

Healthy & Resilient You



A Grateful MIND

Gratitude Practices for
a Healthy Mind & Body


Reap the Benefits of a Grateful Mind

Conventional wisdom has taught us (and rightly so, it turns out) that being grateful is also great for us. Thanks to a number of breakthroughs in scientific understanding, we're beginning to recognize both how and why gratitude has such profound effects on our physical and mental wellbeing. Not only does being grateful make sense on a gut level, the practice also makes use of hard-wired connections in our mind and body, activating fundamental neurochemical pathways shown to be connected to improved moods. Read on to discover how you can tap into these pathways using simple and meaningful gratitude exercises.


Gratitude: The Virtuous Cycle

One way to reap the benefits of gratitude is to keep a gratitude journal, which researchers have found can drastically improve a person's level of optimism, and consequently, their wellbeing. In one study, researchers examined the differences between a group of adults who kept a weekly gratitude journal and those who did not. Those who wrote down what they were grateful for demonstrated a more optimistic outlook, an improvement in exercise routine, and a decrease in physical aches and pains compared to those who didn't keep a journal. Researchers suggest that showing

gratitude works in what they called a virtuous cycle: the more you're grateful for, the better you think and feel, and the more you have to be grateful for.

 **PRO TIP:** *If you're going to use a gratitude journal, studies show that weekly (or even bi-weekly) entries are more helpful than daily ones. Also, go for quality rather than quantity: logging fewer, more meaningful events has shown a greater benefit to positive thinking than an equal or longer list of superficial thanks.*

A different study tested the effects of gratitude on anxiety and symptoms of depression. After controlling for the amount of sleep their subjects were getting, researchers found that showing gratitude can directly help mitigate the symptoms of depression, and it can actually help patients sleep better, indirectly helping to lower levels of anxiety.

 **PRO TIP:** *To help your mind relax for a better night's sleep, try building a gratitude trigger around a nighttime routine right before you go to bed. Maybe turning down the covers or brushing your teeth can be your cue for taking a moment to reflect in gratitude.*

Neurochemistry and Going with the Flow

When science looks at how the brain acts when on a gratitude trip, it becomes clearer why being grateful can have so many physical and psychological benefits. Scientists with the National Institutes of Health (NIH) tracked blood flow in the brain during periods of gratitude, looking for neurochemical clues to the behind-the-scenes effects. They found a correlation between higher gratitude levels and increased activity in the hypothalamus. This area of the brain controls bodily functions such as eating and sleeping, and is associated with the maintenance of metabolism and stress — all of which contribute to mental and physical wellbeing.

They also discovered that gratitude is intricately linked with production of the “feel good” neurotransmitter, dopamine. By making you feel good after completing a certain action or practice, dopamine encourages your

body to repeat that action. This takes us back to the idea of gratitude being a virtuous cycle. If a gratitude practice makes your brain feel good, your brain will encourage you to repeat it.

Redirecting Attention on the Good

Our brains, though powerful and amazing computers, have a pretty limited attention capacity. This is another reason why gratitude can have such a powerful effect on how we feel. If you purposely give your brain something positive to focus on, it will do just that, leaving less room for pessimistic thoughts. By routinely focusing attention on what you’re already grateful for, you can help establish a thought pattern that kick starts our old friend, the virtuous cycle. Here are a few ways you can incorporate gratitude exercises into your daily or weekly routines, helping them to become second nature:

Rise and Shine: If it takes a bit of added effort to get up in the morning and off to work, instead of hitting the snooze button (...again), try a quick, energizing gratitude exercise. Think of one person you’re looking forward to seeing or communicating with that day, and why you’re thankful for them.

Loving the Little Things: For a simple gratitude exercise, focus on little things that we might take for granted. The clean, safe drinking water from the tap for your morning coffee. Coffee. The light coming from your desk lamp. The refrigerator chilling your lunch. Your lunch. When you stop to think about it, these are all tiny miracles adding up to a grateful day.



Looking for more information about incorporating gratitude and mindfulness? Check out the Resilience Hub™. If you are a first-time user, type in your company name to access the site. www.ConcernResilienceHub.com

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If you find your level of stress is impacting your well-being, you can contact us for additional help and support.

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