

“When I started counting my blessings, my whole life turned around.”

—Willie Nelson

In recent years, the act of recognizing and expressing gratitude has been linked to many improved physical, psychological, and social health benefits for both healthcare providers and patients. These benefits include decreased stress levels, lowered blood pressure, better sleep quality, stronger immune systems, and increased feelings of joy, happiness, forgiveness, and compassion. Robert A. Emmons, Ph.D., a leading scientific expert on gratitude, sees the practice of gratitude as having two components: affirming the goodness in our lives, and exploring where that goodness comes from.

Here are some tips for practicing and exploring gratitude using a gratitude journal:

- Spend at least 15 minutes writing about the things for which you are grateful. You may find it easier to write at night so you can include events or observations from the day.
- Set an alarm on your watch, calendar, or smart phone to help remind you to write in your journal once or twice per week. Try to integrate journaling into your routine, but also write down joyful experiences as they happen so that you don't forget them.
- Begin your journey by writing about the basic material things about which you are grateful—such as having a home, a warm bed, food, etc. Then, try to shift the focus to the people, places, experiences, and situations that bring you joy and happiness.
- Avoid repeating the same entries. This will make journaling a challenge as times pass, but challenging yourself in this way will allow your awareness and sense of gratitude to flourish.
- Instead of tallying up all of the good people and things in your life, reflect deeply on how these people and things bring you joy, and what your life would be like without them.
- Try to find something to appreciate in the people and things you don't like. Focusing only on the goodness will help shift your perceptions and bring you more happiness.
- Don't forget to be grateful for yourself and your abilities. Appreciate all that your body and mind can do—whether it's walking, talking, reading, dancing, swimming, or scaling a mountain.
- Get creative! Gratitude journals don't have to be full of lists and words. Fill yours up with keepsakes of your favorite moments—concert ticket stubs, restaurant menus, photos, etc.—or other things like drawings and collages that allow you to express your joy.

GRATITUDE JOURNAL

“Give thanks for a little and you will find a lot.” —Hausa Proverb

Print copies of this page—or use it as a template in your own paper journal—and begin recording the things for which you are grateful.

Date:

I am grateful for:

Reflection and exploration:

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