



In Gratitude

We count our blessings at Thanksgiving, but by making it a year-round habit, we could be living healthier, happier lives.

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After Jill Hart got married in 2000, she started writing a “grateful list” of all the things she loved about her new husband, Allen. Eight years later, whenever they argue or hit a bump, that list softens her anger. “Every time I read that list, it takes me back to our dating days and makes me smile,” says Jill, who lives in Bellevue, Nebraska. “It includes all of the things that made me fall in love with him.”

Every November, American families make an event of setting aside one day for giving thanks. But feeling grateful doesn’t have to be reserved for a special occasion.

“Gratitude is valuable when we can practice it in any given moment,” says Patricia Carlson, executive director of the nonprofit A Network

for Grateful Living, in Ithaca, New York. “Gratefulness has to do with experiencing the fullness of life. Sometimes we look at it as a play on words—it’s the great-fullness.”

In fact, research shows that making gratitude a part of everyday living promotes good health, elevates happiness, and boosts relationships. Psychologists say that perpetually grateful people are optimistic and energetic, which helps them handle stress and illness better than those who focus on the negative.

Hofstra University psychologist Jeffrey Froh believes that. “Kids who have more grateful outlooks tend to be happier,” he says. That gratitude, he says, is genuine appreciation for life and the people in it. “It’s beyond, ‘I have a nice car, nice clothes.’”

And showing gratitude for good work goes a long way in business, says Bob Glantz, head of research at Access Communications in San

Francisco. When Bob’s colleague, Yoshi Nakamoto, hit his 10-year anniversary at Access, the company gave him a \$1,000 music store gift certificate to buy a new drum kit.

“Yoshi is also a professional musician,” says Bob. “I support his music career by giving him the time off he needs. In return, he’s loyal to me.” Yoshi showed his appreciation by thanking Bob in the cover lines of his newest CD. “Gratitude pervades our business,” he says. “It’s a virtuous cycle. If you’re recognized for doing a good job, that gives you added incentive to do more.”

Sometimes, it takes losing someone or something cherished to reinforce gratitude. That happened to Cynthia McKay, of Parker, Colorado. After being raised in a wealthy home, Cynthia lost her parents suddenly when she was in her 20s. If that wasn’t bad enough, not long after her parents’ deaths,

Cynthia was held at gunpoint for hours while her home was robbed. During that terrifying time, she vowed that if she made it out alive, she would change her life. "I realized I had a very rich life and the things I was complaining about were irrelevant," she recalls. "It's the smaller things that really matter. Before I lost my parents, I didn't realize they were so nurturing every day. You have to look at what people do for you, and take time to look at life around you," she adds. "I have a pond in my backyard and seeing my dog swim in it, looking at these mountains and the blue sky, a new little flower coming up in the yard—each is something to be grateful for."

Sometimes it's tough to adopt a grateful approach when we may be facing foreclosure or trying to cope with ever-rising prices for necessities such as fuel, milk, and food.

But it is possible—and important—to make time every day to acknowledge and express gratitude, even if it's only for the smallest things, which can add up.

Start a gratitude journal Every night, Kay Paumier, of Fremont, California, has a "best part of the day" discussion with her husband and jots those best parts down in her gratitude journal. "I find myself looking out for that moment, thinking, 'This could be the best part of the day.' Keeping the journal helps remind me to be more aware, and it doubles my appreciation of all the good things that happen," she says.

GRATITUDE RESOURCES

- FIND CREATIVE IDEAS FOR PRACTICING GRATITUDE EVERY DAY AT THE WEB SITE FOR A NETWORK FOR GRATEFUL LIVING (GRATEFULNESS.ORG).
- READ BOOKS ON GRATITUDE. SOME TO CHECK OUT: *THANK YOU POWER: MAKING THE SCIENCE OF GRATITUDE WORK FOR YOU*, BY DEBORAH NORVILLE; *DISCOVERING YOUR INNER SAMURAI*, BY DR. SUSAN L. REID; AND *ATTITUDES OF GRATITUDE AND GIVING THANKS*, BY M.J. RYAN.
- SCHEDULE REGULAR GRATITUDE CALLS—BY PHONE OR IN PERSON—WITH FRIENDS OR FAMILY MEMBERS. USE THAT TIME TO GO BEYOND SMALL TALK. TELL EACH OTHER WHAT YOU'RE THANKFUL FOR.

Set a goal for saying "please" and "thank you" Showing appreciation for nice gestures has a pay-it-forward benefit—you feel good giving thanks and so do the people receiving your appreciation, which makes them more likely to show gratitude to others. "Whether it's in the grocery store or in your workplace, be aware when somebody does something kind for you," says A Network for Grateful Living's Patricia Carlson.

Make an effort to do something good No matter how small that effort might be, being a daily do-gooder sharpens your own appreciation for good things done to you, and pays big dividends in your sense of gratitude and well-being. Tuck plastic bags into your purse or pocket and fill them with litter as you walk. Read the news with an eye toward the positive; instead of feeling down about local or global troubles in the news, find a way to help. Making a small donation or volunteering can turn a bad story into a good one.

Connect with people Make a point of disconnecting from e-mail or the TV and interacting with others. "We've never been surrounded by more people than we are right now, but we've never been more disconnected either," Froh says. He suggests visiting people you value, or those who may need human contact—an elderly relative or neighbor. "These visits lead to more happiness," Froh says. "Those connections make all the difference." ☺



Daily Thanks

Finding things to be thankful for is easy, if you take the time to look.

Give thanks at the table

Every time you family sits down for a meal, take a few minutes to say good about the day.

Hang thank-you signs

It's a great idea to post a note as a great way to show appreciation. And if the kids see your affection for each other, it will make them feel loved, too.

Stop the whining

Whenever there's a bag for something in the store, have them name two or three toys or games they already have at home that they are grateful for.

Get outdoors

Nothing is more beautiful than the view from your back porch. Sit on the porch for a few minutes every day, take a family walk, and give thanks for the things that give you joy and make your life worth living. *—Patricia Carlson, author of www.grateful.org*