

GRATITUDE JOURNAL

Difficulty: **CASUAL** | Frequency: **3X/WEEK** | Duration: **15 MINS**

WHY YOU SHOULD TRY IT

It's easy to take the good things and people in our lives for granted, but research suggests that consciously giving thanks for them can have profound effects on our well-being and relationships. This exercise helps you develop a greater appreciation for the good in your life. In fact, people who routinely express gratitude enjoy better health and greater happiness.

TIME REQUIRED

15 minutes per day, at least three times per week for at least two weeks.

HOW TO DO IT

There's no wrong way to keep a gratitude journal, but here are some guidelines to help you get started.

Write down or type up to five things for which you feel grateful. You can use a notebook, your phone's notes application, a word processor, or whatever works best for you. The physical record is important—don't just do this exercise in your head. The things you list can be relatively small in importance ("The tasty sandwich I had for lunch today") or relatively large ("My sister gave birth to a healthy baby boy"). The goal of the exercise is to remember a good event, experience, person, or thing in your life—then enjoy the good emotions that come with it.

As you write, here are some important tips:

1. **Be as specific as possible.** Being as clear as possible is key to fostering gratitude. "I'm grateful that my coworkers brought me soup when I was sick on Tuesday" will be more effective than "I'm grateful for my coworkers."
2. **Go for depth over breadth.** Going into detail about a particular person or thing for which you're grateful carries more benefits than a surface-level list of many things.
3. **Get personal.** Focusing on people to whom you are grateful has more of an impact than focusing on things for which you are grateful.
4. **Try subtraction, not just addition.** Consider what your life would be like without certain people or things, rather than just tallying up all the good stuff. Be grateful for the negative outcomes you avoided, escaped, prevented, or turned into something positive—try not to take that good fortune for granted.
5. **See good things as "gifts."** Thinking of the good things in your life as gifts helps you avoid taking them for granted. Try to enjoy and savor the gifts you've received.
6. **Savor surprises.** Try to record events that were unexpected or surprising, as these tend to bring up stronger feelings of gratitude.
7. **Aim for variety.** Writing about some of the same people and things is OK, but focus on different details each time you write about them
8. **Write regularly.** Whether you write daily or every other day, commit to a regular time to journal. Do your best to honor that commitment.

EVIDENCE IT THAT WORKS

Emmons, R. A., & McCullough, M. E. (2003). *Counting blessings versus burdens: An experimental investigation of gratitude and subjective well-being in daily life*. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 84(2), 377-389.

People who wrote in a Gratitude Journal weekly for 10 weeks or daily for two weeks experienced more gratitude, positive moods, and optimism about the future, as well as better sleep, compared to those who journaled about hassles or their daily life.

Who Has Tried the Practice?

Undergraduate students at a large American public university and patients at the University of California, Davis, Neuromuscular Disease Clinic participated in the above study. Around 76% of the participants were women. Data on ethnicity and race are unavailable for this study, but additional studies explore how the Gratitude Journal benefits different groups and cultures:

- A group of predominantly white and highly educated people in [Brazil](#) increased in positive emotion, happiness, and life satisfaction and decreased in negative emotion and depression after daily gratitude journaling for two weeks.
- [Polish natives](#) also increased in well-being after gratitude journaling.
- [Turkish university students](#) improved in college adjustment, life satisfaction, and positive emotion after three weeks of gratitude journaling.
- In a [New Zealand study](#), people with arthritis experienced less pain, everyday interferences from their pain, and pain-related anxiety and more self-efficacy after gratitude journaling each week for four weeks.
- [Muslim undergraduate students in Malaysia](#) increased in happiness after two weeks of writing daily notes of Islamic-based gratitude that expressed “their gratefulness to the Merciful Allah who grants them with blessings and is responsible for their grateful and blessed situations.” About 85% of the participants were women.
- A four-week [Christianity-based gratitude program](#), in which pastors led activities such as gratitude journaling, sermons, and psychoeducation, improved well-being, life satisfaction, and interpersonal engagement in members of a mostly white congregation in the American Pacific Northwest.

More research is needed to explore whether, and how, the impact of this practice extends to other groups and cultures.

WHY TO TRY IT

While it's important to analyze and learn from bad events, sometimes we can think too much about what goes wrong and not enough about what goes right in our lives. A gratitude journal forces ourselves to pay attention to the good things in life we might otherwise take for granted. In that way, we start to become more attuned to the everyday sources of pleasure around us—and the emotional tone of our life can shift in profound ways. What's more, actually writing about these events is key: Research suggests translating thoughts into concrete language makes us more aware of them, deepening their emotional impact.

SOURCES

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This practice is part of [Greater Good in Action](#), a clearinghouse of the best research-tested methods for increasing happiness, resilience, kindness, and connection, created by the [Greater Good Science Center](#) at UC Berkeley and [HopeLab](#).

