotions through images and words, individuals can gain a new perspective on their feelings and better manage their reactions.
- Putting feelings into words helps reframe difficult situations by connecting the emotional right hemisphere of the brain with the language-oriented left hemisphere.
- This process can help individuals move past brooding or rumination by providing a structured way to confront and understand emotional triggers. [[6](#), [13](#), [14](#), [15](#), [16](#)]

NEUROPLASTICITY

The brain's ability to change and adapt throughout life, known as neuroplasticity, is a key mechanism of healing. Art journaling supports this process by creating new neural connections.

- Engaging in creative tasks can help rewire maladaptive thought patterns associated with depression, anxiety, and trauma.
- Neurobiological studies suggest that art therapy prompts "simultaneous physiological and psychological shifts," leading to improvements in adaptive human functioning. [[17](#), [19](#), [20](#), [21](#), [22](#)]

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BILATERAL STIMULATION AND MEMORY INTEGRATION

Art journaling often involves using both hands to create, which engages both brain hemispheres and facilitates the integration of memories.

- Using both hands for art-making can help with the reprocessing and integration of traumatic memories by activating and connecting memories stored in different hemispheres of the brain.
- The process can promote memory consolidation by strengthening the neural connections that move information from short-term to long-term memory. [[2](#), [23](#), [24](#), [25](#), [26](#)]

COGNITIVE FUNCTION

Both the creation and viewing of art challenge the brain and boost cognitive function.

- Art journaling, like other forms of expressive writing, enhances self-awareness and emotional intelligence by fostering a deeper engagement with thoughts and emotions.
- When art journaling activates the brain's default mode network (DMN), it promotes introspection and memory consolidation, leading to greater self-awareness and insight into emotional patterns. [[2](#), [27](#), [28](#), [29](#), [30](#)]

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