

MAKING GRATITUDE A REGULAR HABIT

Most people count their blessings at Thanksgiving, but why stop there? These tips can help you stay intentionally thankful year-round.

Every November, American families make an event of setting aside one day for giving thanks. But feeling grateful doesn't have to be reserved for a special occasion.

"Gratitude is valuable when we can practice it in any given moment," says Patricia Carlson, program director for the organization Spirituality & Practice. "Gratefulness has to do with experiencing the fullness of life. Sometimes we look at it as a play on words—it's the great-fulness."

In fact, research shows that making gratitude a part of everyday living promotes good health, elevates happiness and boosts relationships. Psychologists say that perpetually grateful people are optimistic and energetic, which helps

them handle stress and illness better than those who focus on the negative.

Hofstra University psychologist Jeffrey Froh believes that. "Kids who have more grateful outlooks tend to be happier," he says. That gratitude, he says, is genuine appreciation for life and the people in it. "It's beyond, 'I have a nice car, nice clothes.'"

Sometimes it's tough to adopt a grateful approach when we may be facing hardships.

But it is possible—and important—to make time every day to acknowledge and express gratitude, even if it's only for the smallest things, which can add up.



Start a gratitude journal.

Every night, Kay P., of Fremont, California, has a “best part of the day” discussion with her husband and jots those best parts down in her gratitude journal. “I find myself looking out for that moment, thinking, ‘This could be the best part of the day.’ Keeping the journal helps remind me to be more aware, and it doubles my appreciation of all the good things that happen,” she says.

Set a goal for saying “please” and “thank you.”

Showing appreciation for nice gestures has a pay-it-forward benefit—you feel good giving thanks and so do the people receiving your appreciation, which makes them more likely to show gratitude to others. “Whether it’s in the grocery store or in your workplace, be aware when somebody does something kind for you,” says Carlson.

Make an effort to do something good.

No matter how small that effort might be, being a daily do-gooder sharpens your own appreciation for good things done to you, and pays big dividends in your sense of gratitude and well-being. Tuck plastic bags into your purse or pocket and fill them with litter as you walk. Read the news with an eye toward the positive; instead of feeling down about local or global troubles in the news, find a way to help. Making a small donation or volunteering can turn a bad story into a good one.



Schedule regular gratitude calls with friends or family members.

These could be by phone or in person. Use that time to go beyond small talk. Tell each other what you’re thankful for, and you might be encouraged and surprised to hear what makes the people you love happy in return. When you voice what makes you feel grateful, it can amplify the feeling—which benefits both of you.

Connect with people.

Make a point of disconnecting from email or the TV and interacting with others. “We’ve never been surrounded by more people than we are right now, but we’ve never been more disconnected either,” Froh says. He suggests visiting people you value, or those who may need human contact—an elderly relative or neighbor. “These visits lead to more happiness,” he says. “Those connections make all the difference.”

Read books on gratitude.

Some to check out: Thank You Power: Making the Science of Gratitude Work for You, by Deborah Norville; Discovering Your Inner Samurai, by Dr. Susan L. Reid; and Attitudes of Gratitude and Giving Thanks, by M.J. Ryan.

