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# Gratitude and it's importance

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**Abstract**---Gratitude is the act of expressing our feelings for others and for ourselves. We not only make others happy with simple words of love and praise, but we also feel a lot better about ourselves and our lives. Gratitude is about having the right feelings at the right time about the right things. It's inextricably linked to self-control and motivation. It may not provide immediate relief from pain and stress, but it restores our sense of control. Gratitude is a tool for increasing happiness in the context of positive psychology. The benefits of gratitude are not linked to any sort of pathology or religion, but rather to a desire to create healthy and thriving people and societies. As the preceding paragraphs demonstrated, there are numerous ways to express gratitude. Maybe it's a gratitude journal, or maybe it's treating a stranger with kindness because someone did something nice for you. Try practising gratitude the next time you have some free time. You might be surprised by the advantages it provides. Please share your thoughts and experiences with this important emotion, as always.

**Keywords**---gratitude, expressing, having right feelings.

## Introduction

### What is gratitude

Gratitude is a positive emotion that involves being thankful and appreciative, and it has been linked to a number of mental and physical health benefits. When you feel grateful for something or someone in your life, you respond with feelings of kindness, warmth, and other forms of generosity. The word "gratitude" can have a variety of meanings depending on who uses it and in what context. In a 2019 article published in the journal *Frontiers in Psychology*, Lzie Fofonka Cunha, Lucia Campos Pellanda, and Caroline Tozzi Reppold explain that "gratitude, in general, stems from the recognition that something good happened to you, accompanied by an appraisal that someone, whether another individual or an impersonal source, such as nature or a divine entity, was responsible for it," researchers Lzie Fofonka Cunha, Lucia Campos Pellanda, Lucia Campo. (Wood, Maltby, Gillett, Linley, & Joseph, 2008)

Many of us express our gratitude by saying "thank you" to someone who has assisted us or given us a gift. However, from a scientific standpoint, gratitude is more than just an action; it is also a positive emotion with a biological purpose. Positive psychology defines gratitude in a way that scientists can measure its effects, arguing that gratitude is more than just feeling thankful: it is a deeper appreciation for someone (or something) that produces longer-lasting positivity. Before proceeding with that definition, we offer ten others to provide a cultural context for how the word has evolved over time.

Gratitude, according to Merriam-Webster, is simply "the state of being grateful." The Harvard Medical School goes into greater detail, stating that gratitude is "grateful appreciation for what one receives, whether tangible or intangible." People who are grateful acknowledge the goodness in their lives... As a result, gratitude assists people in connecting to something larger than themselves as individuals—whether that something is other people, nature, or a higher power. " This gives us a better context for the next definition from psychiatric researchers, who define gratitude as: "the recognition of what is valuable and meaningful to oneself, representing a general state of thankfulness and/or appreciation."

### **Two Stages of Gratitude**

Dr. Robert Emmons (2003) defines gratitude as having two stages:

1. The first step is to recognise the goodness in one's own life. We say yes to life in a grateful state. We affirm that, in general, life is good and full of elements that make it worthwhile to live. The recognition that we have received something satisfies us, both because of its presence and because of the effort the giver put into selecting it.
2. Second, gratitude acknowledges that some of the sources of this goodness are external to the self. One can be thankful to other people, animals, and the environment, but not to oneself. At this point, we recognise the goodness in our lives and wonder who we should thank for it, i.e., who made sacrifices so that we could be happy.

The two stages of gratitude are the recognition of the goodness in our lives and the explanation of how this goodness came to us. We recognise the luck of everything that makes our lives—and ourselves—better through this process.

### **How gratitude works**

Happiness is associated with all forms of gratitude. The feeling we get when we say "thank you" to someone or receive it from others is pure satisfaction and encouragement. Gratitude helps to build and sustain long-term relationships, deal with adversity, and bounce back with strength and motivation.

1. Brings Happiness- Gratitude enhances interpersonal relationships both at home and at work (Gordon, Impett, Kogan, Oveis, & Keltner, 2012). The relationship between gratitude and happiness is multifaceted. Expressing gratitude to others, as well as to oneself, produces positive emotions, most notably happiness. Gratitude affects our overall health and well-being by

eliciting feelings of pleasure and contentment. In a survey of adult professionals,

British psychologist and wellness expert Robert Holden discovered that 65 percent chose happiness over health, despite the fact that both were equally important for a good life. In his study, Holden proposed that unhappiness is at the root of many psychopathological conditions such as depression, anxiety, and stress. Simple practises such as keeping a gratitude journal, complimenting oneself, or sending small tokens and thank you notes can instantly improve our mood. Couple studies have also revealed that partners who frequently expressed their gratitude to each other were able to sustain their relationships with mutual trust and loyalty, as well as have long-lasting happy relationships.

2. Improves Health- Gratitude has an effect on both mental and physical health. Over the *last few decades, positive psychology and mental health researchers have discovered* an overwhelming link between gratitude and good health. Keeping a gratitude journal reduces stress, improves sleep quality, and increases emotional awareness (Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005). Gratitude is associated with increased vitality, energy, and motivation to work harder.
3. Professional health- Employees who are grateful are more efficient, productive, and responsible. Expressing gratitude at work is a proactive step toward strengthening interpersonal bonds and eliciting feelings of closeness and bonding (Algoe, 2012). Employees who practise expressing gratitude at work are more likely to volunteer for more assignments, be willing to go above and beyond to complete their tasks, and work happily as part of a team. Managers and supervisors who are grateful and remember to express their gratitude have stronger group cohesiveness and higher productivity. They appreciate good work, give everyone their due in the group, and actively communicate with team members. Among other things, gratitude makes a leader compassionate, considerate, empathetic, and loved.
4. Affects Brain- Attention has been drawn to neural mechanisms that are responsible for feelings of gratitude (Wood, Maltby, Stewart, Linley, & Joseph, 2008). According to research, moral judgments involving feelings of gratitude are elicited in the right anterior temporal cortex (Zahn et al., 2009). According to the same study, the reason why some of us are naturally more grateful than others is due to neurochemical differences in the Central Nervous System. People who express and experience gratitude have more grey matter in the right inferior temporal gyrus (Zahn, Garrido, Moll, & Grafman, 2014).
5. Neurotransmitters- Emily Fletcher, the founder of Ziva, a well-known meditation training website, mentioned gratitude as a "natural antidepressant" in one of her publications. When practised on a daily basis, gratitude can have similar effects to medications. It creates a long-lasting feeling of happiness and contentment, the physiological basis of which is found at the neurotransmitter level.

When we express and receive gratitude, our brain releases dopamine and serotonin, two important neurotransmitters that regulate our emotions and make us feel 'good.' They immediately improve our mood, making us feel good on the inside. We can help these neural pathways strengthen

themselves and eventually create a permanent grateful and positive nature within ourselves by consciously practising gratitude every day.

6. Social Health Gratitude has a social component that suggests it is a socially driven emotion. According to social psychologists, it is intertwined with the perception of what we have done for others and what others have done for us (Emmons & McNamara, 2006).

According to them, gratitude is an emotion that directly targets the formation and maintenance of social bonds (Algoe, Haidt, & Gable, 2008) and reinforces future prosocial responses (McCullough, Kimeldorf, & Cohen, 2008).

### **Gratitude and Brain**

Gratitude can be defined as a gesture or a collection of kind words that we give or receive from others. However, these simple expressions of gratitude have a significant impact on our overall biological functioning, particularly the brain and nervous system. Gratitude has a long-lasting effect on the brain (Zahn et al., 2007). Gratitude has a significant impact on body functions and psychological conditions such as stress, anxiety, and depression, in addition to increasing self-love and empathy.

- **Helps fighting toxic emotions-** The limbic system is the part of the brain that is in charge of all emotional experiences. It is made up of the thalamus, hypothalamus, amygdala, hippocampus, and cingulate gyrus. Studies have shown that feelings of gratitude activate the hippocampus and amygdala, the two main sites regulating emotions, memory, and bodily function. Consistent evidence suggests that what we call "emotions" or "feelings" are neural activations in the neocortical regions of the brain (Moll et al., 2005). A study on people seeking mental health help found that those who wrote letters of gratitude in addition to their regular counselling sessions felt better and recovered faster. The study's other group, which was asked to journal their negative experiences rather than write gratitude letters, reported feelings of anxiety and depression.
- **Reduces Pain-** A study on the effect of gratitude on physical well-being, *Counting Blessings vs Burdens* (Emmons & McCullough, 2003), found that 16% of patients who kept a gratitude journal reported reduced pain symptoms and were more willing to work out and cooperate with the treatment procedure. A deeper investigation into the cause revealed that gratitude increases our vitality by regulating the level of dopamine, reducing subjective feelings of pain.
- **Improves Sleep-** Receiving and displaying simple acts of kindness activates the hypothalamus, thereby regulating all bodily mechanisms controlled by the hypothalamus, one of which is sleep. Every day, gratitude-induced hypothalamic regulation helps us sleep deeper and healthier. A grateful and kind brain is more likely to sleep better and wake up feeling refreshed and energetic every morning (Zahn et al., 2009).
- **Reduces Stress-** In one of their studies on gratitude and appreciation, McCraty and colleagues (cited in McCraty & Childre, 2004) discovered that participants who felt grateful had a significant decrease in cortisol, the stress hormone. They had improved cardiac function and were less

vulnerable to emotional setbacks and negative experiences. Significant research over the years has established that by practising gratitude, we can cope with stress better than others. We can rewire the brain to deal with current circumstances with more awareness and broader perception simply by acknowledging and appreciating the little things in life.

- Helps fight anxiety and depression- Gratitude significantly reduces symptoms of depression and anxiety by lowering stress hormones and managing autonomic nervous system functions. Gratitude is associated with an increase in neural modulation of the prefrontal cortex, the brain site responsible for managing negative emotions such as guilt, shame, and violence. As a result, people who keep a gratitude journal or express gratitude verbally are more empathetic and positive by nature.

### **Gratitude and Grief**

As difficult as it may sound, grieving with gratitude can provide a ray of hope in the darkest of times. In times of despair, it can be difficult to find reasons to be thankful. Kelly Buckley (2017) discussed how she found the meaning of her pain and her life after the death of her 23-year-old son in her book on gratitude and grief. While it is true that practising gratitude strengthens our resistance to negative emotions and distress, it cannot be denied that minor misfortunes are unavoidable and will have an impact on our well-being. Grief can be managed with grief by:

1. Crying- We are not weak because we cry. Instead, it is an act of accepting and becoming aware of our emotions. We cry because we understand how we feel and why we feel that way. It allows us to express our feelings and empowers us to take action and change our lives.
2. Appreciation- Grieving with gratitude allows us to appreciate what we still have. For example, if a person has recently been fired from his job, thanking his family and friends who have stood by his side during the crisis can help to alleviate the pain. He can regain motivation to look for other employment opportunities by consciously acknowledging their love and support.
3. Ask for Help- When all of your coping mechanisms fail, do not be afraid to seek professional help. According to studies, people who practise gratitude are more willing to participate in counselling and therapy for depression management, and their prognosis is much better in such cases.

### **Modern Perspectives of Gratitude**

Positive psychology has recently expanded research on the significance of gratitude, largely led by researcher Robert Emmons. Emmons has published several papers on the psychology of gratitude, demonstrating that being more grateful can lead to higher levels of happiness (Emmons & Crumpler, 2000). Some of Emmons' work has also focused on gratitude in a religious context, emphasising how feeling grateful to a higher power can lead to improved physical health (Krause et al., 2015).

Here is a summary of nine recent psychological findings concerning the study of gratitude:

1. Well Being- Thank you annotations can boost your overall sense of well-being. People who are grateful are more agreeable, open, and less neurotic (McCullough et al., 2002; McCullough, Tsang, & Emmons, 2004; Wood, Maltby, Gillett, Linley, & Joseph, 2008; Wood, Maltby, Stewart, Linley et al., 2008). Furthermore, gratitude is inversely related to depression and positively related to life satisfaction (Wood, Joseph, & Maltby, 2008). This is not to say that "depressed people" should simply be thankful, as depression is a complex disease that affects millions of people. Instead, perhaps gratitude practises should be included as part of depression therapy and treatment.
2. Better relationships- Gratitude can boost your mood. People who are grateful are less neurotic, more agreeable, and open (McCullough et al., 2002; McCullough, Tsang, & Emmons, 2004; Wood, Maltby, Stewart, Linley et al., 2008). Gratitude is also linked to life satisfaction and depression (Wood, Joseph, & Maltby, 2008). This isn't to say that "depressed people" should simply be grateful, because depression is a complex illness that affects millions of people. Gratitude practises, on the other hand, might need to be incorporated into depression therapy and treatment.
3. Optimism- In 2003, Dr. Emmons and Dr. McCullough conducted research on the impact of gratitude practise. Their findings show that people who focused on gratitude for ten weeks were more optimistic in many areas of their lives, including health and exercise. People who are optimistic about their health and well-being are more likely to take actions that promote a healthy lifestyle.
4. Happiness- People were asked to write and deliver a letter to someone for whom they were grateful by Toepfer, Cichy, and Peters (2011). Their happiness and life satisfaction were significantly affected by the task, even weeks later. Gratitude has a long-lasting effect in a positive-feedback loop in the pursuit of happiness and life satisfaction. As a result, the more gratitude we experience and express, the more situations and people we may encounter for which we can be grateful.
5. Self-Control- Self-control aids in discipline and concentration. Self-control can benefit long-term well-being, such as resisting nicotine in cigarettes for someone trying to quit smoking. Self-control enables us to make the "better choice" for our long-term health, financial well-being, and happiness.  
In a 2014 study, DeSteno et al. discovered that choosing gratitude over happiness or feeling neutral increased self-control significantly. Professor Ye Li, one of the study's authors, stated: "Showing emotion can foster self-control, and finding a way to reduce impatience with a simple gratitude exercise opens up tremendous possibilities for reducing a wide range of societal ills, from impulse buying and insufficient saving to obesity and smoking."
6. Mental Health- Patients with heart failure who kept gratitude journals showed reduced inflammation, improved sleep, and improved moods, and their symptoms of heart failure were reduced after only 8 weeks, according to research published in 2015.  
The mind-body connection corresponds to how gratitude can provide a double benefit. For example, gratitude encourages us to have healthier minds and, as a result, healthier bodies.

7. Better Athleticism- According to research by Lung Hung Chen, an athlete's level of gratitude for their accomplishments can affect their happiness (Chen, 2013; Chen & Wu, 2014). More specifically, adolescent athletes who are grateful for what they have in life are happier and have higher self-esteem. Sports fans are also affected by gratitude (Kim & Jeong, 2015; Kim et al., 2010). Gratitude affects a fan's happiness, connection, and sense of belonging to a team. Stronger fan support and pride, in turn, can influence the team's performance and pride in representing a larger group.
8. Neuroscience- Neuroscience is starting to look into how gratitude affects the mysterious human brain. The brain's response to gratitude was measured using functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) in one study (Fox et al., 2015). Gratitude increased activity in areas of the brain that deal with morality, reward, and judgement, according to these researchers.
9. Better life- The body of evidence supporting the benefits of gratitude has grown dramatically over the last two decades. Aside from improving happiness, research shows that practising gratitude, specifically gratitude toward a higher power, can lower stress levels (Krause, 2006). Gratitude can help people feel less depressed and anxious (Kashdan & Breen, 2007).

Gratitude is the act of expressing our feelings for others and for ourselves. We not only make others happy with simple words of love and praise, but we also feel a lot better about ourselves and our lives. Gratitude is about having the right feelings at the right time about the right things. It's inextricably linked to self-control and motivation. It may not provide immediate relief from pain and stress, but it restores our sense of control. Gratitude is a tool for increasing happiness in the context of positive psychology. The benefits of gratitude are not linked to any sort of pathology or religion, but rather to a desire to create healthy and thriving people and societies. As the preceding paragraphs demonstrated, there are numerous ways to express gratitude. Maybe it's a gratitude journal, or maybe it's treating a stranger with kindness because someone did something nice for you. Try practising gratitude the next time you have some free time. You might be surprised by the advantages it provides. Please share your thoughts and experiences with this important emotion, as always.

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