

Gratitude: The Mood-Boosting Benefits of Saying Thanks

Well-Being Tips ✦



Have you ever noticed how even small acts of appreciation can lift your spirits? Practicing gratitude is something we can all do, and the well-being benefits are numerous. Practicing gratitude means taking a moment to pause and notice the things you appreciate about your life as it is today.

Ideas for Practicing Gratitude

Anyone can integrate small moments of appreciation into their daily life. Here are some ideas to get you started:

- ***The Gratitude Journal.*** Keep a small notebook next to your bed. Each night before bed, write down at least three things you feel grateful for. If more than three items come to mind, keep writing. Be sure to pause and savor each of the items on your list rather than just going through the motions. For example, if you write down “the color of fall leaves,” consider what it is you appreciate about the trees of orange and red lining the sidewalks this time of year. What emotions, sensations, or positive memories do they evoke? Allow yourself to enjoy those feelings. If you’re not someone who likes to keep written lists, you can make a mental gratitude list instead.
 - *Why is it helpful?* People who practice gratitude regularly experience less anxiety and depression, and better mental health overall ([Diniz et al., 2023](#)). This might be because unhelpful thinking patterns that contribute to depression and anxiety are often focused on what we wish was different in the past, or how we fear things may go wrong in the future. In contrast, gratitude grounds us in the present moment, inviting us to consider what is going right today ([Smith, 2023](#)).

- **Express gratitude to others.** Think about the people in your world who make your life a little bit easier or brighter. It could be the friendly cashier in the hospital cafeteria, a friend who is willing to listen when you need someone to talk to, or an educator who has gone above and beyond to support your growth. If you're comfortable doing so, send a note, email, or text expressing your appreciation for that person.
 - *Why it is helpful?* A positive, pro-social action like expressing your gratitude to another person stimulates oxytocin production, a hormone which can foster feelings of connection to others and promote relaxation ([LeWine, 2023](#)).
- **The Gratitude Alphabet Game.** Next time you're bored on a road trip or otherwise looking for a way to pass the time, try the gratitude alphabet game. Recite the alphabet A-Z, and list something or someone you are grateful for each letter of the alphabet.
 - *Why it is helpful?* Maybe you have a habit of ruminating about the past or worrying about the future when you spend stretches of time alone with nothing to do. Choosing to play the gratitude alphabet game instead of worrying or ruminating is a form of Habit Reversal Training. In other words, practicing this may help you replace unhelpful thinking habits with thinking habits that support your well-being ([Smith, 2023](#)).

Beware of Toxic Gratitude!

Don't let gratitude become toxic positivity. Sometimes people think they do not have a right to feel sad, depressed, or anxious because they "have so much to be grateful for." The truth is everyone has a right to feel their feelings. While it is important to recognize our good fortune, try not to leverage gratitude as an excuse to guilt yourself for also experiencing pain or hard times, like every human does.

The Medical Student Counseling Center (MSCC) offers free, confidential personal counseling, disability and accessibility services, academic and career development support, and wellness consultations to MD and PA students.

Contact MSCC

osac-mscc@uiowa.edu

(Email should not be used to share confidential information or in the event of an emergency.)

319-335-8056

If you are in crisis or you or someone you know is having thoughts of suicide,
call or text 9-8-8.

[Nondiscrimination statement](#) [Accessibility](#) [UI Indigenous Land Acknowledgement](#)

IOWA

Carver College
of Medicine