

Gratitude - Activity One: The expression of gratitude is a kind of mega strategy for achieving happiness. Robert Emmons (The world's leading researcher on this topic), defines gratitude as "a felt sense of wonder, thankfulness and appreciation for life". It is many things to many people; it is appreciation; it is looking at the bright side of a set back; it is fathoming abundance; it is thanking someone in your life; it is counting your blessings, it is savoring, it is not taking things for granted, it is coping, it is present orientated. Gratitude is an antidote to negative thinking, a neutralizer of envy, hostility, worry and irritation. Expressing gratitude is much more than saying thank you. Research has shown multiple benefits, including higher levels of "happiness", more energy, more hope, and increased periods of positive emotions. It also has been shown to increase helpfulness, empathy, forgiveness. Furthermore a person who is inclined to gratitude is less likely to be depressed, anxious, lonely, envious or neurotic. Research clearly shows you will be happier if you cultivate "an attitude of gratitude".

There are 8 main reasons for cultivating gratitude:

1. Grateful thinking promotes savoring of positive life experiences.
2. It boosts self worth and self esteem.
3. Helps people cope with stress and trauma. Expressing gratefulness during personal adversity like chronic illness or injury can help you adjust, move on, and perhaps begin anew.
4. Encourages moral behavior, especially helping others.
5. It can help build social bonds, strengthen existing and develop new relationships.
6. It inhibits invidious comparisons with others as you are more grateful for what you have.
7. It is incompatible with negative emotions, diminishing emotions like anger, greed, fear and bitterness.
8. Helps us to thwart the hedonic adaptation (our capacity to adjust to any circumstance or event). For example you may gain something in your life (like a new partner) but within 6 months your increase in happiness returns to your usual or set point. Adaptation to all things positive is essentially the enemy of happiness. However it can advance our recovery from negative events such as injury (again we tend to return to our happiness set point after the initial disappointment).

Activity 1 - Gratitude Journal: Best if you enjoy writing. Choose several minutes per day to look outside your life and reflect. Ponder 3-5 things for which you are currently grateful, from the mundane to the magnificent. Research shows doing this once per week for a month boosts happiness for 6 months. The frequency of this can depend on your own individual ability to cope. Too much too often can dilute gratitude.

Activity 2 - Develop a Gratitude Partner: Find someone from your friends or family with whom you can help foster your appreciations, and share your blessings with. Alternatively practice gratitude on a daily basis to as many people as you can.

Activity 3 - Gratitude Letter: Write a letter of thanks to someone who you feel has been instrumental in your life. Even if you do not post this letter it will improve happiness.