



Benefits of Practicing Gratitude

The health benefits of expressing gratitude are many, and some might surprise you. Scholars, spiritual leaders, and scientists throughout history have deliberated on gratitude. More recently, the scientifically-validated benefits of gratitude are better understood.

Through the work of leading researchers like Robert Emmons and Martin Seligman, we know that this virtue is more than just saying, “thank you.” Numerous studies are demonstrating how gratitude journaling can increase one’s happiness. Others show that inflammation in one’s body can decrease. Each study offers insights into how a person can improve their overall health and wellbeing.

Throughout this article, you will discover that expressing gratitude reduces stress, increases optimism, and changes your brain. Before you continue, we thought you might like to download our three Gratitude Exercises for free. These detailed, science-based exercises will help you or your clients connect to more positive emotions and enjoy the benefits of gratitude.

What are the Benefits of Gratitude?

The Greater Good Science Center offers a plethora of information on this subject. In a white paper titled, “The Science of Gratitude” (2018), they outline several benefits to gratitude practice.

For the individual:

- increased happiness and positive mood
- more satisfaction with life
- less materialistic
- less likely to experience burnout
- better physical health
- better sleep
- less fatigue
- lower levels of cellular inflammation
- greater resiliency



- encourages the development of patience, humility, and wisdom

For groups:

- increases prosocial behaviors
- strengthens relationships
- may help employees' effectiveness
- may increase job satisfaction

A Look At The Research On Showing Gratitude

Showing gratitude is not merely saying, "thank you." Wong and Brown (2017) asked how gratitude affects us mentally and physically. Their study involved assigning students into three groups:

Group one wrote a gratitude letter to another person every week for three weeks. Group two wrote about their thoughts and feelings about negative experiences. Group three didn't write anything. All three groups received counseling services. Group one reported "significantly better mental health four and 12 weeks" after the intervention ended.

Their findings also suggest that a combined gratitude practice/counseling approach is more beneficial than counseling alone.

The researchers analyzed their findings to figure out how gratitude has these effects. They determined that gratitude does four things:

1. Gratitude disconnects us from toxic, negative emotions and the ruminating that often accompanies them. Writing a letter "shifts our attention" so that our focus is on positive emotions.
2. Expressing gratitude helps us even if we don't explicitly share it with someone. We're happier and more satisfied with life because we completed the exercise.
3. The positive effects of gratitude writing compound like interest. You might not notice the benefit of a daily or weekly practice, but after several weeks and months, you will.



4. A gratitude practice trains the brain to be more in tune with experiencing gratitude – a positive plus a positive, equal more positives.

Their findings echo research done by Emmons and many others.

Bartlett & DeSteno (2006) found there is a positive relationship between kind, helpful behavior, and feeling grateful. In, "Gratitude and prosocial behavior: Helping when it costs you," they discuss this connection in great detail. Throughout three studies they determined,

- Gratitude facilitates helping behavior,
- Grateful people help the people who helped them (benefactors) and strangers similarly, and
- Reminding people who helped them (a benefactor) still increased helping behavior exhibited toward strangers. The reciprocity norm wasn't a factor.

Dickens and DeSteno (2018) found an association between self-control (patience) and gratitude. Grateful people delay future rewards to a higher degree than ungrateful people. The researchers point out that this has implications for more than one's finances. Increasing levels of gratitude also could help people positively affect health-related behaviors.

When Gratitude Fails

As easy as gratitude is to put into practice, there is one thing that can get in the way of it 'going viral:' Ingratitude. Emmons (2013) offers the following characteristics of ingratitude:

- excessive sense of self-importance
- arrogance
- vanity
- unquenchable need for admiration and approval
- sense of entitlement



Some might recognize these as traits describing a narcissistic personality. Philosopher David Hume (1739) wrote, “Of all crimes that human creatures are capable of committing, the most horrid and unnatural is ingratitude.”

Researcher Thomas Gilovich (2017) describes ingratitude as the result of “adaptation, dwelling on negatives, and skewed perceptions of hardships.” In *Enemies of Gratitude*, Gilovich explains how and why these three experiences interfere with one’s ability to express gratitude. In addition to this, he offers ways to combat these enemies.

The Effects Gratitude Has On Health

According to Julie Ray (2019) of the Gallup Organization, “The world took a negative turn in 2017, with global levels of stress, worry, sadness and pain hitting new highs.” How can this trend change for the better? Research demonstrates that one way is through practicing gratitude.

The following studies demonstrate the affect gratitude has on one’s mental and physical health.

- Writing a gratitude letter and counting blessings had “high utility scores and were associated with substantial improvements in optimism” (Huffman, Dubois, Healy, Boehm, Kashdan, Celano, Denninger, & Lyubomirsky, 2014).
- Gratitude letter writing leads to better mental health in adult populations seeking psychotherapy (Wong, Owen, Brown, Mcinnis, Toth, & Gilman, 2016).
- Gratitude buffers people from stress and depression (Wood, Maltby, Gillett, Linley, & Joseph, 2008).
- Positive reframing underlies the relationship between trait gratitude and a sense of coherence. A sense of coherence is how confident a person feels about potential life outcomes. It is the degree to which a person feels optimistic and in control of future events (Lambert, Graham, Fincham, & Stillman, 2009).
- Patients who expressed optimism/gratitude two weeks after an acute coronary event had healthier hearts (Huffman, Beale, Beach, Celano, Belcher, Moore, Suarez, Gandhi, Motiwala, Gaggin, & Januzzi 2015).



- Gratitude and spiritual wellbeing are related to positive affect, sleep quality, energy, self-efficacy, and lower cellular inflammation (Mills, Redwine, Wilson, Pung, Chinh, Greenberg, Lunde, Maisel, & Raisinghani, 2015).
- Gratitude may enhance peace of mind, reduce rumination, and have a negative effect on depressive symptoms (Liang, Chen, Li, Wu, Wang, Zheng, & Zeng, 2018).

If a person could do only one thing to increase their health and happiness, expressing gratitude might be it. Martin Seligman, a pioneer in the field of Positive Psychology, has remarked, “when we take time to notice the things that go right – it means we’re getting a lot of little rewards throughout the day” (BrainyQuote, n.d.).

Every time a person expresses or receives gratitude, dopamine releases in the brain. Dopamine, a neurotransmitter, is produced in two areas of the brain: the substantia nigra and the ventral tegmental. The former has to do with movement and speech, the latter with reward (Carter, 2009). When a person expresses or receives gratitude, dopamine releases, thus making a connection between the behavior and feeling good.

The more a person practices gratitude, the more often dopamine releases.

Proven Advantages of Keeping a Daily Gratitude Journal

One of the most popular gratitude exercises is the daily gratitude journal. One study found that materialism among adolescents decreased when they implemented this practice. Participants also donated 60% more money to charity (Chaplin, Roedder John, Rindfleisch, & Froh, 2019).

Fritz and colleagues (2019) learned that after completing a gratitude writing exercise, state gratitude predicted healthier eating behavior among undergraduate students. In a second study, they found that a weekly gratitude letter was associated with better eating habits. The teens in this study also experienced fewer negative emotions during the intervention period, which spanned four weeks.

Gratitude journaling might reduce inflammation in people who have experienced Stage B, asymptomatic heart failure (Redwine, Henry, Pung, Wilson, Chinh, Jain, Rutledge,



Greenberg, Maisel, & Mills 2016). In a study titled “Gratitude journaling intervention in patients with Stage B heart failure,” Redwine and colleagues (2016) piloted an 8-week gratitude journaling intervention.

Compared to standard treatment, the intervention group also experienced an improvement in trait gratitude scores.

There is conflicting research about how often a person should journal. Sonja Lyubomirsky and colleagues (2010) found that once or twice per week is more beneficial than daily journaling.

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A Take-Home Message

Regardless of who you are, or the circumstances of your life, the health benefits of gratitude are undeniable. There are numerous gratitude books, workbooks, apps, and premade journals available, making it easier for everyone to increase their practice of this virtue every day.

What activities will you commit to implementing so that you can realize the health benefits of gratitude?

Source: <https://positivepsychology.com/benefits-of-gratitude/>



Can Expressing Gratitude Improve Your Mental, Physical Health?

Expressing gratitude is associated with a host of mental and physical benefits. Studies have shown that feeling thankful can improve sleep, mood and immunity. Gratitude can decrease depression, anxiety, difficulties with chronic pain and risk of disease.

If a pill that could do this, everyone would be taking it. Your brain is designed to problem-solve rather than appreciate. You often must override this design to reap the benefits of gratitude.

What's The Right Amount Of Gratitude?

Simply stated, gratitude should be practiced daily – just as you'd take that magic pill if it existed. Try starting your day by thinking of someone you're grateful for as soon as you wake up. It could be appreciating a friend who sends you funny texts, a teacher who recognizes your child's gifts, or the barista who hands you your coffee and shares friendly conversation. Later, thank that person with a text, note or kind word when you see the person.

Behavior Changes Biology

Remember that behavior changes biology. Positive gestures benefit you by releasing oxytocin, a hormone that helps connect people. Some people call it the love hormone.

You'll also benefit the person on the other end of the gesture. After all, who doesn't like to be thanked for their efforts or just for being who they are? Sharing kindness can make you healthier and happier.

Track Your Gratitude

Another idea is to keep a gratitude journal. Set aside some time during your day, perhaps while attempting to relax your mind before sleep. Think back on your day and write down the things that went right. Maybe your spouse took care of a household repair, you heard your favorite song on the radio, or you



saw a double rainbow. Try writing about the many blessings you may have taken for granted, such as having clean water or having certain abilities.

Our lives are full of reasons to feel thankful.
Sometimes we need to remember to notice them.

Source: Mayo Clinic Health System / Author Amanda Logan is a nurse practitioner in Minnesota.



Giving Thanks Can Make You Happier

Each holiday season comes with high expectations for a cozy and festive time of year. However, for many this time of year is tinged with sadness, anxiety, or depression. Certainly, major depression or a severe anxiety disorder benefits most from professional help. But what about those who just feel lost or overwhelmed or down at this time of year? Research (and common sense) suggests that one aspect of the Thanksgiving season can actually lift the spirits, and it's built right into the holiday – being grateful.

The word gratitude is derived from the Latin word *gratia*, which means grace, graciousness, or gratefulness (depending on the context). In some ways, gratitude encompasses all of these meanings. Gratitude is a thankful appreciation for what an individual receives, whether tangible or intangible. With gratitude, people acknowledge the goodness in their lives. In the process, people usually recognize that the source of that goodness lies at least partially outside themselves. As a result, being grateful also helps people connect to something larger than themselves as individuals – whether to other people, nature, or a higher power.

In positive psychology research, gratitude is strongly and consistently associated with greater happiness. Gratitude helps people feel more positive emotions, relish good experiences, improve their health, deal with adversity, and build strong relationships.

People feel and express gratitude in multiple ways. They can apply it to the past (retrieving positive memories and being thankful for elements of childhood or past blessings), the present (not taking good fortune for granted as it comes), and the future (maintaining a hopeful and optimistic attitude). Regardless of the inherent or current level of someone's gratitude, it's a quality that individuals can successfully cultivate further.

Research On Gratitude

Two psychologists, Dr. Robert A. Emmons of the University of California, Davis, and Dr. Michael E. McCullough of the University of Miami, have done much of the research on gratitude. In one study, they asked all participants to write a few sentences each week, focusing on particular topics.



One group wrote about things they were grateful for that had occurred during the week. A second group wrote about daily irritations or things that had displeased them, and the third wrote about events that had affected them (with no emphasis on them being positive or negative). After 10 weeks, those who wrote about gratitude were more optimistic and felt better about their lives. Surprisingly, they also exercised more and had fewer visits to physicians than those who focused on sources of aggravation.

Another leading researcher in this field, Dr. Martin E. P. Seligman, a psychologist at the University of Pennsylvania, tested the impact of various positive psychology interventions on 411 people, each compared with a control assignment of writing about early memories. When their week's assignment was to write and personally deliver a letter of gratitude to someone who had never been properly thanked for his or her kindness, participants immediately exhibited a huge increase in happiness scores. This impact was greater than that from any other intervention, with benefits lasting for a month. Of course, studies such as this one cannot prove cause and effect. But most of the studies published on this topic support an association between gratitude and an individual's well-being.

Other studies have looked at how being grateful can improve relationships. For example, a study of couples found that individuals who took time to express gratitude for their partner not only felt more positive toward the other person but also felt more comfortable expressing concerns about their relationship.

Managers who remember to say "thank you" to people who work for them may find that those employees feel motivated to work harder. Researchers at the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania randomly divided university fund-raisers into two groups. One group made phone calls to solicit alumni donations in the same way they always had. The second group — assigned to work on a different day — received a pep talk from the director of annual giving, who told the fund-raisers she was grateful for their efforts. During the following week, the university employees who heard her message of gratitude made 50% more fund-raising calls than those who did not.

There are some notable exceptions to the generally positive results in research on gratitude. One study found that middle-aged divorced women who kept gratitude journals were no more satisfied with their lives than those who did not. Another study



found that children and adolescents who wrote and delivered a thank-you letter to someone who made a difference in their lives may have made the other person happier – but did not improve their own well-being. This finding suggests that gratitude is an attainment associated with emotional maturity.

Ways To Cultivate Gratitude

Gratitude is a way for people to appreciate what they have instead of always reaching for something new in the hopes it will make them happier or thinking they can't feel satisfied until every physical and material need is met. Gratitude helps people refocus on what they have instead of what they lack. And, although it may feel contrived at first, this mental state grows stronger with use and practice.

****WAYS TO CULTIVATE GRATITUDE FLYER****

Source: August 14, 2021

<https://www.health.harvard.edu/healthbeat/giving-thanks-can-make-you-happier>



Scientifically Proven Benefits of Gratitude

You'll be grateful that you made the change (and you'll sleep better).

KEY POINTS

- *One study found that thanking a new acquaintance makes them more likely to seek an ongoing relationship.*
- *Gratitude reduces a multitude of toxic emotions, from envy and resentment to frustration and regret.*
- *Writing in a gratitude journal improves sleep, according to one study.*

"Stop feeling sorry for yourself," we are often told. And while it can be hard to avoid self-pity entirely, mentally strong people choose to exchange self-pity for gratitude. Whether you choose to write a few sentences in a gratitude journal or simply take a moment to silently acknowledge all that you have, giving thanks can transform your life.

Here are seven scientifically proven benefits:

Gratitude opens the door to more relationships. Not only does saying "thank you" constitute good manners, but showing appreciation can help you win new friends, according to a 2014 study published in *Emotion*. The study found that thanking a new acquaintance makes them more likely to seek an ongoing relationship. So whether you thank a stranger for holding the door or send a thank-you note to that colleague who helped you with a project, acknowledging other people's contributions can lead to new opportunities.

Gratitude improves physical health. Grateful people experience fewer aches and pains and report feeling healthier than other people, according to a 2012 study published in *Personality and Individual Differences*. Not surprisingly, grateful people are also more likely to take care of their health. They exercise more often and are more likely to attend regular check-ups, which is likely to contribute to further longevity.



Gratitude improves psychological health. Gratitude reduces a multitude of toxic emotions, from envy and resentment to frustration and regret. Robert Emmons, a leading gratitude researcher, has conducted multiple studies on the link between gratitude and well-being. His research confirms that gratitude effectively increases happiness and reduces depression.

Gratitude enhances empathy and reduces aggression. Grateful people are more likely to behave in a prosocial manner, even when others behave less kindly, according to a 2012 study by the University of Kentucky. Study participants who ranked higher on gratitude scales were less likely to retaliate against others, even when given negative feedback. They experienced more sensitivity and empathy toward other people and a decreased desire to seek revenge.

Grateful people sleep better. Writing in a gratitude journal improves sleep, according to a 2011 study published in *Applied Psychology: Health and Well-Being*. Spend just 15 minutes jotting down a few grateful sentiments before bed, and you may sleep better and longer.

Gratitude improves self-esteem. A 2014 study published in the *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology* found that gratitude increased athletes' self-esteem, an essential component of optimal performance. Other studies have shown that gratitude reduces social comparisons. Rather than becoming resentful toward people who have more money or better jobs—a major factor in reduced self-esteem—grateful people are able to appreciate other people's accomplishments.

Gratitude increases mental strength. For years, research has shown gratitude not only reduces stress, but it may also play a major role in overcoming trauma. A 2006 study published in *Behavior Research and Therapy* found that Vietnam War veterans with higher levels of gratitude experienced lower rates of post-traumatic stress disorder. A 2003 study published in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* found that



gratitude was a major contributor to resilience following the terrorist attacks on September 11. Recognizing all that you have to be thankful for –even during the worst times–fosters resilience.

We all have the ability and opportunity to cultivate gratitude. Rather than complain about the things you think you deserve, take a few moments to focus on all that you have. Developing an “attitude of gratitude” is one of the simplest ways to improve your satisfaction with life.

Source: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/what-mentally-strong-people-dont-do/201504/7-scientificallly-proven-benefits-of-gratitude>