



Give gratitude, get healthier

People who regularly express and feel gratitude tend to be more optimistic and satisfied in life, have higher self-esteem and sleep better. They also tend to have stronger relationships and communities. And they may even have improved physical health – people who show more gratitude are more likely to exercise more frequently and have fewer visits to doctors.

How gratitude works

Proactively focusing on positive contributors in your life can help shift your attitude and reduce negative thoughts and feelings. Expressing and acknowledging gratitude helps you affirm the goodness in your life and the sources of this goodness. This in turn can help you keep perspective and be more resilient, even in stressful and difficult times.

Gratitude also can bring ‘pay it forward’ benefits. It helps you and those you share your gratitude with feel and recognise your individual social value, get a boost from the positive reinforcement and be more inclined to express thanks.

Adopting gratitude

You can proactively practise gratitude and make it a regular part of life. Here are some get-started ideas:

- **Keep a journal.** Writing down what you’re thankful for helps to keep you thinking about the positive aspects of your life, which may help to put stress and difficulties in perspective. It also gives you a log of positive memories to revisit and relish.
- **Send a thank-you letter.** Take the time to write to someone and let them know how much you appreciate them. Acknowledging people who make a difference in your life can give you a ‘happiness boost’ and give them a boost, too.

- **Focus on the positive.** When good things happen, take time to think about and savour them. Give yourself the time to enjoy positive emotions and experiences, and permission to revel in your own success.
- **Make a mental note.** Each day, think about the good things in your life and take a mental picture. This can help you reinforce the positive memories.
- **Share the joy.** Make sharing what you're grateful for a regular part of your routine. For example, take time during family dinners or outings with friends to share three things you're thankful for.

Get help

Gratitude can go a long way in helping you instil short- and long-term positive feelings. It also may help you be better equipped to bounce back from hard times.

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Make forgiveness a daily practice

Grudges don't have to be so big that they become burdensome. Even small, unforgiven slights can weigh us down. If you feel negatively about a situation after it has passed, it may be time to forgive.

The meaning of forgiveness

Forgiveness is nuanced – it's both a decision and an emotional process. We can decide how to treat those who we feel wronged us by not seeking payback. We also can become aware of our emotional reactions whenever we're hurt, and work to transform our anger into understanding, compassion and empathy.

Despite the benefits of forgiveness, which include everything from lowering heart attack risk to reducing anxiety, many people struggle to put forgiveness into practice.

But sometimes, grudge-bearing against others is difficult to dislodge. It's also difficult to forgive yourself.

How to forgive yourself and others

If you struggle to forgive yourself or others, here's a framework to make forgiveness a daily mindfulness practice based on psychologist Everett Worthington's REACH model:

- Recall: Recall the hurt. Acknowledge the injury without treating yourself like a victim or the other person like a villain.
- Empathise: Put yourself in the other person's shoes.
- Altruistic gift: Consider forgiveness a charitable gift, even if the offender doesn't seem worthy.
- Commit: Commit to the act of forgiving, repeating a phrase such as "I forgive them" or "I forgive myself".
- Hold onto forgiveness: Forgiveness is a process and a practice. Silently repeating the above phrases during seated meditation or lying in bed before your day begins keeps forgiveness in your heart.

No matter the severity of a situation, forgiveness takes practice. Committing to forgiving others and yourself early on will help prevent a situation from getting out of hand, which in turn makes everyone feel better.

Don't let anger ruin your relationships

Everybody gets angry with a loved one sometimes – this is a perfectly normal human emotion. Maybe you feel that your spouse has let you down. Or maybe job or family troubles or money concerns have piled up.

It's how we express our anger that matters. The next time anger bubbles up, here are some tips that may help you work through your feelings and protect your relationships.

Be mindful. Parents need to be especially mindful in how they express and handle their anger. Children learn how to cope with emotions from their parents.

Take a time out. If you sense a conflict starting, take a few minutes to collect your thoughts. Continuing a conversation in the heat of anger will not solve the problem. Just be sure that you are both on the same page and that taking a break doesn't mean the communication is over.

Breathe. If you feel your shoulders tightening, your fists clenching and your heart beating faster – stop and take deep breaths. Some people also find it helpful to repeat a calming word or phrase as they breathe.

Be logical. Take the emotion out of problem-solving. A lot of how we handle things in life depends on our perspective of the situation. What may be thrilling or challenging for one person may not be for someone else. Remember that we are different, and we should try not to judge each other.

Identify the source of the anger. Sometimes, we fight with others over small things that aren't really the source of our frustration. Pinpointing the true source of our anger can help us to clearly communicate that to others as well as come up with solutions.

Slow down. Before you react, stop and think. Listen to what the other person has to say. Take some time before you answer in anger. Learn what may trigger anger in you and be aware of that when the issue comes up. You may be reacting from some previous experience that has nothing to do with the current situation.

Change your point of view. Anger can sometimes lead to dramatic or irrational thinking. Whatever you are angry about might be frustrating, but ask yourself how important it is in the grand scheme of things to keep it in perspective.

Think before you speak. Before you spit out an angry retort, think about possible consequences. Words spoken in anger can harm a relationship. Words do hurt and, once spoken, they are difficult to take back. Your relationships are more important than being right or 'winning' the fight.

When you speak, speak carefully. It is healthy to express your anger. Learn to use "I" statements. "I was really angry when you broke your promise" leaves an opening for communication. Avoid using words like "never" or "always". Phrases like "You never keep your promises!" are not constructive and can make everyone feel worse. "You" statements also put the other person on the defensive from the beginning.

Use humour. Sometimes humour can help defuse a tense situation and help you gain some perspective on the situation. Be careful to use jokes that the other person finds amusing but not hurtful. Avoid sarcasm, as this can

become another expression of anger.

Learn to forgive. Holding on to grudges and anger can be harmful for both your relationships and your health. Forgiveness can help strengthen relationships.

Seek help. If you find that you continually have trouble controlling your anger or your anger is hurting your relationships, a licensed therapist or counsellor may be able to help. Some couple's counselling can also be of help when you see a therapist who can provide an objective perspective.

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