



Why Gratitude Is Good

Numerous studies have found gratitude to be one of the strongest positive emotions, and have linked it to overall happiness and subjective wellbeing. Research shows that demonstrating gratitude brings about other positive emotions such as empathy, forgiveness, optimism, hopefulness, and helpfulness. Mira Khreino explores this gift that keeps on giving.



Gratitude is the expression of appreciation for what one already has, rather than what one wants. It involves being thankful for the simple pleasures in life, such as a compliment or a piece of cake, as well as the larger, more evident things, like a work promotion. Thinking about the things that one appreciates and is thankful for can make one feel more positive, and hence boosts one's mood and overall wellbeing.

Gratitude improves with practice. If it is not currently part of your communication repertoire, then you can deliberately cultivate it and gradually introduce it into different life scenarios. With practice and repetition, it becomes easier and more automatic to integrate into your daily interactions.

Gratitude is self-generating and self-propelling. "Once you start expressing gratitude, you start finding more and more

things to become grateful for," says Robert Emmons, the leading gratitude researcher at the University of California.

Regularly practicing gratitude and taking time to reflect upon the things we are thankful for helps us feel alive and energetic, improves our sleeping patterns, and increases our life satisfaction and wellbeing. It even raises our compassion and kindness levels and fortifies our immune systems.

WAYS TO FULLY REAP THE BENEFITS OF GRATITUDE:

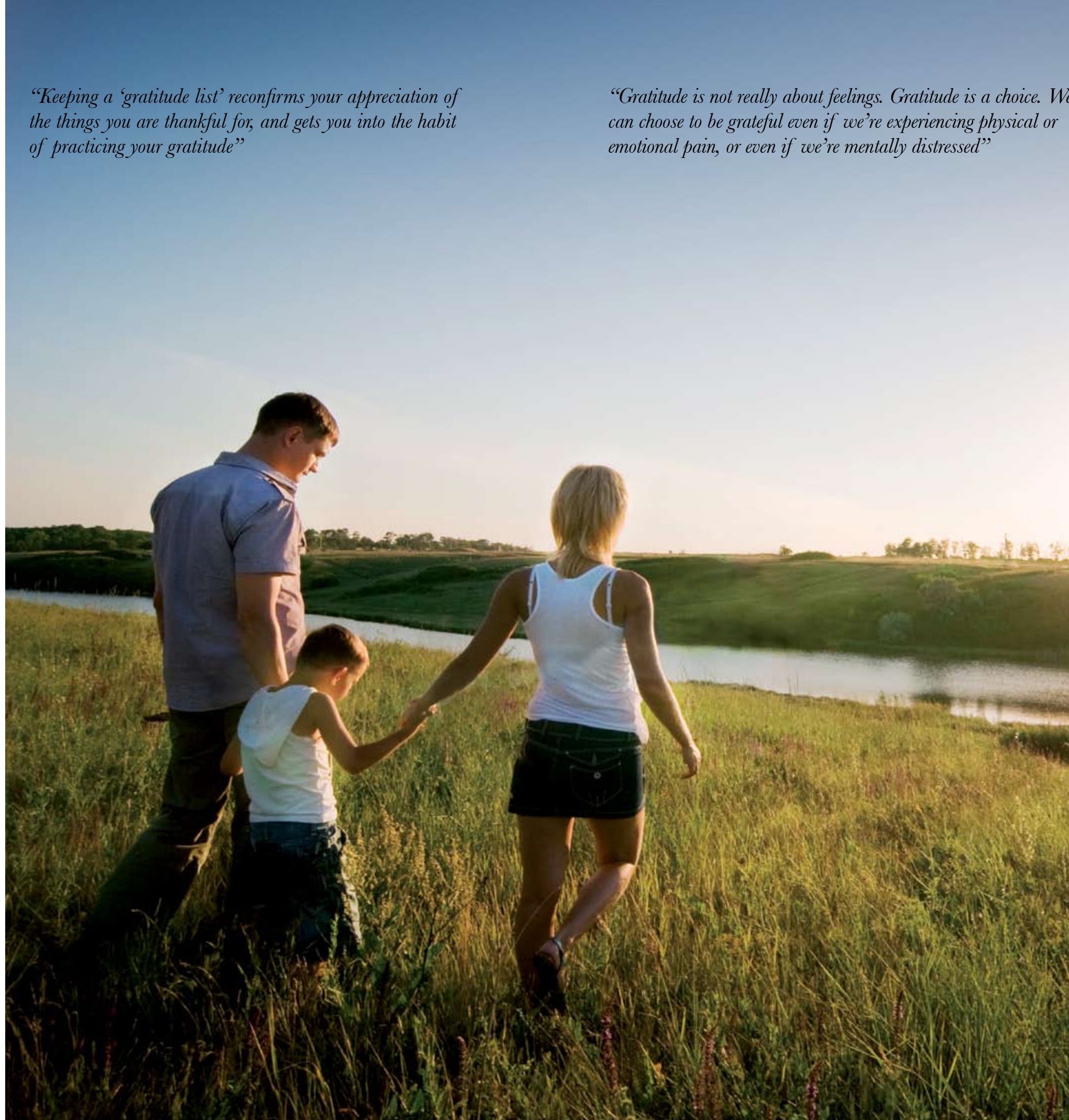
- 15 THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND
- 1 Be specific about what you are grateful for. For example, rather than thinking: "I am grateful for my daughter," think, "I am grateful that my daughter ran back to give me a hug this morning before joining her friends in the playground." We'll find more things to be grateful about when we delve into specifics.

"Taking time to reflect upon the things we are thankful for helps us feel alive and energetic, improves our sleeping patterns, and increases our life satisfaction and wellbeing"

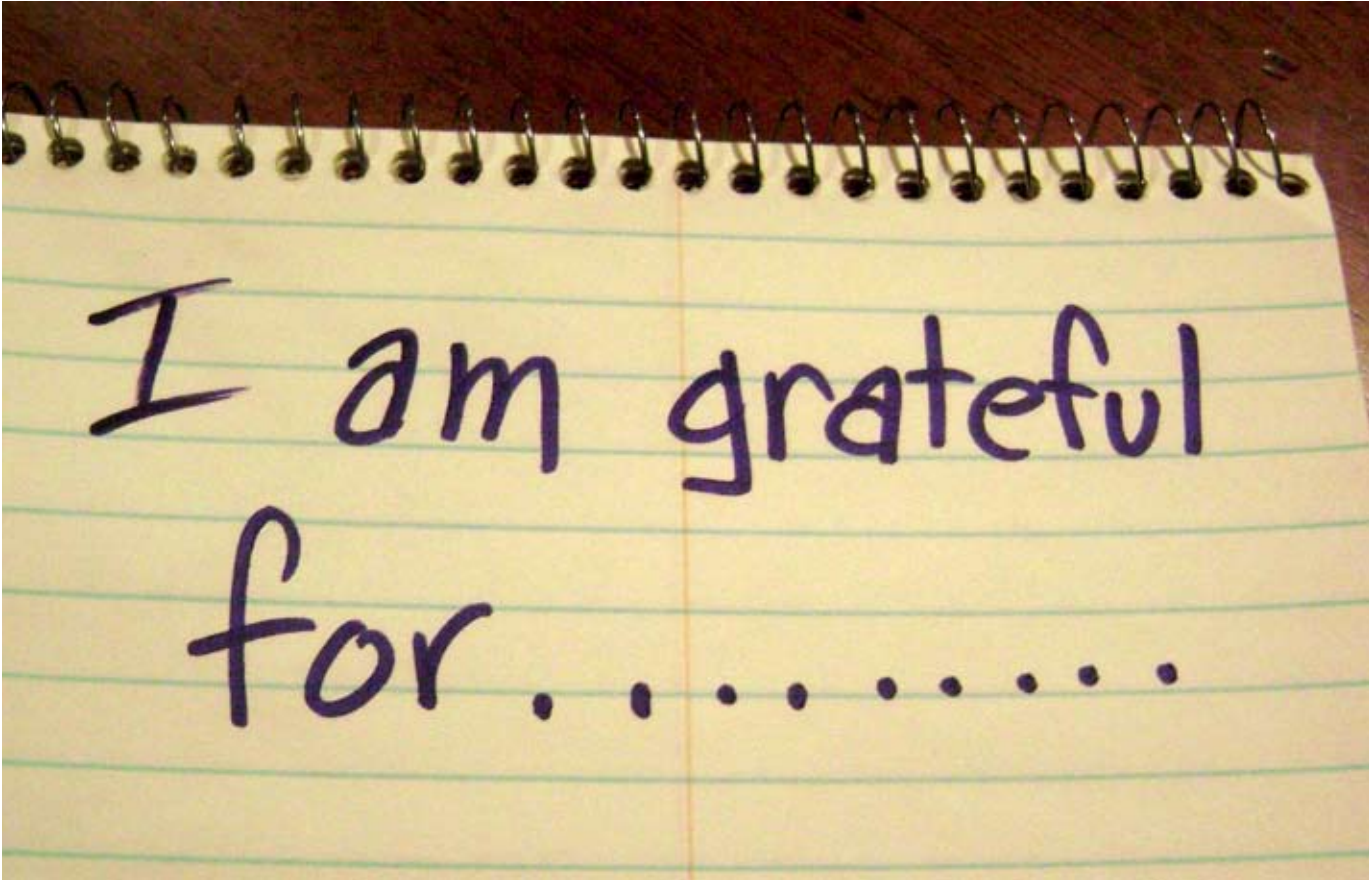
- 2 The way we perceive a situation depends on our frame of mind. Practicing gratitude shifts our focus to the positive aspects of a situation, and this changes the way we perceive it. By being more grateful, we become more positive, and start seeing situations in a more positive light. This eventually makes us happier people.
- 3 Gratitude puts things into perspective. By becoming more aware of the smaller things in life, we realize how much we have to be appreciative of. Our focus shifts away from the negative, or what we do NOT have, to the positive, or what we DO have. Gratitude allows us to get to a point where we take less for granted; a state where we realize how blessed and fortunate we are. This in turn leads us to becoming more grateful.
- 4 Get social about your gratitude. Be grateful not only about the circumstances in your life, but also about the people in your life. Express your gratitude towards those who haven't received it yet, especially if they have positively impacted your life. Involve others in your gratitude list. For example, share the things you are grateful for around the dinner table.
- 5 Expressing gratitude to another makes the other feel appreciated and worthy. Thanking someone for something they have done or said makes them happy and positively impacts their life. Gratitude therefore, is also a form of giving back.
- 6 Expressing gratitude to another not only provides you with a fleeting sense of joy, but also has a long-lasting effect on your mood. A University of Pennsylvania study found that a week-long written expression of gratitude among subjects has resulted in increased happiness among those subjects for up to six months after the trial week.
- 7 Keeping a gratitude journal or 'gratitude list' has been shown to have long lasting positive effects. Try scheduling a couple of minutes each day to write down a list of things that you are grateful for. It is easiest if you do this at the same time each day - first thing in the morning or last thing before bed for example. This activity deliberately creates time for you to count your blessings. Keeping a 'gratitude list' reconfirms your appreciation of the things you are thankful for, and gets you into the habit of practicing your gratitude. In a study published by the Journal of Positive Psychology, Dr. Phillip Watkins - a leading psychologist in the area of gratitude research - found that keeping

“Keeping a ‘gratitude list’ reconfirms your appreciation of the things you are thankful for, and gets you into the habit of practicing your gratitude”

“Gratitude is not really about feelings. Gratitude is a choice. We can choose to be grateful even if we’re experiencing physical or emotional pain, or even if we’re mentally distressed”



- a diary of three blessings worked much better to boost happiness, than recalling three instances of pride upon accomplishing something.
- 8 Thank you notes help you put your gratitude into concrete writing and serve to reaffirm your thankfulness and appreciation. This reconfirmation boosts your mood (and theirs)! Actively acknowledging those who have helped you, and writing to them allows you to become better at recognizing the good in life, which in turn helps you feel appreciative and thankful more often.
- 9 Gratitude letters where the writer details the kindness of someone whom they've never really thanked properly, are very similar to thank you notes, but involve a little more detail. Both the writer and the recipient benefit immensely from the letter. Interestingly, a study has found that if the writer actually reads the letter out loud to the recipient during what is known as a "gratitude visit," the visit will positively impact both the writer and the recipient for up to a month later.
- 10 Remember to be grateful for the things you do for yourself as well. Thinking of something that you have done well or that has been beneficial to your wellbeing boosts your mood and self-esteem. Be appreciative of your own thoughts, actions, and positive attitude.
- 11 Gratitude helps with sleep. Numerous studies have found that gratitude improves one's quality of sleep, presumably because those who are grateful are less consumed by negative thoughts before bedtime. Unsurprisingly, sleep deprivation caused by negative thoughts can lead to crankiness, and being less appreciative the next day. So instead of ruminating about troubling thoughts and 'to do' lists whilst in bed, think positively about the things you were thankful for that day.
- 12 Paying attention to the positive aspects in life, trains the brain to become more sensitive to these aspects. Train your brain to see the good in life and you'll be able to see more and more of what's good!
- 13 Gratitude and happiness walk hand in hand. This extends to all aspects of life including romantic relationships. A study has found that after receiving gratitude from a partner, participants noticed that the partner was more responsive to their needs and more satisfied with the relationship overall. According to a study by the Journal of Personal and Social Psychology, passing a word of thanks on to your partner/



spouse creates a cycle of gratitude in which each person feels more appreciated and happy.

14 In professional relationships, expressing thanks for a job well done can make colleagues/employees feel a strong sense of self-worth and confidence. Expressing gratitude in a professional environment also leads to an increase in trust and helpfulness among colleagues.

15 Gratitude can extend far beyond our nearest and dearest. Think of times in which you needed the assistance of someone in a matter which you could not undertake on your own. For example, be grateful to the grocer who brings you fresh produce grown miles away, or the chef at a restaurant who prepares your food, but whose work is never really fully appreciated.

CHARACTERISTICS OF PEOPLE WHO DEMONSTRATE GRATITUDE

Clinical psychologist Philip Watkins of East Washington University has published a series of studies looking at gratitude as a trait, and assessing the relationship between gratitude,

subjective well-being, and happiness. One of Watkins’ studies has identified four characteristics found in people who demonstrate gratitude:

- Feeling a sense of abundance in their life; not feeling deprived.
- Acknowledging the contribution and involvement of others in the attainment of wellbeing.
- Appreciating the simple pleasures in life and thus demonstrating gratitude more frequently.
- Realizing the importance of experiencing gratitude and expressing such emotion.

Watkins also found a strong positive correlation between experiences and expressions of gratitude and overall wellbeing. When looking at personality traits that correlate highest with happiness, gratitude always featured in the top three. Interestingly, his research also showed depression to be inversely correlated to gratitude, with clinically depressed individuals showing significantly lower gratitude (nearly 50 percent) than non-depressed controls. Amazingly, a one-time act of gratitude directly produced a 10 percent increase in happiness and a 35 percent decrease in depressive symptoms.



“Gratitude is a practice; it’s a discipline. To some it may come more naturally than to others, but the good news is that people can develop this skill with practice”

THE BENEFITS CONTINUE
Dr Robert Emmons, a well-known expert in the field of gratitude research, has also discovered encouraging findings in his studies of the subject; namely that people who express gratitude often, have also reported its positive impact on other life aspects. This research concurs with the findings of Drs Blaire and Rita Justice at the University of Texas Health Science Centre, which states: “a growing body of research shows that gratitude is truly amazing in its physical and psychosocial effects.”

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL, PHYSICAL, AND SOCIAL BENEFITS OF GRATITUDE INCLUDE:
Psychological: Positive emotions including optimism, pleasure, joy, alertness, and wakefulness, i.e. overall wellbeing and happiness.
Physical: Decreased aches and pains, lower blood pressure, improved immune system, healthier lifestyle, better sleep, and higher energy levels.
Social: People become more forgiving,

empathetic, compassionate, generous, and outgoing. Gratitude enhances overall social interactions and reduces feelings loneliness.
Robert Emmons also found that grateful people are more physically active, have better dietary habits, are less likely to smoke and abuse alcohol, and have lower rates of depression and anxiety.

TO END
Gratitude is a practice; it’s a discipline. To some it may come more naturally than to others, but the good news is that people can develop this skill with practice. Gratitude is not really about feelings. Gratitude is a choice. We can choose to be grateful even if we’re experiencing physical or emotional pain, or even if we’re mentally distressed. We can always find something to be grateful for. Committing to a simple daily activity such as writing down what you’re grateful for each day is a great start that can strongly boost happiness!
With so much to be grateful for, it’s your choice to either see the glass half empty or half full. ■

“When looking at personality traits that correlate highest with happiness, gratitude always featured in the top three”