

Our society tends to view happiness as something provided by circumstances or material possessions, but research has shown that a promotion, new car or even getting married only makes people happier in the short term. In six months, they've returned to the level of happiness they usually felt before the life change. On the other hand, regular expressions of gratitude have been proven to make people happier in the long run.

Here's Why Being Grateful Is Awesome

There are many perks to being grateful. These benefits grow more intense as the level of gratitude increases. A study conducted by Seligman, Steen, and Peterson (2005) showed that even a single gratitude visit--personally delivering a letter of thanks to someone who deeply influenced your life--can increase your happiness.

The [same researchers](#) found that taking time each day to write out three things that went well increased participants' happiness. While a weekly gratitude journal increased happiness, those who did the exercise daily reported higher levels of alertness and energy. More importantly, those participants remained happier than before after six months.

What might be an even bigger surprise is that participants who wrote a daily gratitude journal were also more likely to receive help from someone concerning an important issue--and more likely to give help.

Another study by [Dr. Robert A. Emmons](#) analyzed three groups of people: one who listed five things that went well at the end of each day, one who listed five hassles at the end of each day, and a final group who listed events without focusing on their positive or negative connotations. After ten weeks, those who practiced the gratitude journal were 25% happier than those who didn't and even got 1.5 more hours of exercise per week.

These studies focused on fairly ordinary people and undergrad students, but those aren't the only people who benefit from having a regular gratitude practice. Emmons and McCullough did another study, this time focused on people with debilitating health problems. After just 21 days, participants who did the gratitude journal reported feeling happier, more optimistic and even sleeping better.

How to be more grateful

Eager to increase your happiness by 25% and sleep better? Try the gratitude exercises used in these studies:

Gratitude Visit--Think of someone who made a positive impact on your life but who you never properly thanked. Write a letter explaining what you're grateful for and why you're writing it--then deliver it in person to show how much you mean it.

Gratitude Journal--Everybody's gratitude journal is a little different. Some people start by listing everything they've ever been grateful for. Others start with one thing every day. However you do it, spending a little bit of time each day to write down what you're grateful for is a great way to remind yourself of how wonderful the world is--which might just be why it will make you happier.

The gratitude journal can be whatever length you think is appropriate, but a good place to start is with "Three Good Things in Life", as participants in the study mentioned above did.

Think about gratitude today and figure out how you can work these practices into your life to build a happier future.