



# *The Gratitude Effect:*

## Why Adding Gratitude Practices to your Life Can Help

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Most of us have at least a basic understanding of what the phenomenon of gratitude is. We express gratitude by saying thanks around the dinner table at Thanksgiving and thanking the cashier at our local supermarket. While gratitude has become habitual in different areas of our lives, its impact is more profound than you may imagine. The truth about gratitude is that it is always at our disposal. While gratitude seems like a simple task, honing gratitude takes practice.

In a 2017 study conducted by The Greater Good Science Center at the University of California, researchers discovered how a simple practice of gratitude can directly lead to more positive emotions. [2] For the study, researchers brought together 300 adults, the majority of whom were college students. At the time of the study, all participants were seeking mental health counseling and scheduled to participate in the study prior to their initial appointments.

The majority of participants of the study reported clinically low levels of mental health, particularly with anxiety and depression, prior to the study launch. To begin the study, the researchers broke the participants into three groups.

**Group 1 was tasked with writing one letter of gratitude to another person each week for three weeks.**

**Group 2 was tasked with writing about their deepest and most negative thoughts.**

**Group 3 did not participate in any writing activities.**

Following the study, participants who reported having the best overall mental health were Group 1. The study results conclude that the impact that gratitude has on us begins in our brains. In this experiment, brain activity was measured using a magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) scanner. Researchers utilized the fMRI scanner by tasking the various groups with a gift-giving activity. The areas of the brain which show the most activity during this exercise include the anterior cingulate cortex and medial prefrontal cortex. The areas impacted are associated with moral and social cognition, reward, empathy, and value judgment. By studying the results of the fMRI scan, we learn that gratitude attracts a more positive attitude overall.

# 3 Steps to Becoming More Grateful



## **Keep and maintain a daily gratitude journal:**

By keeping a gratitude journal, you are inviting the feeling of gratitude into your day-to-day life. The key to keeping a gratitude journal is to remember that no act of gratitude is too small. The more we incorporate gratitude in our daily lives, the easier it becomes to unlock.

## **Express gratitude to those closest to you:**

Gratitude is a great practice but can be even better when shared with someone else. In your journey to become more grateful, bring a friend along for the ride. By focusing on the good qualities of your family and friends and sharing these qualities with them, you are not only recognizing how grateful you are to have people in your life, but also reinforcing their sense of self by sharing some of your favorite qualities with them.

## **Highlight your accomplishments:**

When we are in a negative state, it becomes second nature to list all the 'bad' qualities about ourselves. One way to shift your mindset back to gratitude is to remember a moment when you overcame an obstacle. Whether passing a challenging exam or completing a stressful project at work, reminding ourselves of times in which we overcame challenges not only motivates us in our current situation but also allows us to step out of the present moment and into a place of gratitude and accomplishment.

Like advancing to the 'next level' in your favorite video game, gratitude is always available to be 'unlocked' for our use. The role that gratitude can play in our lives is beautifully described by author Sara Avant Stover, she states: "Gratitude is one of the most medicinal emotions we can feel. It elevates our moods and fills us with joy." [1] The elevation mentioned by Avant Stover happens when we disconnect from destructive thoughts and welcome back positive ones. All-in-all, gratitude is one of the greatest gifts that we can give both to others and ourselves.



### Sources:

- <https://www.lifeofpurpose.co.za/5-ways-to-practice-gratitude/>
- <https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/topic/gratitude>
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