

7 Scientifically Proven Benefits of Gratitude

You'll be grateful that you made the change (and you'll sleep better).

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"Stop feeling sorry for yourself," we are often told. And while it can be hard to avoid self-pity entirely, mentally strong people choose to *exchange* self-pity for gratitude. Whether you choose to write a few sentences in a gratitude journal, or simply take a moment to silently acknowledge all that you have, giving thanks can transform your life.

Here are 7 scientifically proven benefits:

1. **Gratitude opens the door to more relationships.** Not only does saying "thank you" constitute good manners, but showing appreciation can help you win new friends, according to a 2014 study published in *Emotion*. The study found that thanking a new acquaintance makes them more likely to seek an ongoing relationship. So whether you thank a stranger for holding the door or send a thank-you note to that colleague who helped you with a project, acknowledging other people's contributions can lead to new opportunities.
2. **Gratitude improves physical health.** Grateful people experience fewer aches and pains and report feeling healthier than other people, according to a 2012 study published in *Personality and Individual Differences*. Not surprisingly, grateful people are also more likely to take care of their health. They exercise more often and are more likely to attend regular check-ups, which is likely to contribute to further longevity.
3. **Gratitude improves psychological health.** Gratitude reduces a multitude of toxic emotions, from envy and resentment to frustration and regret. Robert Emmons, a leading gratitude researcher, has conducted multiple studies on the link between gratitude and

well-being. His research confirms that gratitude effectively increases happiness and reduces depression.

4. **Gratitude enhances empathy and reduces aggression.** Grateful people are more likely to behave in a prosocial manner, even when others behave less kindly, according to a 2012 study by the University of Kentucky. Study participants who ranked higher on gratitude scales were less likely to retaliate against others, even when given negative feedback. They experienced more sensitivity and empathy toward other people and a decreased desire to seek revenge.
5. **Grateful people sleep better.** Writing in a gratitude journal improves sleep, according to a 2011 study published in *Applied Psychology: Health and Well-Being*. Spend just 15 minutes jotting down a few grateful sentiments before bed, and you may sleep better and longer.
6. **Gratitude improves self-esteem.** A 2014 study published in the *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology* found that gratitude increased athletes' self-esteem, an essential component to optimal performance. Other studies have shown that gratitude reduces social comparisons. Rather than becoming resentful toward people who have more money or better jobs—a major factor in reduced self-esteem—grateful people are able to appreciate other people's accomplishments.
7. **Gratitude increases mental strength.** For years, research has shown gratitude not only reduces stress, but it may also play a major role in overcoming trauma. A 2006 study published in *Behavior Research and Therapy* found that Vietnam War veterans with higher levels of gratitude experienced lower rates of post-traumatic stress disorder. A 2003 study published in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* found that gratitude was a major contributor to resilience following the terrorist attacks on September 11. Recognizing all that you have to be thankful for—even during the worst times—fosters resilience.

We all have the ability and opportunity to cultivate gratitude. Rather than complain about the things you think you deserve, take a few moments to focus on all that you *have*. Developing an

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"attitude of gratitude" is one of the simplest ways to improve your satisfaction with life.