

Why Gratitude Matters

Gratitude is a spontaneous feeling but, increasingly, research demonstrates its value as a practice—that is, making conscious efforts to count one's blessings. Studies show that people can deliberately cultivate gratitude—and there are important social and personal benefits to doing so. It is possible to feel grateful for loved ones, colleagues, animals, nature, and life in general. The emotion generates a climate of positivity that both reaches inward and extends outward.

Gratitude is an emotion, one that makes a person feel happier. Gratefulness is also a mood as well as a personality trait. Some people are just more inclined to feel grateful as a daily habit.

Gratitude is both a temporary feeling and a dispositional trait. In both cases, gratitude involves a process of recognizing, first, that one has obtained a positive outcome and, second, that there is an external source for that good outcome.

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Psychologists find that, over time, feeling grateful boosts happiness and fosters both physical and psychological health, even among those already struggling with mental health problems. Studies show that practicing gratitude curbs the use of words expressing negative emotions and shifts inner attention away from such negative emotions as resentment and envy, minimizing the possibility of ruminating, which is a hallmark of depression.

- ◆ **Helps reduce stress** - People who are grateful feel less pain, less stress, suffer insomnia less, have stronger immune systems, experience healthier relationships, and do better academically and professionally. Overall it can boost both your mental and your physical health.
- ◆ **Helps your mental health** - Grateful people are indeed less likely to have mental health problems like depression. One study found that a gratitude intervention was successful in reducing negative affect and increasing mental resilience in a group of older adults.
- ◆ **Helps you engage in better self-care** - One study suggests that spending only a few minutes engaging in a gratitude activity, such as writing a letter of gratitude to a loved one, can motivate you to make healthy food choices.

Tips to Foster Gratitude

- ✿ Keep a journal of or in some way note big and little joys of daily life.
- ✿ Write down "three good things"—identify three things that have gone well for you and identify the cause.
- ✿ Write thank-you notes to others.
- ✿ Think about people who have inspired you and what about them was most significant.
- ✿ Engage in "mental subtraction." Imagine what your life would be like if some positive event had not occurred.



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Cultivating Gratitude

Gratitude starts with noticing the goodness in life. A materialistic culture that encourages constant wanting and sees possessions as the source of happiness is not the most fertile ground for gratitude. But it is not an insurmountable barrier to developing it. Envy and especially cynicism and narcissism are similarly *thieves* of gratitude. In fact, the cultivation of gratitude may be at least a partial remedy for narcissism.

- ◆ **Practice gratitude** - Just being around your family and friends can help you feel more grateful. Also, being more appreciative of life and feeling less cynical pushes you in a more thankful frame of mind. At other times, when you are facing a tough decision, seeing it as a gift is useful, some people wouldn't mind having such a decision to make.
- ◆ **Experience gratitude** - This depends on the person, and we all differ in the degree to which we are inclined to experience and express gratitude. It can be something as simple as a healthy Spring shower, just because the rain washes everything clean. Engaging in a more specific act, such as volunteering to help others, makes people feel good about themselves.
- ◆ **Gratitude is Contagious** - Gratitude is a social emotion and the expression of gratitude toward others compounds its benefits. The emotion literally pays itself forward. And it almost does not matter whether the gratitude is communicated or reciprocated by others.

source: Psychology Today



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