

How to Practice Gratitude

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Living your life with gratitude helps you notice the little wins — like the bus showing up right on time, a stranger holding the door for you, or the sun shining through your window when you wake up in the morning. Each of these small moments strings together to create a web of well-being that, over time, strengthens your ability to notice the good.

Robert Emmons, psychology professor and gratitude researcher at the University of California, Davis, explains that there are [two key components](#) of practicing gratitude:

1. We affirm the good things we've received
2. We acknowledge the role other people play in providing our lives with goodness

Most of us know it's important to express thanks to the people who help us, or silently acknowledge the things we are grateful for in life. Research has linked gratitude with a wide range of benefits, including strengthening your immune system and improving [sleep patterns](#), feeling optimistic and experiencing more joy and pleasure, being more [helpful and generous](#), and feeling less lonely and isolated.

What are the effects of practicing gratitude?

1. **It boosts your mental health.** [A study from 2017](#) found that those who write letters of gratitude reported significantly better mental health four weeks and 12 weeks after their writing exercise ended. While not conclusive, this finding suggests that practicing gratitude may help train the brain to be more sensitive to the experience of gratitude down the line, and this could contribute to improved mental health over time.
2. **It helps you accept change.** When we are comfortable with the way things already are, it can be difficult to accept when things change—let alone feel grateful for that difference. But when we make it a habit to notice the good change brings, we can become

more flexible and accepting. Here are [four ways to practice gratitude](#) when change arises.

3. **It can relieve stress.** The regions associated with gratitude are part of the neural networks that light up when we socialize and experience pleasure. These regions are also heavily connected to the parts of the brain that control basic emotion regulation, such as heart rate, and are associated with stress relief and thus pain reduction. Feeling grateful and recognizing help from others [creates a more relaxed body state](#) and allows the subsequent benefits of lowered stress to wash over us.

Often, we make gratitude sound like it's all about you. We often hear that gratitude is the single most important ingredient to living a successful and fulfilled life—or that when we are grateful, fear disappears and abundance appears. In fact, research does support the idea that gratitude helps people who practice it.

People who practice gratitude report:

- Fewer physical symptoms of illness
- More optimism
- Greater goal attainment
- Decreased anxiety and depression, among other health benefits.

But gratitude isn't just about feeling good—It's an emotion with moral motivations. Modern psychologists describe gratitude as a "moral barometer."

Research shows that the neural connection between gratitude and altruism is very deep, and that cultivating gratitude may encourage us to feel more generous. We don't say "thanks" for selfish reasons. Far from it: Gratitude, like giving, is its own reward.

Practicing gratitude lights up the brain's reward center. One study found that [practicing_gratitude_by_keeping_a_gratitude](#) journal lights up the ventromedial prefrontal cortex, a key brain region associated with reward processing in the brain.

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A Simple Mindful Gratitude Journaling Exercise

Building your capacity for gratitude isn't difficult. It just takes practice.

The more you can bring your attention to that which you feel grateful for, the more you'll notice to feel grateful for!

1. **Start by observing.** Notice the *thank yous* you say. Just how much of a habitual response is it? Is it a hasty

aside, an afterthought? How are you feeling when you express thanks in small transactions? Stressed, uptight, a little absent-minded? Do a quick scan of your body— are you already physically moving on to your next interaction?

2. **Pick one interaction a day.** When your instinct to say “thanks” arises, stop for a moment and take note. Can you name what you feel grateful for, even beyond the gesture that’s been extended? *Then* say thank you.

10 Ways to Practice Daily Gratitude



As Jon Kabat-Zinn says, “The little things? The little moments? They aren’t little.” Saying thank you, holding the

door for someone, these little moments can change the tone of your whole day.

One of the most powerful ways to rewire your brain for more joy and less stress is to focus on gratitude. Here are 10 simple ways to become more grateful:

1. **Keep a Gratitude Journal.** Establish a daily practice in which you remind yourself of the gifts, grace, benefits, and good things you enjoy. Recalling moments of gratitude associated with ordinary events, your personal attributes, or valued people in your life gives you the potential to interweave a sustainable theme of gratefulness into your life.
2. **Remember the Bad.** To be grateful in your current state, it is helpful to remember the hard times that you once experienced. When you remember how difficult life used to be and how far you have come, you set up an explicit contrast in your mind, and this contrast is fertile ground for gratefulness.
3. **Ask Yourself Three Questions.** Meditate on your relationships with parents, friends, siblings, work associates, children, and partners using these three questions: "What have I received from __?", "What have I given to __?", and "What troubles and difficulty have I caused?"
4. **Share Your Gratitude with Others.** Research has

found that expressing gratitude can strengthen relationships. So the next time your partner, friend or family member does something you appreciate, be sure to let them know.

5. **Come to Your Senses.** Through our senses—the ability to touch, see, smell, taste, and hear—we gain an appreciation of what it means to be human and of what an incredible miracle it is to be alive. Seen through the lens of gratitude, the human body is not only a miraculous construction, but also a gift.
6. **Use Visual Reminders.** Because the two primary obstacles to gratefulness are forgetfulness and a lack of mindful awareness, visual reminders can serve as cues to trigger thoughts of gratitude. Often times, the best visual reminders are other people.
7. **Make a Vow to Practice Gratitude.** Research shows that making an oath to perform a behavior increases the likelihood that the action will be executed. Therefore, write your own gratitude vow, which could be as simple as “I vow to count my blessings each day,” and post it somewhere where you will be reminded of it every day.
8. **Watch Your Language.** Grateful people have a particular linguistic style that uses the language of gifts, givers, blessings, blessed, fortune, fortunate, and abundance. In gratitude, you should not focus on how inherently good you are, but rather on the inherently

good things that others have done on your behalf.

9. **Go Through the Motions.** Grateful motions include smiling, saying thank you, and writing letters of gratitude. By “going through grateful motions,” you’ll trigger the emotion of gratitude more often.
10. **Think Outside the Box.** If you want to make the most out of opportunities to [flex your gratitude muscles](#), you must look creatively for new situations and circumstances in which to feel grateful. Please share the creative ways you’ve found to help you practice gratitude.

Try This Five-Minute Gratitude Meditation



Finding something simple to be thankful for each day can help boost your resilience and overall sense of well-being. Follow this five-minute gratitude practice from Elaine Smookler to notice and appreciate the little things.

Use the breath to anchor yourself in the present moment. Our minds are always so easily pulled to busyness. Bring particular attention to feeling the breath, or something in the body, as you bring your shoulders down and orient your attention toward gratitude.

1. *Next, bring to mind a sight you are grateful for.*

Move through your senses, and find one thing to start with that you appreciate that comes to you from the world of sight, if you have this available. It could be a color...a shadow...a shape...a movement. Remember, it will never be like this again. What do you see right now, and can you feel grateful that you get to see this, whatever it is?

2. *Now, shift to a scent you appreciate.* As you continue to work with your senses, now take time to tune in with appreciation to an aroma. What do you notice? What about that glorious or interesting or subtle smell is making you smile? It could be gratitude for something familiar: a scent that brings comfort, upliftment; or maybe it's something you've never smelled before, and it just piques your curiosity, ignites you, enlivens you.

3. *Moving on, tune into any sounds around you.*

Allowing the world of smell to gently recede into the background, on an in-breath, shift your attention to your ears and the world of sound. Maybe notice what it feels like to [really listen](#). How many sounds can you notice, and can you feel grateful that you're able to experience sound, if you are? What can you notice about these sounds—far away? close? Perhaps you could play a piece of music that brings you joy, and have gratitude that it's so available? Or maybe it's the sound of children laughing, the sound of loved ones breathing, the sound of the beating of your own heart.

4. *The world of touch and texture beckons us next.* We find so much to be grateful for in touch! If there's someone near who you can hug or who can hug you, notice how this makes you feel filled with gratitude for the joy of human contact. Or perhaps you have a beautiful pet that you can stroke and cuddle, or some lovely material with a texture that feels warm to the touch, soft, evocative. Let your senses ignite your gratitude! There's so much to be appreciative of.

5. *Shift to noticing and appreciating objects around you.* Now take a moment to look around: Look down, look up, and from side to side. Appreciate how much effort must have gone into anything at all you own or use. Someone conceived of the need and many people worked on the details of the design. Much care even

went into the packaging to deliver your item to you safely. What do you feel when you let yourself be grateful that all that talent went into making your life a little easier?

6. **As you end this practice, carry this attitude of gratitude with you.** One last little grateful tip: Why not offer your thanks to each person who does anything at all for you today? Even if it is their job to help you? When you're grateful, when you let your heart open up and be filled with appreciation, notice how being grateful makes you feel.
7. **Close with gratitude.** I'm so grateful that you tuned in to this gratitude practice, and I appreciate your time, your effort, and your energy to be present, awake, and alive to your precious life. Have a beautiful day.

How Gratitude Boosts Relationships:



Our closest relationships enrich our lives in ways that may not always be noticeable. When we pause to consider all they've brought us, we begin to realize that so much of what we have is built on the people who love us—from the coffee your partner brewed for you this morning, to your overall sense of identity and contentment.

Plus, there's scientific evidence that feeling and expressing gratitude in relationships of all kinds strengthens them. Researchers from both the University of North Carolina and University of California found that gratitude acts as a "[booster shot](#)" for romantic relationships. And a review of close to 100 studies by researchers at the University of Nottingham determined that those who feel and express gratitude tend to be pro-social—kind, helpful, and giving.

Can a Lack of Gratitude Kill Relationships?

Strengthening your relationship with someone doesn't require an elaborate date or weekend-long outing. Small gestures—like making eye contact, or following through on plans—can be just as impactful over time.

As a [study from Florida State University](#) found grateful partners typically make our lives better, but we might not benefit as much if we're not also grateful. People with more grateful partners tended to start out more satisfied with their marriages and still be more satisfied three years later—but only if they were high in gratitude

How Gratitude Makes Parenting Easier



By Carla Naumburg

Gratitude has become one of my go-to responses to difficult parenting situations, and not just during mundane or unpleasant tasks. Here are a few other times:

- 1. When I'm completely exhausted and just can't deal.**
Whenever this happens, I am at high risk of throwing my own private pity party, which doesn't help anything. A moment of gratitude shuts that party down so I can get clear on what I need to do and get through the rest of the day.
- 2. Whenever my girls get sick or injured, my thoughts start spinning.** I waver between worrying about their health and stressing about the work I won't get done.

Reminding myself of all I have to be grateful for—that they aren't sicker, that we have access to pediatric emergency rooms, skilled doctors, and health insurance—halts my mind's cycle of rumination (which only augments stress and worry) and helps me get steady on my feet again so I can do what's needed—not just stress in circles.

3. **When I'm anxious about the future.** My daughter's health is just one of the many issues that trigger my anxiety—the full list could fill a library. [Anxiety](#) thrives in future thinking—gratitude lives in the present. When I focus on everything there is to appreciate in the here and now, my anxiety decreases dramatically.
4. **When I can't help but imagine the worst.** I have an incredible ability to catastrophize my way through almost any experience, even the positive ones. It's as if I'm in constant Cinderella mode—the more beautiful the shoe is, the more I worry about the other one dropping. Focusing on all that I have to be grateful for helps me savor the best moments of parenting, rather than getting caught up in [imagining the worst](#).
5. **When I'm distracted.** I try to stay as present as I can for my kids, but sometimes it's hard. It's hard because parenting can be boring or infuriating or confusing or downright gross. Sometimes I can bring myself back with a few deep breaths, but other times I need a stronger anchor. Gratitude is that anchor.

share gratitude with others





Discover Daily Gratitude

