

WELLNESS TIPS

GRATITUDE

Messages encouraging people to express gratitude are prevalent at Thanksgiving and some people have a tradition of sharing what they are grateful for when they gather over the holiday. Gratitude is a sense of appreciation of what an individual has or receives, for the goodness that is in their lives both within and outside of oneself.

It turns out that there are benefits to regularly acknowledging gratitude. A growing body of research has found an association between gratitude and more positive emotions, improved sleep, decreased stress, decreased physical pain, decreased depression, increased sense of well-being, and strengthened interpersonal relationships.

Gratitude can include memories of the past, current circumstances, or a hopeful, optimistic outlook about the future. It isn't limited to acknowledging major life events, but also recognizing and appreciating the small things in our lives, such as how good a new pair of running shoes feel, that first cup of morning coffee, or noticing a striking sunset.

Ways to Include Gratitude in Your Life

- Set aside time on a regular basis to focus on what you are thankful for
- Thank someone in person for something they have done
- Write a thank-you note of appreciation to someone
- Thank someone mentally
 - It can be beneficial even if you don't mail the letter or share your thoughts
- Keep a gratitude journal or list of things you are grateful for
 - Have a goal of naming several things that you appreciate
 - It doesn't have to be a long list - perhaps 3-5 items
- Prayer can be beneficial in expressing gratitude
- Mindfulness meditation
 - Include a specific word/mantra reflecting your gratitude
 - Or focus on something in the here and now, such as warmth of the sunshine, a cool breeze, a pleasant sound

There isn't one specific way to experience or express gratitude. Choose what is meaningful and feels right for you. Don't force the process – acknowledge what you truly feel grateful for, not what you

“should” feel grateful for. It might feel awkward at first if this hasn’t been something you have done regularly, but it becomes more comfortable with practice.

There is no correct frequency for practicing gratitude. Some people choose a daily practice, while others may choose weekly.

It can take several weeks to experience the on-going benefits associated with practicing gratitude, but there are also immediate benefits that can be experienced.

In addition to feelings of well-being, other emotions can also be triggered such as embarrassment, feeling indebted, or feeling guilty. And it doesn’t make feelings of pain or loss, for example, go away. While available research suggests many potential benefits from practicing gratitude, there is also evidence that it isn’t an effective practice for everyone. And research is lacking on how it may affect people with depression, anxiety or suicidal thoughts.

Practicing gratitude is easy to do and isn’t time consuming. It may contribute to feeling more grounded and hopeful by recognizing the positive aspects that are present in one’s life. Consider giving it a try.

Feel free to contact the MSCC to schedule an appointment for questions and concerns.

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See the MSCC Website for past Wellness Tips. <https://medicine.uiowa.edu/md/student-support/student-counseling/mscc-wellness-programs-and-resources>

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