

Gratitude Practice

What is it and why does it matter?

Gratitude is defined as the quality of being thankful; readiness to show appreciation for and to return kindness.

Professor Robert Emmons and colleagues(1) have studied the effects of gratitude on physical health, psychological wellbeing, and in our relationships with others. He describes gratitude as “First, it’s an affirmation of goodness. We affirm that there are good things in the world, gifts and benefits we’ve received. Secondly, we recognize that the sources of goodness are outside of ourselves. ... We acknowledge that other people—or even higher powers, if you’re of a spiritual mindset—give us many gifts, big and small, to help us in our lives.” (2) Their studies find that people of all ages who practice expressing gratitude consistently report a host of benefits such as: Less bothered by aches and pains, lower blood pressure, feel more alert, joyful, optimistic, forgiving, less lonely or isolated.

What you can practice

There are many ways to build your ability to give and receive (3)(4). Feel free to do a web search on ‘how to practice gratitude or kindness’ to explore different methods that may work well for you.

Three practices that my students have found to be effective:

- Keep a gratitude journal – regularly record the things for which you are grateful. Recall ordinary events, personal attributes, valued people or other living beings in your life...
- Meditate to more holistically reveal what is going on. The Naikan technique involves reflecting quietly for 5 to 30+ minutes on three questions. Let’s start with the first two: 1) “What gifts or benefits have I received from ____? (a specific person or situation, or specific time period like today or last week)”. 2) “What have I given to ____?” Be creative and notice both small things we frequently overlook, as well as the obvious stuff.
- Each day, practice grateful motions, such as smiling at people, saying and genuinely feeling “thank you”, and acknowledging specifically what others do (verbally or in writing). Find ways to be kind, even in small ways, to people you know and don’t know.

(1) https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/why_gratitude_is_good

(2) <https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/topic/gratitude/definition>

(3) https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/ten_ways_to_become_more_grateful1/

(4) <https://www.yogajournal.com/meditation/cultivate-goodness-practice-lovingkindness>

