

A woman with long brown hair, wearing a white sleeveless dress, is running through a field of yellow flowers. She is smiling and looking towards the camera. The background is a bright, sunny outdoor setting with green foliage and trees.

The Practice Of
GRATITUDE

*To Promote Happiness And
Improve Your Quality Of Life*

By The American Institute of Health Care Professionals, Inc.

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Are You Unhappy?

Are you happy or unhappy? Do you see the glass half-empty or half full? On a scale of 1-10, where 1 is very unhappy and 10 is very happy, how would you rate your happiness level?

It is possible you may be unhappy without even realizing it. If you grew up in an unhappy home, you will equate a state of unhappiness with normality and according to the attachment theory of British Psychologist and psychiatrist John Bowlby, may even equate the pain of unhappiness with love.

You may not even know what true happiness feels like...It is possible you have a habit of thinking negative thoughts. Some or many of these may have been picked up in childhood and may be deeply ingrained beliefs. Even if you grew up in a relatively healthy and happy home environment, you may still have picked up some negative core beliefs. They may include thoughts such as "I am not good enough", "I am not worthy," or "I am unlovable."

If you relate to these or any of the following then you are probably feeling unhappy. However, the good news is, there is a lot you can do to change that and train your brain so that you experience a much greater sense of happiness and, the more you practice, the happier you will get.

Consider...

- You feel sad often
- You feel a constant sense of lack
- You are critical of yourself and others
- You feel lonely
- You feel you won't have enough and that you will never have enough
- Your life lacks meaning
- You tend to see the cup half empty rather than half full
- You feel constantly dissatisfied

If most or even any of the above is true, then you are probably experiencing more unhappiness than happiness.

While many may believe that it is material possessions and money that bring happiness, and sure, they have their place, but really true and lasting happiness stems from much more than material possession.

Happiness is a state of well-being, it is a mental and emotional disposition, and it can withstand financial discourse and the everyday negativity we encounter in our lives.

Gratitude is at the core of happiness, and something that can be experienced even during trying times and tribulations, to save your mind, spirit and even your body from the negative effects of negativity.

Read on to find out how gratitude really can boost your mood, increase your levels of satisfaction, and generally enhance the quality of your life.

What Does Gratitude Really Mean?

Have you ever wondered what all the fuss about gratitude was for? You know when to say thank you, right? But how deep does your gratitude really go?

The key to finding out how grateful you are is to consider how happy you are. Seems weird, doesn't it?

But think about it for a moment...

How do you feel on the inside?

Do you feel happy or sad? Angry or calm?

Peaceful and serene or in constant turmoil?

You may not know it yet, but gratitude is a feeling state that can bring about a deep sense of joy and happiness.



Robert Emmons, a research psychologist from UC Davis and author of "Thanks!: How the New Science of Gratitude Can Make You Happier", found that those engaged in regular gratitude practices actually experience greater life satisfaction, have increased levels of happiness and are less prone to depression.

An attitude of gratitude can improve sleep and bring about a feeling of contentment, as opposed to a sense of emptiness, hopelessness, longing, and constant dissatisfaction encouraged by our materialistic society, which tells us, we can never ever have enough.

Gratitude experts say that the more you feel grateful, the more you make room for increased abundance to come in to your life. Psychologist Barbara Fredrickson talks about the upward and downward spirals of emotion. Negative emotions lead to negative effect, or depression.

The more you are entrenched in these negative thoughts, the more your emotions spiral down to further negative states of unhappiness, such as sorrow, despair, which in turn lead to isolation and loneliness, and these in turn lead to deeper depression.

If you can generate an upward spiral of positive emotions, for example by practicing gratitude, it is possible to lead yourself out of a state of despair, hopelessness and sadness and into positive emotional states such as happiness, joy, contentment, love, appreciation and gratitude.



The more you can experience these happier states, the more chance you have of experiencing them again in the future. You build an ever-stronger basis for happiness and one of the ways to do this is through the practice of gratitude.

More Benefits of Gratitude

There are even more benefits to a practice of gratitude which include the following, all corroborated by scientific studies:

- When you practice gratitude, people tend to like you and warm to you more. Studies show that you become more trusting, more social, and more likeable. Studies also show that you are more likely to offer help to others when you feel gratitude.
- You tend to become more optimistic and this in turn has been shown to improve health.

- Gratitude makes you focus more on the important things in life, like your relationships with friends and family, and less on material benefits. People who are highly grateful are not as likely to be attached to the idea that material success brings happiness.
- Gratitude allows you to be satisfied and thankful for all you *do* have, instead of focusing on what you don't.
- If you receive words of appreciation at work you become more inclined towards volunteerism, and your morale is boosted.
- It can make you kinder, making you less prone to feel resentful and more likely to be generous.
- You are less envious of others.
- You feel better and your health improves, and you can experience increased levels of energy.
- Some studies even suggest that you get to live longer as a result of feeling grateful!

22 Ways To Practice Gratitude Daily

There are many ways to practice gratitude. Here are some ideas to get you started:

1. Keep a gratitude journal. At the end of each day, write down 3 -5 things for which you are grateful for in the day.
2. Make a gratitude jar: every time something wonderful happens, whether big or small, write it down on a piece of paper and fold it up and place it in the jar. Then, on a rainy day, you can pull out a paper and remind yourself of something wonderful that happened.
3. Keep a "Gratitude 365" photo album. Take a photo of something you feel grateful for every day and make an album. Create positive memories in this way by creating a physical manifestation and symbol of your gratitude. Take one photo a day for 365 days. Review it daily and of course at year-end.
4. Say a few words of heartfelt gratitude for your food before you eat a meal. Give thanks for all the people who worked hard to bring the food to your table. Give thanks for the farmer, the wholesalers, the retailers, the delivery people, and if you happen to be in a restaurant, the chef, cooks and servers who all work hard to bring you delicious and nourishing food. Give thanks for the animals and plants who ended up as food on your plate. Savor your food and try to eat mindfully. Focus on the texture, color, and flavor of the food as you chew each mouthful and give thanks for the nourishment this food brings to your body.
5. Keep a gratitude stone in your pocket. It may be a beautiful stone you found on the beach or on a walk, a stone you picked up on a holiday or other special time, one that already has a positive memory associated with it. Every time you touch the stone, it will trigger you to think of something you are grateful for.



Thank



You

6. Look in the mirror and give thanks to your body. Thank it for supporting you, carrying you, nourishing you. Thank each part for the constant and faithful work it does for you in keeping you active each and every day. Thank your legs for transporting you, your arms for being able to hug your loved ones, your hands for being nimble and able to lift and sort, and use tools, and give massages. Thank your eyes for seeing the way, your ears for hearing and your mouth for communicating and tasting. Go on in this way until you have thanked each part of your body, including the internal organs.
7. Give thanks for your breath. Life is a mystery and a miracle and every breath you take is a gift that has been given to you. Imagine yourself breathing in thanks, and breathing out peace, for example. As you breathe in, imagine the feelings of gratitude washing over your body on the inside and outside, instilling in you a sense of calm and contentedness. As you breathe out, let that sense of peaceful calm carry out into the world on the outbreath.
8. Keep a list of all adversity that you have triumphed over in your life, and keep it current. Gratitude for your own strength, and ability to walk to the other side when hard times hit hold a lot of value.
9. Consider the lessons you learned through adversity, and there is always at least one. Keep a track of those, be grateful for each one, as these help shape, and mold your own personal growth.
10. Give thanks for all the things we usually take for granted, and remember as a Westerner you are among the world's wealthiest people. Give thanks for hot and cold running water, a warm bed, a warm winter coat, and gloves, food on your table every day, electric light, your computer and TV, your car, good roads, public transport, and on and on. We have so much it is easy to take it for granted. Remember how lucky you truly are. You don't have to walk five miles a day in the burning heat to collect water for cooking



and drinking. You don't have to spend your day foraging for firewood. You have enough food to eat so you are not starving. Remember, you are wealthy and blessed; it is very good to cultivate an attitude that reflects this. This is purely and simply a more health giving strategy than to look at those who have more material wealth than you and allow yourself to feel negative emotions such as envy, greed, and a sense of lack or hopelessness.

11. Say thank you to all the people who serve you every day: the cashier at the grocery store; the bank clerk; the bus driver; your kids' teachers, and so on.

12. Remember to smile. Smiling brings happiness to others and this is reflected back to you when they in turn smile at you. Cherish these moments of human connectedness. We are social animals and connecting with others helps, us feel better.

13. Every morning, give thanks for the new day that has been gifted to you.

14. Be grateful for your ancestors: without them, you wouldn't even be here!

15. Show appreciation to your friends and family.

Make an effort to compliment them and encourage them in their efforts. Support them emotionally and be grateful for the sense of contribution and satisfaction this brings you.

16. Share what you are grateful for around the dinner table with your family and encourage each one of them to do the same. For example, it might be one thing you are grateful for that happened to you on that day. Say, "I am grateful for...what about you?" Go round the table in this way. If you have young children you could make a game out of it and see who can come up with the most things they are grateful for on that day...

17. Write a gratitude letter to someone who made a positive difference in your life and whom you have never properly thanked. Research shows that when we do this we can decrease feelings of depression and increase feelings of satisfaction and happiness.

18. Give thanks for every single thing you touch in a day...



19. Turn your challenges into teachings to be grateful for. Every cloud has a silver lining and when you can find it, you will enrich your life.
20. Think of everyone you meet, even your adversaries, as teachers. Be grateful for the lessons they give you.
21. Write a list of all your strengths and talents and be grateful for being you and all the wonderful gifts you bring to the world.
22. Remember, as the Tibetan Buddhists say, that death can come at any time. This is something we don't like to admit here in our western society, but it is a fact of life. By acknowledging that we live in the "cradle of death," we can recognize each moment we are alive as the precious gift that it is and treat life with appreciation and gratitude.

Final Thoughts

If you think you are feeling unhappy, or you find yourself too often being critical, resentful and ungrateful then cultivating an “attitude of gratitude” is one of the best things you can do for yourself in order to feel an increased sense of well-being and therefore become healthier.

With consistent daily practice, you really can turn your unhappiness on its head and develop a sense of true abundance, with appreciation for all the blessings in your life causing you to feel happier, wealthier, more satisfied, and less depressed.

Research shows us that practicing gratitude can increase your happiness levels by up to 25%! Now that’s a lot! Who wouldn’t jump at the chance to increase the amount of happiness they experience on a daily basis? You can enrich your relationships, work-life, and your inner sense of connectedness just by practicing gratitude.

You can enhance your overall quality of life and feel much better about yourself when you acknowledge all the wonderful things you have to be grateful for. Our thoughts are merely beliefs and not facts.

Why not buy into the positive thoughts that bring you to a place of increased joy, rather than choose to believe in the negative thoughts that hurt us, cause us harm, and literally bring us down? Gratitude helps us to spiral up out of negativity and depression into a more positive place of hope, appreciation, and acceptance of where we are at in our lives.

The more we focus on the positive factors in our lives and on what we have to be grateful for, the more we experience positive emotions. This creates what psychologist Barbara Fredrickson calls an upward spiral of positive emotion. She believes that the more happiness we can generate now will predetermine how much happiness we are likely to experience in the future. Gratitude can literally transform your life for the better, and make you more inclined to help others too.

With so many benefits, and so many fun ways to practice, what's holding you back from starting your own "attitude of gratitude"?

Whether you start with a gratitude journal or giving thanks for each meal, make a start and notice how you feel. If you feel better, it will motivate you to keep going.

Gradually you can build your gratitude practice until feeling grateful permeates every aspect of your life, and you can observe how it transforms everything from your relationships to your sense of abundance to your feelings of happiness.

It could just be the greatest gift you could ever give yourself, as well as those around you.

