

Developing the Habit of Gratitude

There is a great deal of research that suggests an “attitude of gratitude” will contribute to your happiness. As Dr. Sonya Lyubomirsky notes in her book *The How of Happiness*, “It is important to understand why and how expressing gratitude works to make you happier.” She explains that expressing gratitude encourages you to savor life’s positive experiences, bolsters your self-worth, helps you cope with stress and trauma, and helps you build social bonds with others. Dr. Lyubomirsky also notes that “the practice of gratitude is incompatible with negative emotions and may actually diminish or deter such feelings as anger, bitterness, and greed.”

Expressing your gratitude in a rote and unthinking way, however, won’t really add much to your emotional health or your feelings of well-being. For example, Karen decided to write on her Facebook page about what she was grateful for every day for a month. By the second week, she was writing about being grateful for a fresh donut and that she found her favorite lipstick on sale. That’s *not* what we mean by a habit of gratitude. Gratitude is a sincere and heartfelt appreciation of what we have in our lives and an action that helps us truly feel this emotion.

To keep your gratitude meaningful, it is recommended that you try different activities to express your gratitude rather than doing the same thing over and over again. You don’t have to do something every day. Completing a gratitude activity just once or twice a week will help you integrate these feelings into your everyday life.

Here are some suggestions of things you can do.

Write down your feelings of gratitude in a journal.

Write a note or email to someone who has gone out of their way for you.

Make a call to someone who has made a difference in your life.

Give a donation to a charity to honor something you appreciate.

Meditate on something that has made you feel particularly grateful.

Other ideas:

Now on the next page write down what you were grateful for, what you did, and how it affected your mood or behavior.

