

Doing this can make you happier!

With the Thanksgiving holiday fast approaching, it is only fitting that our topic for this month is gratitude. Leading researchers in the field of positive psychology like Robert Emmons and Martin Seligman, have long debunked the notion of gratitude as just another way of saying, “thank you.” According to Emmons & Shelton (2002), “as a psychological state, gratitude is a felt sense of wonder, thankfulness, and appreciation for life.” Moreover, the research has consistently demonstrated that gratitude is associated with greater happiness.

“Gratitude is the healthiest of all human emotions. The more you express gratitude for what you have, the more likely you will have even more to express gratitude for.” —Zig Ziglar

While there are several ways to cultivate gratitude, let’s spotlight gratitude journaling. The benefits of keeping a gratitude journal are well documented. Individuals who kept a gratitude journal exercised more regularly, felt better about their lives, and were more optimistic about the upcoming week (Emmons & McCullough, 2003). Personally, I have found a shift in mindset in my daily gratitude practice—a focus on abundance instead of lack.

My challenge for you over the next 21 days is to cultivate gratitude by adopting a daily habit of gratitude journaling. This challenge is an opportunity for you to take a step back and acknowledge all that is good in your life. Though it may initially feel forced, the more you practice gratitude, the more natural it becomes. Here’s how you can participate in the challenge:

- Keep a gratitude journal
- Set aside 10-15 minutes each day
- List 5 things you’re grateful for today
- Reflect on your list

Terri-Ann Kelly, PhD, RN, CPT and the Healthy Nurse, Healthy New Jersey Team

References:

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

Emmons, R. A. & Shelton, C. S. (2002). Gratitude and the science of positive psychology. In C. R. Snyder and S. J. Lopez (Eds.), *Handbook of positive psychology* (pp. 459-471). New York: Oxford University Press.