



Gratitude and Happiness

One way of pulling yourself out of the dumps is to focus on what you are grateful for. Some people have a tendency to complain often, and those people tend to be chronically unhappy. Research shows that when people take the time to notice what is good about life, it can help immensely in improving mood.

Being grateful is about much more than saying thank you – it’s about showing appreciation for life and not taking things for granted. People who focus on what they are grateful for tend to be less depressed, more adaptive, have stronger social relationships, and are in better physical health (Wood, Froh, & Geraghty, 2010).

Gratitude Exercises to TRY

- **Keep a daily gratitude journal:** Each day, list at least five things you are grateful for. As you get more comfortable with this exercise, increase the daily list to ten or more!
 - **Be thankful.** Thankfulness is an attitude that you can practice and develop. Cultivating gratitude as the norm in your life will make keeping a gratitude journal much easier.
 - **Write each day.** Make it a rule to write down a certain number of items you are thankful for each day. Avoid repeating the same entries, if possible. This will make writing in the journal more challenging as times goes on, but that’s how your awareness and thankfulness will grow. You’ll be challenging yourself to find new things to be thankful for that perhaps you never noticed before.
 - **Start with the basics.** It’s easiest to recognize things that sustain your life here on Earth, like your house, your bed, your clothes, food, etc. Be sure to explain how this makes you feel and why you are grateful for it.
 - **Describe how you are grateful for yourself.** You can start by feeling grateful to have the body you have, even if you don’t like everything about it. Avoid the trap of being grateful for something that is better than what *other people* have. Instead, compare whatever you are grateful for with how you would feel if you didn’t have it at all.
 - **Think about your abilities.** You may start with basic abilities like your ability to see, your ability to hear, your ability to walk. Then progress to the extended abilities that are unique to you. Think about skillful things like dancing, singing, writing, and features that make up your character... like your listening skills, your skills in cheering people up, your skills at being a good friend, etc.
- **Play the gratitude game:** Everyone sits in a circle and one person is designated the leader. The leader starts with “I am grateful for...” and chooses anything that starts with “A”. The leader then passes the prompt either right or left, and the next person says, “I am grateful for...” and chooses anything that starts with “B”, then “C”, etc. Each person has the right to pass.
- **Call or text with a close friend about your gratitude:** Write out on paper what that message would be. Or, pretend to be calling or texting and speak out loud what you would communicate to that friend.



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