



Glynis Barber

USE GRATITUDE TO MAKE YOU HAPPIER

Our holistic columnist on how one small thing can improve your wellbeing

How can something so simple as gratitude have such a big effect on our health? Experience has shown me that the answers to seemingly insurmountable problems are often astonishingly easy. I should add however, that these insights usually only come to me during meditation or a meditative activity like walking on a beach. So, maybe the answer is not to always think cerebrally but rather with our hearts?

Now, feeling gratitude all day long is not one of my strong points. In fact, I could be accused of being the opposite. I'm a world class whinger and have been known to complain to the point of even annoying myself. And it turns out this is exactly what not to do.

To reap the many benefits of gratitude you need to avoid self pity. Rather than concentrating on what you think you deserve, concentrate instead on what you actually have. Be it good health, a roof over your head or anything at all, no matter how small. These little things would be sorely

missed if you suddenly didn't have them. It's so easy to take for granted things we have on a regular basis. Health is a prime example.

A sense of entitlement will work against you. Feeling like you deserve more and are entitled to everything that comes your way is the opposite of gratitude and it's important to note that this attitude is different to having good self esteem. You can feel worthy of the gifts that life bestows on you and also feel grateful for them. Gift is the operative word here – a gift is something unearned, is not owed by the giver and is something to therefore feel grateful for.

Feeling gratitude like this is a gift in itself because it can elevate stress, anxiety and depression and also boost your mood. As neuroscientist Rick Hanson has said, whatever you rest your mind on will determine the shape of your brain. If you rest it on worry and sadness, then it will neurally take the shape of anger and anxiety. By giving thanks and resting on all the good things you have, it will take on a different shape – the shape of gratitude.

Recognising all that you have to be happy for, especially during the tough times, increases mental strength and resilience. It has helped war veterans lower their rates of post traumatic stress disorder and a study published in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* found that gratitude was a major contributor to resilience following the 9/11 terrorist attack in New York.

A bit of gratitude in your life on a daily basis will keep you less stressed and happier, while improving blood pressure, cognitive neurotransmitters, reproductive hormones, blood sugar and your immune system. Now that's truly something to be grateful for.

TRY IT TODAY

1. Start a gratitude journal. Writing in a journal for a couple of minutes a day has been shown to improve sleep quality, reduce stress and boost overall happiness.
2. Show your appreciation to someone by writing a thank you note or thanking them verbally. Don't just think it, let them see your gratitude.
3. Don't compare your life to others. This leads to feelings of resentment towards other people's achievements and can reduce your sense of self esteem. By being grateful for your own life, you will be able to appreciate the accomplishments of others.
4. Express gratitude during mindfulness exercises, meditation or prayer.
5. A good book on gratitude to give more insight is *The Little Book of Gratitude* by Robert Emmons.

Glynis Barber is an actress, co-author of *The In-Sync Diet* and founder of agelessbyglynisbarber.com

