



Practicing Gratitude

What does it mean to be grateful?

Gratitude is saying "thank you." But it's more than a thank-you to a friend for a favor or gift. Gratitude is saying thanks for everything that is important to you and good in your life. You are thankful for a gift, but you're also thankful to watch a sunset, do well at a sport, or to be alive. You see your life and your experiences as a gift.

Gratitude is linked to well-being. Research indicates that people who practice gratitude appear to be more optimistic, pleased with their lives, and connected to others when compared to those who reflect on daily hassles or on everyday events. Studies also suggest that gratitude is linked to feeling good about life, being optimistic, and having a good social network.

You also might find that gratitude may help decrease your anger. If you find yourself thinking about how someone has wronged you, shift your attention to someone else who has been there to support you.

Gratitude may also be linked to resilience, which is having an "inner strength" that helps you bounce back after stressful situations. The traits mentioned above, such as optimism and connection with others, are often found in people who are resilient.

How can you practice gratitude?

To practice gratitude, you say "thanks" and appreciate what's important to you. Try these tips to incorporate more gratitude in your life.

- Spend a few minutes at the end of each day and think about, or even write down, what you are grateful for that day. Think about people, events, or experiences that have had a positive impact on you.
- Call or email someone just to say "thanks."
- Write thank-you notes as well as saying "thank you" when you receive gifts or favors. Or write a letter of gratitude and appreciation to someone. You don't have to mail it.
- Write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper about something a stranger did for you. Or just say "thank you" to people you don't know, such as waving when a person lets your car cut in during heavy traffic.
- When feeling burdened by your health, give thanks for the abilities you still have.
- Start a family ritual of gratitude, such as giving thanks before a meal.
- Find a creative way to give thanks. For example, plant a garden of gratitude or take pictures of things you are grateful for.

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