



EVER GRATEFUL

A grateful heart is a beginning of greatness. It is an expression of humility. It is a foundation for the development of such virtues as prayer, faith, courage, contentment, happiness, love, and well-being. ~ James E. Faust

Positive and optimistic people are often grateful for what they have and spend little time reviewing what they've lost. The power of a grateful attitude has been common knowledge for centuries. Today we know that an attitude of gratitude has many benefits, including improving psychological health and sleep, reducing toxic emotions, increasing happiness, reducing depression, and raising self-esteem.

WHAT ELSE CAN GRATITUDE DO?

Our groups at the treatment center begin each day by reviewing several things for which we are grateful. It's easy to hit the low-hanging fruit, such as being thankful for socks, coffee, and ice cream, but it is more meaningful to acknowledge people who have helped your recovery. Many of our clients appreciate this practice and take it with them after treatment ends. It has value far beyond what most people would ever imagine.

It's a mood-booster. Social scientist Robert Emmons developed a 21-day program for increasing thankfulness in his book, *Gratitude Works! A 21-Day Program for Creating Emotional Prosperity*. It involves keeping a gratitude journal, writing letters of gratitude to kind people, and sharing those letters in a face-to-face meeting to express thanks. People who went through the program said they felt more optimistic, more connected to others, and described better moods. Taking note of everyday thoughtfulness boosts relationships.

It's a relationship-strengthenener. When couples kept gratitude journals, chronicling things their partner did that they appreciated, there was a measurable positive change in their perception of their partner. It was a change that lasted in part because it translated to a greater willingness to talk through concerns. Couples said "It really transforms your perception of that person," and "We naturally have this scarcity mentality. When we write a gratitude journal or express gratitude, we transform our perception of reality from one of scarcity to one of abundance."

It enables you to bounce back from life's setbacks. Studies of women undergoing treatment for breast cancer and veterans who have suffered post-traumatic stress show that keeping gratitude journals helped them get through difficult times more quickly. Psychologists call this resilience and it means

the ability to bounce back. Resilient people take the worst life has to throw at them without allowing themselves to be defined by their setback. Optimism, forgiveness, and gratitude are all useful tools for building resilience.

It's a depression fighter. One study found that the simple act of writing down three things participants were grateful for was as effective at increasing a sense of well-being as spending an hour in therapy. Another study found that suicidal patients assigned gratitude exercises showed clinically significant therapeutic improvement.

It helps you achieve your goals. Study participants who kept gratitude lists over two months were more likely to report completion of key goals. Grateful people report higher levels of positive emotion, life satisfaction, vitality, optimism, and lower levels of depression and stress. It is one of the fastest ways to achieve a good mood and one of the best ways to sustain it.

PRACTICE BEING GRATEFUL

Like any lifestyle change, being grateful must be practiced. Begin by noticing what you have around you. In particular, notice who you have around you and how they have helped, encouraged, or supported you. Practice verbalizing your appreciation regularly.

GRATITUDE IN RECOVERY

Remain humble and accepting. Be grateful for another chance to get your life back. Review what you are thankful for and be aware of how others have been kind to you. Living with a humble outlook and a healthy view of what you have and who you are helps your recovery go beyond behavior and into deep life change. It affects your mood positively and offers encouragement along the journey.

A TIME TO REFLECT

1 Being grateful offers a variety of positive effects. Looking back over today's reflection, which of the healthy benefits would be most helpful in your life?

2 Reflect on how gratitude would help your relationships.

3 Like any lifestyle change, being grateful must be practiced. How can you incorporate gratitude into your life regularly?
