

Gratitude

You can influence your mind so that your positive moods are active more often than your negative moods.

Adding more gratitude to your life is one approach that can be a path to strengthening a more positive mood.

A lot of recent research shows that an attitude of gratitude can lead to greater happiness, improvement in a variety of moods, and even improved physical well-being.

It is interesting to note that gratitude plays a role in every major religion. It seems that gratitude can be considered a universal human value that cuts across cultures and has been important throughout time.

"Gratitude" means thinking about and being thankful for experiences or qualities in:

- Ourselves
- Other people
- The world.

When we can identify things to be grateful for or things we appreciate, we are more likely to activate and strengthen positive core beliefs

Therefore, one thing each of us can do to improve our mood is to develop a regular practice of gratitude. Gratitude provides a pathway to recognizing and capturing positive experiences. When we follow this path and cultivate this mind-set, we tap into the better parts of our nature and experience more positive moods. Focusing on things we appreciate often results in a shift in perspective from negative to positive

Gratitude Journal

For the next six weeks, take five minutes once a week to focus your attention on things you are grateful for. These may be small things like noticing the strength in your arms or the warmth of the sun, or bigger things like experiencing the love of a child or even the election of a good leader. Write these down in a journal. Since you are only doing this exercise once a week, it may be helpful to make a note on your calendar or in an electronic diary to remind you to do it. As examples, here are some of the items Louisa wrote in her gratitude journal:

The world

I live in a safe neighbourhood. I appreciate that my neighbours know me and wave when they see me. I enjoy watching the children play and hearing their laughter.

Others

I enjoyed walking with my dog. She is always excited when I get out her leash to walk her. It helps me after a hard day to know that she will be happy to see me. She cuddles with me on the couch, and I enjoy petting her.

Myself

I took time to help my elderly neighbour. He was trimming some plants and couldn't reach the highest ones. I value helping others, and it made me feel good to do something kind without expecting anything in return. I actually enjoyed doing it. I also felt happy that his mood seemed to lift because I was there, and that we had a nice chat while we worked together.

Use the categories above: The world; others; myself. Notice things you are grateful for, review what you've already written and add new items to your gratitude journal each week.

As in Louisa's example above, it is more helpful to write about a few things in depth than to try to make a long list of things you are grateful for. So try writing about a few things in detail each week, even if it is just one item per category. Some weeks you might write about several items on one or two categories instead of on all three categories. This is also OK.

Remember to do this for at least six weeks. Then, after filling them out for six weeks, answer the questions below:

1. Did keeping this journal change my outlook about my life, other people, or myself in any way?
2. How has it affected my mood, if at all?
3. Were there benefits to reviewing what I had already written, even if I didn't add much that week?
4. Did it become easier over time to notice things to be grateful for?
5. How did keeping this journal affect my awareness of gratitude throughout the week?
6. Did the effects seem to last longer as I continued this practice?
7. Did keeping this gratitude journal help strengthen a more positive outlook on life?
8. Would it be helpful for me to continue practicing gratitude? If so, how and why?

Adapted from *Mind Over Mood: Change How You Feel by Changing the Way You Think* (2015) by Dennis Greenberger and Christine A. Padesky.