



Gratitude Takeaway

Did you know that the simple act of expressing gratitude can do wonders for your health and well-being? Research shows that grateful thinking significantly impacts elements of both physical and psychological health and well-being, including:

- Increased happiness
- Better sleep
- Increased energy
- Reduced anxiety and depression
- Reduced pain¹

But the benefits of gratitude don't end with mental and physical health. Cultivating this quality can also improve your career and your relationships. Research, for example, suggests a strong correlation between gratitude and strong meaningful relationships.

Another great thing about gratitude is that the more you practice it, the more grateful and positive it makes you feel.

Most of us could use more gratitude in our lives. But where do we begin?

To get started, consider adding these exercises to your daily life to reap the rewards of a grateful attitude.

1. Wake up with gratitude

One of the best ways to practice gratitude is to get into the habit of expressing it as soon as you wake up. Dr. Christine Cronin suggests starting the day by going over a mental list of 10 things you are grateful for.

Immediately starting with gratitude as you wake up sets a positive tone for the rest of the day. You can start by simply saying "thank you for this new day," and go from there. Along with things you are grateful for in the present, you can also say thank you for the blessings and opportunities you will receive throughout the day.

2. Say a prayer

Many people also start out their day with a prayer, and for good reason. Prayer can help relieve depression and tension, and it promotes greater security, peace, and meaning in our lives thus improving your spiritual well-being. One reason for these benefits is that praising and thanksgiving are key components of prayer. Prayer doesn't have to be a religious thing. Prayer is simply a positive thought expressed towards whoever or whatever you choose.

Sometimes our prayers are less about gratitude and more about our own wants, needs, and struggles. If you find that your prayers focus too much on the negative and what you don't have, focus on taking up most of your prayer with expressions of gratitude. You can also frame your problems in terms of gratitude. For example, you could say something like, "I'm thankful for this challenge I have today and the opportunity it will provide to help me grow and improve."

3. Keep a daily gratitude journal

In his book *Thanks*, Dr. Robert Emmons explains one of his studies in which one group of subjects were told to write 5 things they were grateful for each week, while another group was told to write 5 things they were displeased about each week. After 10 weeks, the results revealed that those who wrote about gratitude were 25% happier than the other group and the control group. Additionally, they reported more exercise and fewer health complaints than the other groups.

While writing about gratitude in general can be beneficial, research also shows that the more specific you are about what you are grateful for, the more beneficial your gratitude journaling will be. A study from the University of Southern California backs up this research. In their study, the researchers found that test subjects who wrote 5 sentences about one thing they were grateful for were happier and more energetic compared to test subjects who were asked to write about just one sentence about 5 things they were grateful for over the course of 10 weeks.⁵

So when you're journaling, make sure to be specific! Instead of saying you're grateful for your spouse, for example, go into detail about why you are grateful for them, citing specific personality traits, experiences, and things they have done for you in the past.

4. Meditate with gratitude

Gratitude expression and meditation are two wellness practices that can significantly increase your happiness. Combining them into one meditation experience can make your results even more significant.

Instead of keeping your mind clear like you would with typical meditation, gratitude meditation involves concentrating and reflecting on being grateful for everything in your life—both the bad and the good. You can meditate on the happiness the good things in your life bring, as well as recognize the opportunities for growth the seemingly bad things in life can bring about.

Gratitude meditation can do amazing things for your confidence and overall sense of well-being. There are several YouTube videos that can guide you in the process of gratitude meditation. You can also follow a meditation script like this one.

Gratitude Meditation

1. Take some time to place yourself in a comfortable position. Take a few deep breaths and let your chest rise and fall with each inhalation and exhalation. When you are ready, let your eyes drift closed.
2. As you continue to breathe slowly and deeply, let your attention rest gently on your breath. Feeling the movement as it enters and exits your body. Each time you exhale, let go of any tension. Relax your face, your shoulders, your belly, your legs.
3. On your next exhale, settle your attention to the area around your heart. Focus on the feelings of love, compassion, empathy, forgiveness.
4. With your attention on your heart center, bring to mind something or someone you are grateful for.
5. As you continue with your easy, relaxed breathing, perhaps you feel gratitude for being alive, or healthy.
6. Perhaps you are grateful for the abundance of nature that produces food to nourish your body, and beautiful scenery to nourish your soul.
7. Bring your attention to people who truly nourish you in your life and how they bless you with their presence.
8. Feel gratitude for your own life and the many gifts you have been blessed with.
9. Now bring your attention to how this gratitude feels in the area around your heart. With each inhale, let this feeling grow outwards. Expanding to fill your chest, your arms and hands, your legs and feet. With each inhale this feeling grows, filling you up.
10. And now, even as you return your attention to your breath, let your body remember the sensations of your gratitude.

5. Take a savouring walk

Walks are not only great for exercise and fresh air, but also offer an opportunity to reflect on the simple things in life for which you are grateful. To start, you may simply express thanks that you are able to take a walk and get away from your busy life for a moment. As you walk, observe and acknowledge the simple wonders around you that you often take for granted. For instance, the warm sun on your body, the feel of the breeze, beautiful flowers, and so on.

Similar to the research done on gratitude journaling, there is evidence that a savouring walk increases feelings of gratitude. In one study, a “positive focus” group was asked to observe as many pleasant things around them as possible. Alternatively, a “negative focus” group was asked to observe as many negative things around them as possible.

We’ll bet you can guess which group felt better on their walk...

That’s right. Happiness, appreciation, and gratitude was significantly greater for the “positive focus” group in comparison to the “negative focus” and control groups.⁶

6. Commit to one complaint-free day a week

The savouring walk study and Dr. Emmons’s journaling study also apply to our next gratitude exercise that will change your life. Both studies indicated that the “negative focus” people in these groups found that consistent complaining led to decreased happiness. So an important message we can take from this research is to do your best to stay positive and avoid complaining.

Of course, completely avoiding complaining is easier said than done. But to get started, you can commit yourself to one day a week when you avoid complaints. This will help you to avoid thinking of yourself as a victim and start taking more responsibility for your life. As a side note, it will likely be easier to choose a weekend as opposed to a weekday to complete this exercise.

7. Write Thank You notes(or Feedback Fish)

In his book *365 Thank Yous: The Year a Simple Act of Daily Gratitude Changed My Life*, John Kralik explains how writing one Thank You note each day for 365 consecutive days transformed his life. John notes starting this exercise with everyone that gave him a Christmas gift, and then expanding to co-workers, then to other people he interacted with, such as a barista that greeted him by name at his local Starbucks.

From this experience, John realized that writing the Thank You notes helped him focus on little things he had been taking for granted and be more positive about the bad things in his life. After his 365-day exercise was over, he noticed that his life had changed significantly. He lost weight, his failing business was prospering, and his relationships with family and friends had improved.

It may seem like an insignificant thing, but writing one Thank You note (or feedback fish) a day can truly change your life as well as the lives of those around you.

8. Use gratitude affirmations

While gratitude in itself is an affirmation of goodness, specific gratitude affirmations can be more easily absorbed by your subconscious mind. Reciting these affirmations helps your mind naturally shift to a positive outlook so you can experience the benefits of gratitude consistently.

The key with affirmations is to focus on the ones that you value and that resonate with you. Consider routinely reciting a few of the below affirmations below based on what you value and your specific situation. These and other similar affirmations could be used in your morning gratitude routine, with your gratitude rock, and during your gratitude meditation.

- I am grateful now, and that is keeping the door open for more blessings.
- My life is filled with an abundance of goodness.
- The universe supports me and all my desires.
- I am grateful to my body and all the things it does for me.
- I experience gratitude for everything I have in my life.
- I am blessed.
- I am so happy and grateful now that I weigh (desired weight) pounds.
- I see the beauty in nature that surrounds me.

9. Get a gratitude rock

One of the challenges with gratitude is remembering to practice it every day. This is where a gratitude rock can help. The first step is to find an attractive-looking rock that you don't mind seeing every day. You may turn this into an activity where you go find a smooth rock at a river bed. You can even write or engrave the word "gratitude" on the rock. If you're looking for a quicker solution, you may choose to just buy a gratitude rock.

Placing this rock in a prominent place will remind you to express gratitude. Each time you touch the rock, think of something you are grateful for. You may decide to get a couple gratitude rocks, or keep a small one in your pocket to remind you when you are away from your desk or your home as well.

Using a gratitude rock can change your life in many ways, including helping you:

- Think more positively
- Live in the present
- Give back to others
- Make your health a priority
- Be more successful in your career⁷

10. Volunteer

Though it may seem like a sacrifice, volunteering is actually great for your health and well-being. One reason for this is that the act of volunteering provides you with a healthy dose of gratitude. Research confirms that the act of volunteering promotes greater optimism, a greater sense of control, and an overall greater sense of well-being.⁸

When it comes to volunteering, it's best to look into causes that are meaningful to you. If you love nature, for example, you could volunteer at a national park. Or if you're an animal lover, you can volunteer at your local animal shelter. Because volunteering engages your body and mind, it can potentially offer more benefits than simply expressing your gratitude verbally.