

Grateful for Gratitude This Holiday Season

Some of us may not be looking forward to the holidays with the same excitement that the festive season usually generates. But with a little gratitude, and some positive thinking, we can still get the most out of the season while improving our overall well-being.

Everyone has times when they feel appreciative or thankful for a person or a situation. These moments of thinking about the past in a positive way give us a good feeling and are the very definition of gratitude.

Feeling grateful just happens sometimes. Other times, we must make a special effort to increase how often we feel it. With so many disruptions to our usual celebrations, this holiday season might be one of those times.

Benefits of Gratitude

Recent studies have found a host of benefits from practicing thankfulness, including:

- Improved heart and kidney function and lower blood pressure and stress-hormone levels
- Higher levels of optimism and satisfaction with life
- Lower levels of stress and anxiety
- Fewer reports of physical ailments
- Higher motivation to exercise
- Higher levels of personal goal attainment
- Higher levels of alertness, attentiveness and energy
- Stronger emotional support for others
- Increased resilience in the face of hardship

Measurable Improvement

On his Emmons Lab website, Robert Emmons, a professor of psychology at the University of California, Davis, sums up some of the recent findings about gratitude and its positive health effects:

- In one study, researchers found that those who kept regular gratitude journals exercised more, reported fewer ailments, felt better about their lives as a whole and were more optimistic than those who recorded problems or neutral life events.
- Adults with neuromuscular disease who were asked to focus on gratitude over a three-week period reported more positive moods, a greater sense of connection to others, more optimism and better sleep than a control group.
- In another study, participants who kept gratitude lists were more likely to have made progress toward important personal goals over a two-month period than those who didn't.

Ways to Increase Gratitude

Experiencing more gratitude does not need to be difficult or time-consuming. Try these ideas and see what works best for you:

- **Make a list.** Write everything in your life that makes you grateful. Look at this list regularly.
- **Gratitude journal.** Take five minutes each day to think of three things that happened in your life that you are glad you experienced. Then write them down somewhere. Take pictures. Photograph little things in your everyday life that make you smile.
- **Tell someone.** Whether it is someone you look up to or just someone who makes you happy, take a bit of time to tell him or her that you're glad to have them around.
- **Frame events in a positive light.** We often joke about whether the glass is half empty or half full. Make an effort to see the half-full side of every situation.
- **Think about great holidays of the past.** Draw pleasure from all the wonderful times you have had with friends and family and think about how you will again enjoy those times soon.

What is there to be thankful for?

You can be thankful for anything in your life that makes you feel positive on some level. Some bigger things could include:

- Friends and family
- Achieving a goal
- Your talents and skills
- Appreciating where you live and the opportunities you have
- Your health and happiness

You do not need to limit your gratitude to big-picture ideas. Positive things that seem small and happen every day are also worth focusing on. Some small things could include:

- A good joke you heard from a friend
- A sunny day
- A good song on the radio
- A funny thing your pet did

How do I start?

- Grab a notebook and begin a gratitude journal
- Tell someone when you appreciate something they've done
- Think of three things that you're grateful for and jot them down

Resources

- Emmons Lab: <https://emmons.faculty.ucdavis.edu/>
- ReachOut.com: <https://au.reachout.com/articles/the-how-and-why-of-practising-gratitude>
- International Positive Psychology Association: <https://www.ippanetwork.org/>

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