



The benefits of a Gratitude Practice

Gratitude is a powerful and deep emotion.

The focus on gratitude or appreciation is a theme that occurs in all religions and spiritual practices. The importance of having a regular gratitude practice is also frequently mentioned by coaches and motivational speakers. Research in the field of neuroscience is finding clear links to gratitude and well-being that support the importance of practices in gratitude.

Gratitude can be viewed as a skill that can be trained and developed. This increases the range of gratitude, developing the skill of being more attuned to finding a sense of gratitude in a variety of situations.

Gratitude is not a magical cure to lessen pain or grief, but in a difficult moment it can change your perspective in a difficult situation, which may lessen the sense of suffering. A regular gratitude practice can therefore, over time, expand our capacity to deal with difficult situations, and build inner reserves to deal with difficult circumstances.

A conscious gratitude practice can have a profound effect on your overall health. It can change how your brain processes events and emotions such as fear, anxiety and depression.

Neuroscience has illustrated various benefits of a regular Gratitude practice. These include:

- Improved sleep
- Better emotional resilience
- Increased feelings of happiness
- Enhanced relationships and social bonding
- Change of perspective in challenging situations
- Increased creativity
- Increased motivation
- Better recovery from traumatic events and illness
- Improved immune system, blood pressure & heart function, lower levels of inflammation, resulting in better overall improved health

How to set up a Gratitude Practice

Buy or make a journal

Spend some time selecting or making a journal which you find beautiful and that you will want to write in. This can be a separate journal to the one you usually use, or you can use the same journal and write with a different coloured pen or pencil.

You can also use the Gratitude Practice work page below as part of your practice.

Set aside time and a designated space

Select a time of the day that works for you, and stick to it (see below on developing a routine). It is highly beneficial to start and end your day with gratitude (if you initially can only manage an AM or a PM that is also a good start). Starting your day with a gratitude practice sets the tone for the day, and ending with reflecting back on the day in gratitude concludes the day in appreciation.

Develop a routine or ritual

Consistency helps to develop habits. This includes selecting a time of the day that works for you, setting up a specific place where you will not be disturbed, making a cup of tea, using a journal, using a specific pen/pencil.

Gratitude add-on

If you already have a mindfulness, meditation or yoga practice, or any other existing morning/ evening routine for reflection, simply add-on your gratitude practice to the existing routine.

It's all about *experiencing* Gratitude

Start off with connecting to the feeling of gratitude. Really being in touch with the power of the emotion and expressing from that felt sense hold more value than just listing down a bunch of things that come to mind.

How and what to write

A few ideas:

1. List 3-5 things you are grateful for.
2. Journal more in-depth on one of the things on your list. This could include:
 - why you are grateful for this particular thing (how it is benefiting you)
 - being grateful to the people/ processes involved for making this possible
 - exploring a deeper level of gratitude, i.e. gratitude for the intention with which someone did something for you such as relieving a stressor or improving your well-being
3. Draw the things you are grateful for (concrete images e.g. a bicycle, house, or something that symbolizes what you are grateful for).
4. Write a poem that illustrates the gratitude you are experiencing.

Gratitude when things are difficult

What if you are going through a really difficult time or if it's difficult to connect to a felt sense of gratitude?

Everything in life is balanced by polarities – good/ bad, negatives/positives, benefits/drawbacks. Where you choose to focus your attention in a situation will shape your attitude to that situation. This requires reframing a loss or challenge into a potential gain, attributing meaning to the difficulty by focusing on what it is teaching you, or what it can potentially contribute to your life and growth. Once you start practicing this approach to viewing everything in your life as having a positive as well as negative impact, you will realize the power you have to transform obstacles into opportunities.

Incorporating Gratitude in your life:

- Gratitude journaling
- Listening to guided gratitude meditations/ mindfulness practices
- Making gratitude the lens through which you view all the daily experiences you have
- Regularly express gratitude to other people in person.
- Writing personal thank you notes (expressing gratitude by specifically acknowledging either the intention with which something was done for you/ given to you (e.g. 'thank you for making dinner to take some pressure of me', the benefit you received (e.g. 'thank you for assisting me with the project, it saved a lot of time') or the sacrifice made by the person (thank you for giving me a lift to work, I realize it was out of your way').

Keep it up!

When you are starting out with a daily gratitude practice and journaling, it can sometimes feel like it's not working, or that you are not doing it right. As with any skill and practice, it may take some time to really get into it. The benefits might not be immediate, but you will start to notice them over time!

References and links:

The what, why and how of Gratitude by Dr. Robert Emmons:

<https://www.takingcharge.csh.umn.edu/making-gratitude-part-everyday-life-tips-dr-robert-emmons>

Three surprising ways that gratitude works at work by Dr. Robert Emmons:

https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/three_surprising_ways_that_gratitude_works_at_work

Six Habits of Highly Grateful People by Jeremy Adam Smith:

https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/six_habits_of_highly_grateful_people

What Science Reveals About Gratitude's Impact on the Brain by Glenn Fox



<https://www.mindful.org/what-the-brain-reveals-about-gratitude/>

Practice Gratitude to Unlock Your Best Self by [Clare Sarah Goodridge](#)
<https://www.flowresearchcollective.com/blog/practice-gratitude>

Podcast: Unlocking Creativity and Maximizing Gratitude Dr. Glenn Fox and Dr. Scott Barry Kaufman (Flow Research Collective, Episode 7, Podcast referred to in above article)
<https://www.flowresearchcollective.com/radio/7>

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