

How Gratitude is Good for Your Health

Find out how the act of being thankful can improve your physical and mental health, as well as your relationships.

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The year-end holidays are typically a busy time filled with big meals and gatherings with family and friends — but they should also serve as reminders to pause and be thankful. And while expressing gratitude often makes others feel good, it turns out that it can also have many positive effects on your own health.

Studies show that practicing gratitude can lead to more intimate and connected relationships, less depression, more motivation and engagement, and better overall mental well-being. There is even evidence that gratitude may help you sleep better.

Psychoanalyst and associate attending physician **Dr. Gail Saltz at NewYork-Presbyterian/Weill Cornell Medical Center** explains the positive health impacts of showing appreciation.

Is gratitude good for your health?

Yes. People who spend more time experiencing gratitude report more feelings of physical and mental well-being. Gratitude improves one's outlook on life. Appreciating what you have can make you feel more optimistic and satisfied and experience less frustration, envy, and regret. It also tends to result in increased self-esteem and confidence, which also improves mood. There is even evidence to suggest that gratitude helps to diminish the likelihood of developing post-traumatic stress disorder after an upsetting experience.

What impact does it have on one's relationships?

Gratitude can enhance relationships. We are often attracted to positive people; this positivity also makes one easier to get along with and talk to, even about difficult things. Being thankful for the important people in your life is more likely to be reciprocated. Mutual appreciation for each other often results in a more satisfying relationship. When you are less envious and focused on material things that you don't have, you in turn invest more energy in what you do have and what's right in front of you.

Does gratitude affect sleep?

People who practice gratitude right before bedtime, by listing those things they feel grateful for, report better sleep. This is likely because gratitude diminishes anxiety and stressful feelings, allowing for a more restful and relaxed entry to sleep.

How can being mindful improve feelings of gratitude?

Mindfulness is the practice of being present in the moment and hyperaware of current thoughts and feelings of the moment. Those who are mindful about being grateful express appreciation for the people and things around them, which can enhance the positives to be gained from gratitude.

What can we do to feel more grateful?

Listing three things for which you are grateful, big and small, on a daily basis for even two weeks can make a difference in overall mood. Sharing with your partner what about them you feel grateful for can bring the two of you closer. Writing a note to someone you feel is deserving of your thanks can shift your focus to the positive, and a recent study revealed that note will mean more than you think to its recipient.

What's a good way to give thanks this holiday season?

At the dinner table, go around and state something you each feel grateful for. This can be done year-round. I personally have periods of time when I list three things for which I am grateful each day. Sometimes I share these with my children and they share theirs with me. Sharing my feelings about gratitude models for my family the value of having gratitude, appreciating the people in your life, and viewing life through this lens. Sharing our feelings in this way also makes us feel closer around something positive and life affirming.

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