

Mental Health & Happiness

Be Kind to Your Mind, Body and Community

Maximize Gratitude: Express Appreciation and Savor Kindness

Learning Objectives

- Understand how gratitude benefits well-being
- Deepen relationships by expressing gratitude
- Build a gratitude practice
- Enrich daily life with acts of kindness

Lesson Key Points

- **Gratitude definition:** the quality of being thankful; readiness to show appreciation and to return kindness.
- **Cultivating gratitude supports health and happiness**
 - Practicing gratitude improves psychological health by increasing optimism and life satisfaction and decreasing negative feelings such as envy, resentment, frustration and regret
 - Gratitude increases the release of feel-good oxytocin and supports positive neuroplasticity which has a role in strengthening relationships
- **Gratitude supports flourishing**
 - Positive Psychology research findings: “When people report feeling grateful, thankful, and appreciative in their daily lives, they also feel more loving, forgiving, joyful and enthusiastic. Notably, the family, friends, partners and others who surround them consistently report that people who practice gratitude are viewed as more helpful, more outgoing, more optimistic, and more trustworthy.” ([Emmons & McCullough](#))
- **Writing exercises to practice gratitude**
 - Listing: People who make gratitude lists show more appreciation when receiving help, which leads to an attitude of gratitude. ([Froh, Sefick, & Emmons](#))
 - Journaling: Research shows that people who write about gratitude are more hopeful, exercise more, sleep better and have fewer medical appointments
 - Planning: Creating a personal gratitude plan increases motivation and establishes accountability
- **Expressing gratitude with kindness**
 - The experience and feeling of being kind is more important than the result of the action
 - When expressing your gratitude to someone, you get kindness and gratitude in return

Benefits of Practicing Gratitude



BODY

- Stronger immune systems and less depression
- Improved sleep
- Rise in amount of exercise
- Fewer medical appointments



MIND

- More joy, optimism and happiness
- Less feelings of loneliness, isolation and depression
- Increased life satisfaction and self-esteem
- Decreased negative feelings such as envy, resentment, frustration and regret
- More progress toward important personal goals



COMMUNITY

- Stronger relationships and more generous behavior
- Builds participation in community efforts
- Deepen relationships with loved ones
- Supports optimism and self-confidence, knowing that others are there for us

Source: Research by Robert A. Emmons PhD

Resources

Beach Cities Health District:

- [Mental Health & Happiness Series](#)
- [Virtual Events](#)
- [Health-Related Resources & Referrals](#)

Books:

- "Leading with Gratitude" by Star Sargent-Dargin
- "Flourish: A Visionary New Understanding of Happiness and Well-Being" by Martin E. Seligman
- "The Little Book of Gratitude: Create a life of happiness and wellbeing by giving thanks" by Robert A. Emmons, PhD

Websites:

- [Action for Happiness](#)
- [Greater Good in Action](#)
- [Happify.com](#)
- [Mindful.org](#)
- [Thnx4 is an online gratitude journal – a project of UC Berkeley's Greater Good Science Center](#)

Articles:

- ["Counting blessings versus burdens: an experimental investigation on gratitude and subjective well-being in daily life"](#)
- ["The Science and Research on Gratitude and Happiness"](#)
- ["Positive Psychology" by Robert A. Emmons, PhD](#)
- ["The Amazing Effects of Gratitude"](#)
- ["The Science of Giving: Why One Act of Kindness is Usually Followed by Another"](#)
- ["What Science Reveals about Gratitude's Impact on the Brain" by Glenn Fox](#)
- ["How to Practice Gratitude"](#)

Videos:

- [The Science of a Meaningful Life Video Series: "The Benefits of Gratitude" with Robert Emmons, PhD](#)
- ["The Many Ways that Gratitude Can Improve Your Health"](#)