



## Concern Healthy & Resilient You

# Thanksgiving

A powerful new take on gratitude practices



When we say, “gratitude practice,” what does that mean to you? Maybe gratitude has been a lifesaver, helping carry you through a rough time, or adding extra joy and energy to everyday life.

You also might picture having to wait to chow down on green bean casserole at Thanksgiving while people go around the table saying what they’re thankful for. Or imagine something vaguely woo-woeey like putting your hand on your heart once a day and thinking up gems like, “I’m grateful for puppies!”

(Actually, we are extremely grateful for puppies. Puppies are little furry miracles. But puppies, by themselves, aren’t enough to build a sustainable gratitude practice.)

So, how can we regularly incorporate more gratitude into our lives, and why would we even want to?



### Why Be Grateful?

We’ve known for a while that adopting an attitude of gratitude can have a profoundly positive effect on our physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing. Science validates those benefits, showing that a [regular gratitude practice](#) can have both short and [long-term impacts on our neurochemistry](#) and physiology to:



**Reduce depression, stress, and anxiety.**



**Improve sleep quality.**



**Lower diastolic blood pressure and improve heart health.**

Beyond the biological impacts, gratitude practices serve an increasingly important function in our always-on-and-hustling society. These days, particularly with the prevalence of algorithmically narrow news and social media feeds, it’s easy to get stuck in negativity.

That kind of repetitive negative thinking can start to build default neural pathways in our brains, becoming second nature if we’re not careful. Gratitude exercises help us stop the doom looping and encourage us to mindfully focus on something good instead.

## How to Dig Deeper.

While tried and true practices like daily journaling or pausing for moments of reflection can deliver benefits, a growing body of research indicates that we can maximize the positive impacts by developing deeper, and more meaningful gratitude habits. Here are some ideas for getting started.

**Master Tip: Tell Stories** – Stories are powerful emotional generators, and science shows their appeal is universal. A recent psychological study placed participants in isolation, hooked them up to body monitors, and then played a recording of the same story for them. Amazingly, all participants experienced similar physiological responses like rising and falling heart rate and brain activity at the same points within the story.

Whichever of the following gratitude techniques you try, storifying them can greatly increase their impact. In other words, don't just say, "I'm grateful for puppies!" say why: "Because they offer unconditional love, are un-self-consciously playful and open, and have cute little snoots that make me laugh."



**Journal Less about More** – Writing down things that you're grateful for every day can get stale and start to feel like homework. Journaling less frequently and in more detail can deliver stronger results while being more enjoyable and manageable. No matter the frequency, instead of just writing that you're grateful, elaborate by including details of why you're grateful. *Oh, coffee! Before you came along today, I was glum and droopy. Then, there you were, smelling and tasting like life and helping me open my eyes to see this amazing new day! You've made me so happy!!*



**Vary Your Daily Practice** – You've probably seen people participating in some kind of 30-Days of Gratitude exercise on social media—

particularly during November. This usually takes the form of a brief daily gratitude post about something or someone. You can take the program deeper by planning different positive activities, like directly expressing gratitude to someone important, or stepping outside for five minutes to breathe deeply and be happy for sunshine and Vitamin D. (Google *30-Day Gratitude Calendar* for some good ideas.)



**Build Connections** – We do have a lot of common miracles in our modern lives that we can take for granted. Clean running water on demand. Bananas in the winter. Practically every song, TV show, or movie ever, on demand. While it's great to celebrate those, take a minute to think about all the people, advancements, and effort that go into providing them. *When you finally get to eat that green bean casserole at Thanksgiving, think about the family cook(s) who lovingly made it, the person who stocked the groceries, and the people who grew and harvested the ingredients.*



**Give Others Reasons to be Grateful** – This is a big one. Don't stay focused exclusively on yourself. Be kind. [Model goodwill](#). Open doors. Give sincere, thoughtful compliments. Thank someone important for the impact they've made on you. Smile more. Getting a return smile, or a surprised thank you will lift your spirits a thousand times more than writing a grateful poem about your lunch.

By pausing regularly to foster gratitude in ourselves and others, we can build and strengthen new and positive neural pathways. Over time, and with practice, that can build healthy habits, improve wellbeing, and encourage our thoughts to automatically wander down brighter paths.

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