

## Thanks A Lot!: The Practice of Gratitude

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I was recently walking the beach on a beautiful, sunny day and noticed a feeling of warmth and satisfaction and thought, “hmm, that is nice” and then I thought, “wow, I am really lucky to live in such a beautiful place... so grateful to be near the ocean, with the sun shining and summer upon us”. I noticed my positive feelings grow. And it got me to thinking about gratitude.

I have seen a few magazine blurbs about “practicing gratitude” and have tried making gratitude lists when I am feeling down or discouraged. And it has helped me out of a rut. But on that day on the beach I began to wonder, “What if I really practiced gratitude in my daily life?” How might that affect me?

So, I decided to investigate gratitude and I discovered that gratitude and happiness are hot research topics (who knew?). And the research shows some interesting outcomes. In one study, people were asked to keep a once weekly “gratitude journal” where they briefly listed five things for which they were grateful, like a sunny day at the beach, achieving a task, a co-worker’s generosity, a stranger holding the door, etc. After only two months, the journal keepers were exercising more, reported fewer physical problems, and had higher levels of optimism and happiness as compared with a group who hadn’t kept a gratitude journal (Emmons & McCullough, 2003).

I cannot tell you how to be rich. But I can tell you how to feel rich, which is far better, let me tell you firsthand, than being rich. Be grateful. It is the only totally reliable get rich quick scheme.

- Ben Stein

In another study of people with neuromuscular disease, practicing gratitude led to more energy, positive moods, and optimism as well as a greater sense of connectedness to others... and they slept better. Scientists have even researched how kids and adolescents respond to gratitude exercises. And the results show positive changes, even in teenagers!

The challenge is that sometimes we give too much attention to what’s not going so well in our lives. The more we focus on something, the bigger it grows so we can end up spending most of our time focused on the problems and forget to give the positive, pleasant aspects of life any attention. The result of this imbalance is that we can be left thinking and feeling as if life is mostly one big problem. Practicing gratitude allows us to shift the focus, if only for a few minutes, but with significant results.

So, how does one “practice gratitude?” Below are some ways you might try. (If you want to do your own research study, try rating your happiness on a scale of 0-10, [with “0” being no happiness and “10” being extremely happy] before you start “practicing gratitude” and then several weeks later to see how it has worked for you).

**1. Keep a daily Gratitude Journal:** List three good things that happened to you today (keep it near your bed or somewhere that will help you make it part of your routine). If you like, you can add what you did to bring those good things about.

For example:

Good Thing	What I Did To Bring It About
Lunch with an old friend	I took the time and initiative to give her a call
Had a good run outside	I have discipline and follow through
My 5 year old told me an adorable, funny joke	I was present with him and listened

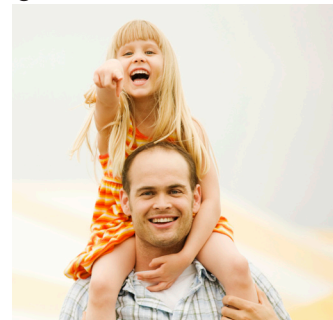
**2. Make a global list of the things for which you are thankful:** Make a list of all the things you’re thankful for, big or small. Keep it simple.

A grateful person trusts enough to give life another chance, to stay open for surprises.

- Brother David Steindal-Rast

**3. Share your gratitude:** Thank someone for something they did for you today or in the past. You can even do this “big” by making a “gratitude visit,” as recommended by Dr. Martin Seligman (see his website, [www.authentic happiness.org](http://www.authentic happiness.org) for more info) by writing a letter to someone who made a positive impact on your life. Make a surprise visit and read them the letter.

**4. Create a family ritual:** Consider having everyone at the dinner or breakfast table name one thing that went well or that they’re thankful for. This is something we often practice at Thanksgiving but once a year just isn’t enough. If eating meals together isn’t something you do, consider doing it when you’re driving somewhere or any other time you have a few minutes together. If kids learn this early on they are more likely to continue to practice it throughout their lives.



# A Good Night's Sleep: The Essentials of Sleep Hygiene

Want to be able to add “a good night’s sleep” to your Gratitude List? Here are some tips for sleeping better (adapted from the Mayo Clinic).



## **Stick to a sleep schedule:**

Go to bed and get up at the same time every day, even on weekends, holidays and days off. But, if you don’t fall asleep within about 15 minutes, get up and do something relaxing until you are ready to go back to bed when you’re tired.

## **Be careful what you eat and drink:**

Don’t go to bed uncomfortably hungry or stuffed. Also limit how much you drink before bed. Avoid nicotine, caffeine and alcohol as they disrupt sleep.

## **Create a bedtime ritual:**

Do the same things each night to tell your body it’s time to wind down. Try to do something relaxing like taking a bath or listening to soothing music, preferably with the lights dimmed. Be sure to reduce screen time (computer, TV, tablet, etc.) before bed.

## **Get comfortable:**

Create a room that’s ideal for sleeping—ideally dark and quiet. Consider room darkening shades, ear plugs, or a fan to create the best environment for your needs. A good mattress and pillow help too.

## **Limit daytime naps:**

If you choose to nap during the day, limit yourself to about 10 to 30 minutes, ideally during the mid afternoon. If you work nights, you will obviously need to sleep during the day. Keep the shades closed so that sunlight - which adjusts your internal clock - doesn’t interrupt your sleep.

## **Include physical activity in your daily routine:**

Regular physical activity can promote better sleep, helping you to fall asleep faster and to enjoy deeper sleep. Just be careful not to exercise too late in the day so you are not too “ramped up” at bedtime.

## **Manage stress:**

Practice good stress management skills with a focus on balance in your life. Contact your EAP if you need help managing stress. Know when to contact your doctor.

(From Mayo Clinic: <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/sleep/HQ01387/>)

## **Health Benefits of Sleep**

- Improves learning and memory
- Prevents and helps cure diseases
- Aids in keeping weight under control
- Balances our mood

## **EAP Can Help!**

Your EAP is a confidential, assessment, short-term counseling and referral program for you and your family members. It is a free benefit provided to you by your organization.

**1.800.769.9819 ~ TTY dial 711 for TRS then dial 800.769.9819**

## **Online Work/Life Services**

If your organization offers Online Work/Life Services, visit our 24-hour internet resource for information, advice and support on a wide variety of issues. Contact your human resources department for a company code then check our Work/Life Services at [www.affiliatedeap.com](http://www.affiliatedeap.com)

