Thank You. No, Thank You
Grateful People Are Happier, Healthier Long After the Leftovers Are Gobbled Up

BY MELINDA BECK

It turns out, giving thanks is good for your health.

A growing body of research suggests that maintaining an attitude of gratitude can improve psychological, emotional and physical well-being.

Adults who frequently feel grateful have more energy, more optimism, more social connections and more happiness than those who do not, according to studies conducted over the past decade. They’re also less likely to be depressed, envious, greedy or alcoholic. They earn more money, sleep more soundly, exercise more regularly and have greater resistance to viral infections.

Now, researchers are finding that gratitude brings similar benefits in children and adolescents. Kids who feel and act grateful tend to be less materialistic, get better grades, set higher goals, complain of fewer headaches and stomach aches and feel more satisfied with their friends, families and schools than those who don’t, studies show.

“A lot of these findings are things we learned in kindergarten or our grandmothers told us, but we now have scientific evidence to prove them,” says Jeffrey J. Froh, an assistant professor of psychology at Hofstra University in Hempstead, N.Y., who has conducted much of the research with children.

“The key is not to leave it on the Thanksgiving table,” says Robert Emmons, a professor of psychology at the University of California-Davis and a pioneer in gratitude research. And, he notes, “with the realization that one has benefited comes the awareness of the need to reciprocate.”

Philosophers as far back as the ancient Greeks and Romans cited gratitude as an indispensable human virtue, but social scientists are just beginning to study how it develops and the effects it can have.

The research is part of the “positive psychology” movement, which focuses on developing strengths rather than alleviating disorders. Cultivating gratitude is also a form of cognitive-behavioral therapy, which holds that changing people’s thought patterns can dramatically affect their moods.

It’s possible, of course, to overdo expressions of gratitude, particularly if you try to show it with a gift.

“Thanking someone in such a way that is disproportionate to the rela-

You’re Welcome
Researchers believe gratitude may actually help your mental and physical health.

For adults:
- More optimistic
- More social satisfaction
- Less envy
- Less depression
- Fewer physical complaints
- Better sleep
- More exercise

For children:
- Better grades
- Higher goals
- More satisfaction with lives, friends, family and school
- Less materialistic
- More desire to give back

Source: WSJ reporting

Find a ‘gratitude accountability buddy’
Swap gratitude lists with a friend; acknowledging where gratitude is due will keep it from sounding like bragging.

Keep a gratitude journal
Note one to three good things that happened during the day—and be specific.

Watch your language
Using disparaging words, even in talking to yourself, reinforces negative thoughts.

Pause mindfully
Several times a day, stop whatever you are doing and focus on the sounds, smells, touches around you.

Savor good times
Photographs, drawings and written accounts help reinforce memories. Collect them in scrapbooks or post around your home.

Go on a gratitude visit
Write a letter of thanks to someone who has helped you in the past. Read it in person or over the phone.

Count blessings, not sheep
Review events and people to be grateful for during the day as you’re falling asleep.
For Kids: an Exercise in Thanksgiving

Bonuses: What will you do to show your gratitude to this precious gift of life?

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benefits of gratitude</th>
<th>How to show gratitude</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increases happiness</td>
<td>- Write thank you notes</td>
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<td>Reduces stress</td>
<td>- Share gratitude with others</td>
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<td>Improves relationships</td>
<td>- Practice mindfulness</td>
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<td>Boosts overall health</td>
<td>- Express gratitude daily</td>
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Compliments: After the turkeys are gone