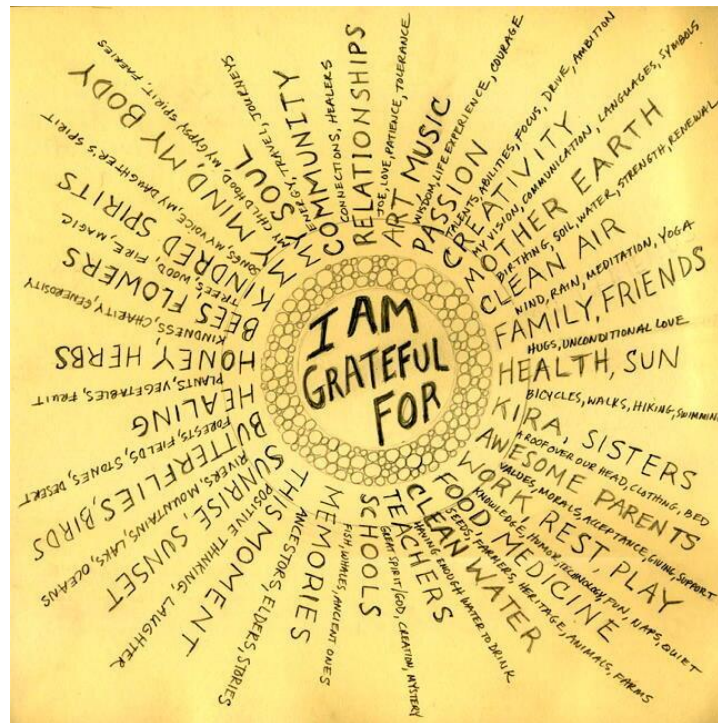


The Benefits of Gratitude



Sharon Myers RN, MA

What is Gratitude?

- Latin: The root *gratia* means grace or gratefulness. “Having to do with kindness, generousness, gift, the beauty of giving and receiving, or getting something for nothing” (Pruyser, 1976)
- Buddhist: The Pali word for gratitude is *katannuta*.

The word *katannuta* consists of two parts:

- *Kata* which means that which has been done, especially that which has been done to one, to oneself
- *Annuta* which means knowing or recognizing



The knowing or recognizing what has been done for one's benefit

What is Gratitude?

- Is gratitude an emotion, and attitude, a habit, a personality trait, or a coping response ? Or something else ?
- Most importantly, gratitude is a strength that can be enhanced with awareness and practice.
- It's a tool to have in your tool box

“

Gratitude and attitude are
not challenges; they are
choices.

ROBERT BRAATHE

GRACIOUSQUOTES.COM

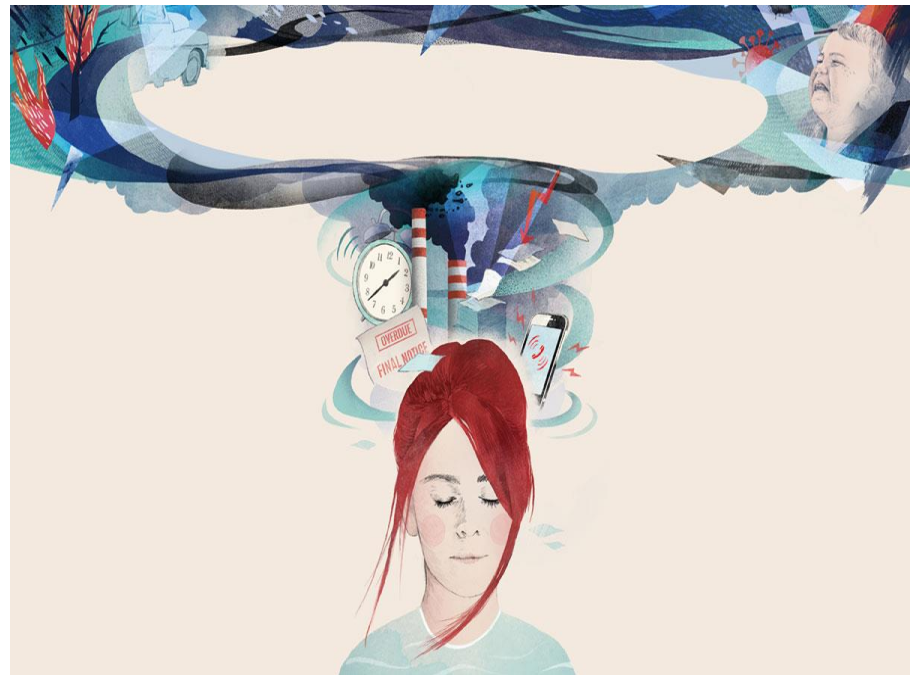


Gratitude During Hard Times

- Gratitude is a **strength** that can be enhanced with awareness and practice
- Gratitude involves noticing and then having a deep sense of appreciation and thankfulness for the positive aspects of our lives.
- It does not mean we ignore the hard or negative aspects, but rather that we **see and include** the other meaningful, positive and true aspects that are happening in the situation
- When disaster strikes, gratitude provides a perspective from which we can view life in its entirety and not be overwhelmed by temporary circumstances
- Feelings follow from the way we look at the world, thoughts we have about the way things are, the way things should be, and the distance between these two points.

Gratitude in the Midst of Chaos

- Gratitude can help us put the pieces of the story together in a way that makes sense and is helpful in our lives



What Does the Research Show?

Gratitude and Health: An Updated Review

- A Pub Med review of gratitude studies
- Includes 64 peer reviewed articles published in academic journals
- Looked at physical as well as psychosocial outcomes



Jans-Beken, L., Jacobs, N., Janssens, M., Peeters, S., Reijnders, J., Lechner, L., & Lataster, J. (2019). Gratitude and health: An updated review. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 15(6), 743–782

Results

- Decreased diastolic BP noted immediately after gratitude journaling (Jackowska et al., 2016)
- No conclusive improvement in heart rate variability, inflammatory markers, pain perception (Jans-Beken et al, 2019)
- Improved sleep quality (Jackowska et al., 2016, Southwell et al., 2017)
- Improved adherence to cardiac health behaviors (Millstein et al., 2016)
- Significant reduction in level of depression immediately after the intervention , at 1 month , and 3 months(Cheng, 2015 and O'Connell et al., 2017)
- Significant reduction in anxiety post treatment, and at 3 months (Jackowsky et al., 2016 Ramarez et al., 2014, Southwell et al., 2017)

Gratitude Improves Our Social Connections and Relationships

Having good social relationships (both romantic and/or platonic) predict better mental and physical health (Bartlet et al., 2010, Jans-Beken et al., 2019)

- Increased relationship commitment,
- Increased ability to relate to others
- Increased formation of new social relationships
- Increased ability to elicit appreciating behavior



Gratitude Improves our Social Relationships

- Expressing gratitude to others reminds us of why our friends or partners are valuable and worth holding on to
- Having a more positive view of another leads to greater trust.
- When we trust someone we feel more comfortable talking through disagreements
- Gratitude enhances empathy and understanding, leading to better communication and conflict-resolution skills
- One person's gratitude inspires the other to act in a similar manner (toll booth or Starbucks example)

Gratitude Study # 1

Counting Blessings versus Burdens

201 undergraduate participants

Assigned randomly to one of 3 groups (asked to journal weekly regarding gratitude, hassles or life events)

10 week study

Measured positive affect, exercise, prosocial behavior

- Grateful journal group significantly higher ratings of joy and happiness ($r=.41$ and $.42$, $p<.01$).
- Significantly greater optimism regarding the upcoming week ($r=.24$, $p<.01$)
- Significantly more favorable life appraisal ($r=.22$, $p<.01$)
- Significantly greater amount of time spent exercising (1.5 more hours per week, $p<.01$)
- Conclusion: “Relative to focusing on complaints or on neutral life events, a focus on “counting one’s blessings’, leads to enhanced psychological and physical functioning”

Emmons, R. A., & McCullough, M. E. (2003). Counting blessings versus burdens: An experimental investigation of gratitude and subjective well-being in daily life. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 84(2), 377–389

Gratitude Study # 2

Counting Blessings vs Burdens versus Social Comparison

157 undergraduate participants

Randomly assigned to gratitude, hassles or social comparison journaling for 13 days

Measured positive affect, prosocial behavior, exercise

Results:

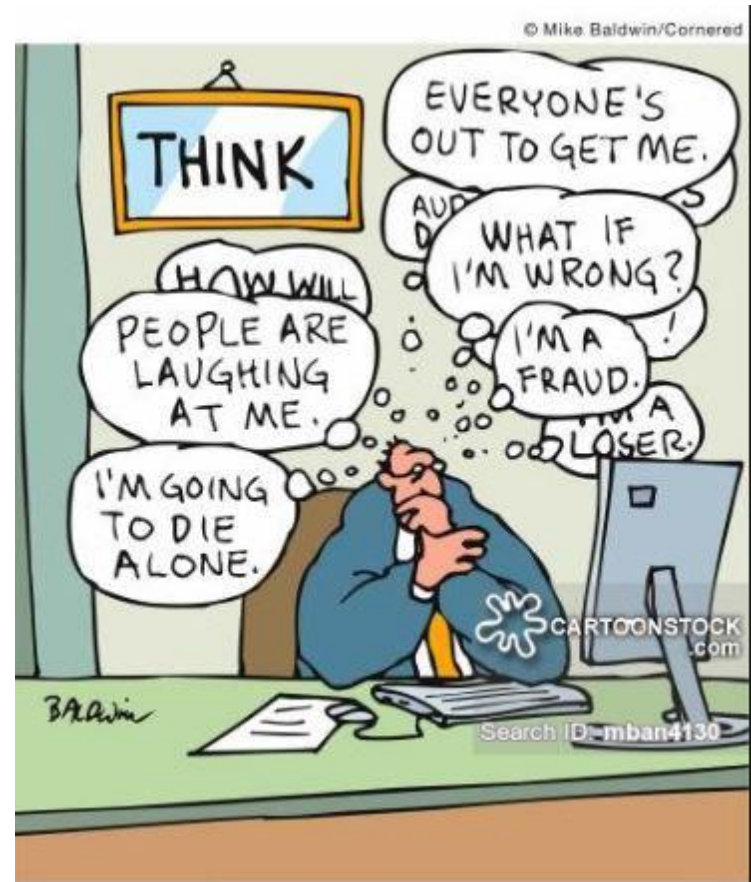
Gratitude group showed increased positive affect during the 13 day period (attentive, determined, energetic, enthusiastic, interested, joyful, strong) versus the hassles group. No effect seen from the social comparison group

The gratitude group were more likely to reports having offered emotional help to others than those in either the hassles group or the social comparison group.

No difference in exercise

Key Components for Creating a Gratitude Habit

- Attention to the good things we've received, or the good things that are present even during a hard situation
- Acknowledge the role other people play in bringing goodness into our lives



Ways to Practice Gratitude

- Keep a journal
- 3 Good Things Exercise
- Share your gratitude with others (your relationships will become stronger)
 - Telling someone what you appreciate about them
- Go through the motions of gratitude such as smiling, saying hello to others, saying thank-you, look beyond the grey dot
- Practicing a gratitude reflection



A Gratitude Reflection

Settle yourself in a relaxed posture. Take a few deep, calming breaths to relax and center and close your eyes.

Imagine a warm yellow sunlight above your head that is slowly spreading down through your head, your face, to your chest, now down to your stomach, through your hips, thighs, and into your thighs and calves, warming and relaxing your muscles as it moves down into your feet and toes and into the ground beneath you. You feel relaxed and at ease.

Let your awareness move to your immediate environment: Notice all the things you can smell, taste, touch, hear. Say to yourself: “For this, I am grateful.”

Next bring your mind to someone in your life who has made your life easier, or someone who is easy to love. Thank them for what they have done to help you out or for how they have made your life better.

Next, bring to mind other people in your life to whom you are close: your friends, family, partner, teachers, Say to yourself, “For this, I am grateful.”

Now send your gratitude to every single person you have encountered so far today. Thank them for making your life more interesting, richer or for ways they have helped you grow and learn about yourself.

Next, turn your attention onto yourself: you are a unique individual, blessed with imagination, the ability to communicate, to learn from the past and plan for the future, to overcome any pain you may be experiencing. Say to yourself: “For this, I am grateful.”

Finally, rest in the realization that life is a precious gift. That you have a precious gift of life, health and physical capabilities, tears, joy and everything in between. Say to yourself: “For this, I am grateful.”

The Gratitude Challenge

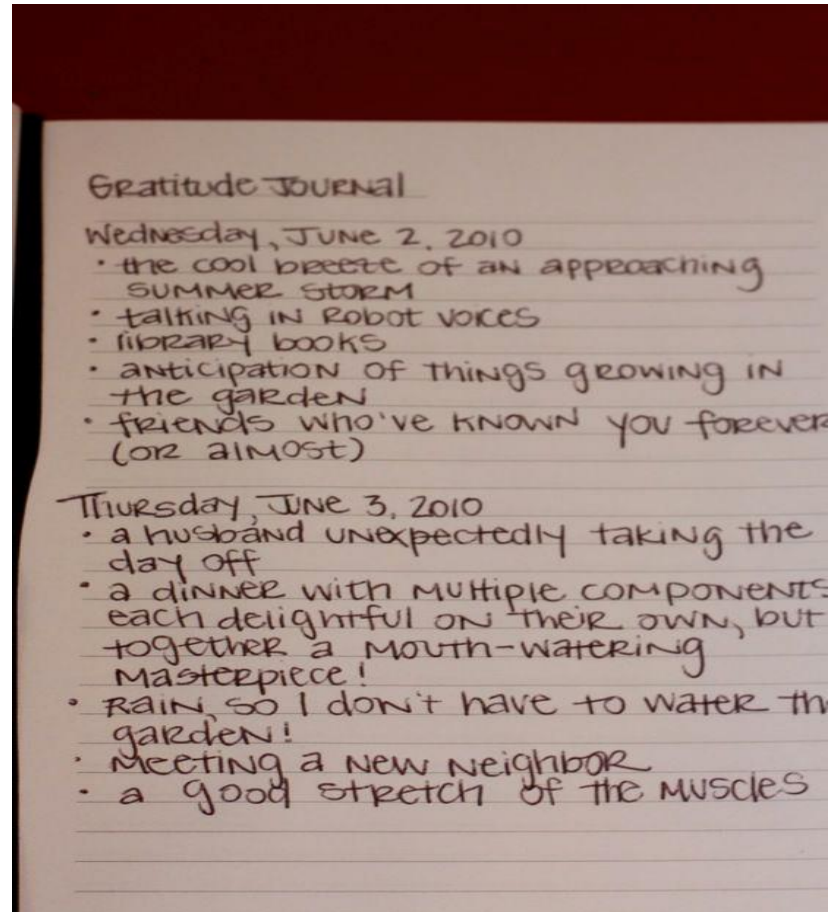
- The hardest part of creating a gratitude habit is remembering to do it
- We go through each day and each week as machines, repeating the same behaviors and tasks ...Groundhog Day
- Make a vow or commitment to practice gratitude
- What if we set a reminder **today** to bring more awareness to building our gratitude muscle?
 - Post-it note reminder somewhere you will see it
 - Daily alarm on your phone
 - Wallpaper on your phone
 - String bracelet
 - Dot on your hand
 - Link gratitude to a behavior you are already doing each day



Gratitude
a muscle we
need to exercise

Gratitude Journal

- The gratitude journal helps you look at life in a positive, concrete way.
- It allows you to focus on what went right instead of the inevitable things that went wrong.
- And it enhances your self-esteem, feelings of hope
- It helps you to notice your interconnectedness.
- See the patterns of good in your life.
Over time, you'll notice a consistency within the list of items you're grateful for



Three Good Things Activity

THREE GOOD THINGS

Monday: 1. Baked a cake.

2. Phoned Sarah for a chat

3. 2 hours of job research

Tuesday: 1. Had a bath

2. Ate some cake

3. Watched the last Cold Feet

Wednesday: 1. Did the pub quiz

2. Ate dinner with all the family

3. Played with the cats

Thursday: 1. Drank some wine

2. Bought a new hat

3. Learnt that I smile a lot

Friday: 1. Saw the Bond film

2. No phones date night

3. Slept all night without waking

Saturday: 1. Went for a walk

2. Watched the fire burn

3. Wrote a letter

Sunday: 1. Had a lie in

2. Went out for Sunday dinner

3. Planned my Summer holiday

All Week Greatest:

1. Saturday walk

2. Family Dinner

3. No phones date night

Finish off the Month with Gratitude
(You've got 16 days left)

National Gratitude Month

