

Using the Brain Dump Technique to Reduce Stress

What to Know

Sometimes you might find yourself overwhelmed and spiraling into anxious thoughts. Doing a brain dump can help. This involves writing down everything that comes to mind on a particular topic. You will get all your thoughts and ideas down on paper to organize them, leading to less stress and overwhelm. In addition, your self-awareness, productivity, and focus may increase.

Brain dumping is like journaling, but it is time-limited, and you write down all your thoughts quickly – usually within 5-10 minutes.

Benefits include:

- helping you remember what you need to accomplish.
- clearing up headspace so you can learn more information.
- organizing your thoughts.
- improving focus and concentration.
- increasing awareness of thoughts and feelings.
- reducing stress.
- improved recall and memory.

Like journaling, the benefits of brain dumping depend on what you write about and your state of mind. Here are signs you might need to do a brain dump. Check off any that apply to you.

___ You usually feel stressed.

___ You keep going around in circles on a particular issue or problem.

___ You have trouble prioritizing tasks or activities.

___ You believe there is too much on your plate.

___ You are having more negative thoughts than usual.

___ You have difficulty remembering priorities.

___ You lose track of goals or steps to achieve your goals.

___ You have a lot to learn in a short amount of time.

The idea is to get everything on paper that is on your mind. A brain dump might also include:

- to-do lists
- grocery lists
- thoughts about a conversation
- priorities
- goals
- worries and fears
- action plans

- upcoming events
- information you are concerned you will forget
- anything that is bothering you
- doodles or drawings of things that have been stuck in your head

There are four types of brain dumps.

1. Morning Starter Brain Dump. Write all your thoughts on paper first thing after you wake up. This activity can include worries about the day and to-do lists.

2. Learning Brain Dump. When trying to learn a new skill or understand a new concept, recall is enhanced when you write things down. For example, if you need to remember a new procedure at work, a brain dump after learning about it may help.

3. Appreciation Brain Dump. You can do a brain dump to enhance positive feelings and practice gratitude. The goal is to write down as many things as you can that you are grateful for – and genuinely feel those feelings to expand them.

4. The Overwhelmed Brain Dump. This option can be used when you feel stressed or overwhelmed. When life gets hectic, pause, and write down everything that is on your mind. This type of brain dump can help you let go, de-stress, avoid overwhelm, get organized, and experience clarity. It can also help you reduce distractions, increasing your focus on tasks.

Which one will you practice? _____

Here are some tips. If you choose the Morning Starter Brain Dump: At the beginning of your day, take out a notebook or journal and start writing with no specific direction in mind. Include:

- all the tasks you need to accomplish
- thoughts that hold you back
- ideas you are excited about
- lingering worries

If you choose the Learning Brain Dump: After you have learned new information, write freestyle about all the information you have absorbed. Make an organized list or separate a piece of paper into quadrants to better organize the information into categories. Any time there is a lot of new information you need to remember, “dump” it on a piece of paper.

If you choose the Appreciation Brain Dump: Set a timer for 10 minutes and write down as many things as you can think of that you appreciate. Go into as much detail as you want. You may jot down a long list of things you are grateful for or write freehand about one thing. Be mindful and pay attention to how you feel after completing it.

The Brain Dump technique is a healthy way to cope with stress. Add this to your mental toolbox to enhance your life and well-being.

What to Do

Use a notebook or journal and practice the Brain Dump technique each day for two weeks. Remember to write everything down that is on your mind. Let it all out! You may find clear indicators about what you need to do next.

Date	Type of Brain Dump	Amount of Time	How did you feel after?

After practicing this exercise, were you calmer and less stressed? Why or why not?

Did you achieve clarity about next steps or actions you needed to take? Explain.

Reflections on This Exercise

What did you learn from this exercise that you did not know before?

If you struggle with stress and overwhelm, how motivated are you to address this problem?

Is this a technique you will continue to use? Why or why not?

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What can you do differently to make progress in this area?
