



Gratitude



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It is not medical advice.

You should always consult your doctor about your own particular conditions, and ensure that you do your own research before making any changes to your diet.

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Gratitude



Can feel like a difficult subject with chronic illness

What does that mean for you – how do you feel about the concept of gratitude?

When I say ‘gratitude’, how does that make you feel?



What is Gratitude?



Gratitude practice is the intentional and regular act of reflecting on and expressing thankfulness.

It cultivates a mindset that can shift focus from pain or loss toward small moments of value (Wood et al., 2010).

It's not about denying difficulties — it's about acknowledging what is still good, even amidst pain (Emmons & Stern, 2013).



Why is Gratitude Helpful?



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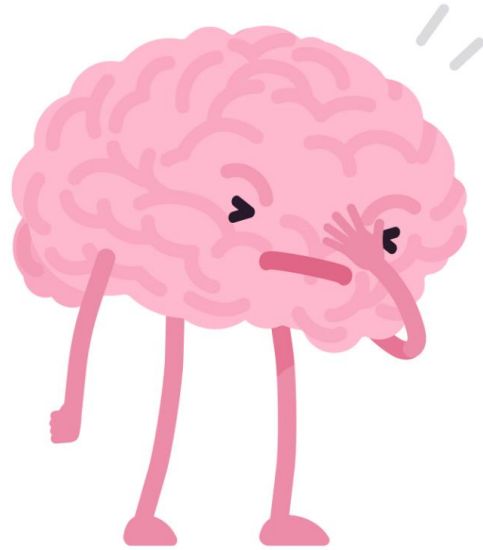


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How We Think

Different parts of our brains do different types of thinking.



Worried, Frightened Brain - Amygdala

Worry, sadness, fear

Judges things as 'good' or 'bad', 'right' or wrong'

Focuses on negative

Self-critical



The Wise, Kind Brain – Pre-Frontal Cortex

Wise, calm, rational, compassionate

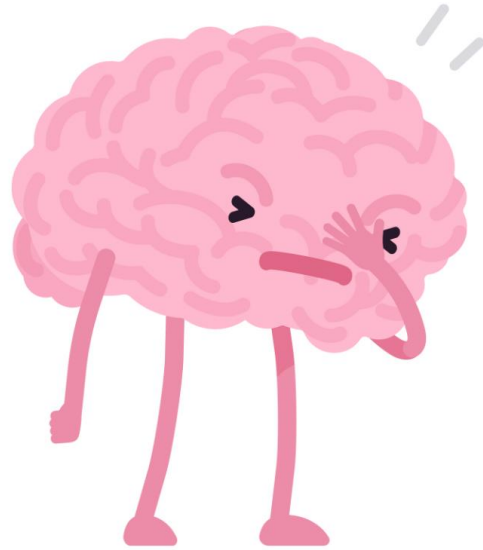
Problem solving

The kind voice that we would use to other people

Sees the best in ourselves and other people.

Can't be in both at the same time – exam or interview situation

How We Think



Worried, Frightened Brain - Amygdala

The more time we spend using our 'Worried, Frightened Brain, the worse we feel mentally and emotionally.

Sad, anxious, depressed, worried, frightened, down.



The Wise, Kind Brain – Pre-Frontal Cortex

The more often we can be in our Wise, Kind Brain, the better we feel mentally and emotionally.

Optimistic, positive, joyful, happy, relaxed, calm
Helpful

The Evolution of the Brain



The Amygdala evolved around 250 million years ago

We're really good at using it – we've had a lot of time to practice!

The Pre Frontal Cortex evolved around 30 million years ago

The most significant expansion 400,000 years ago.

A much newer part of the brain – one we haven't quite got the hang of yet!

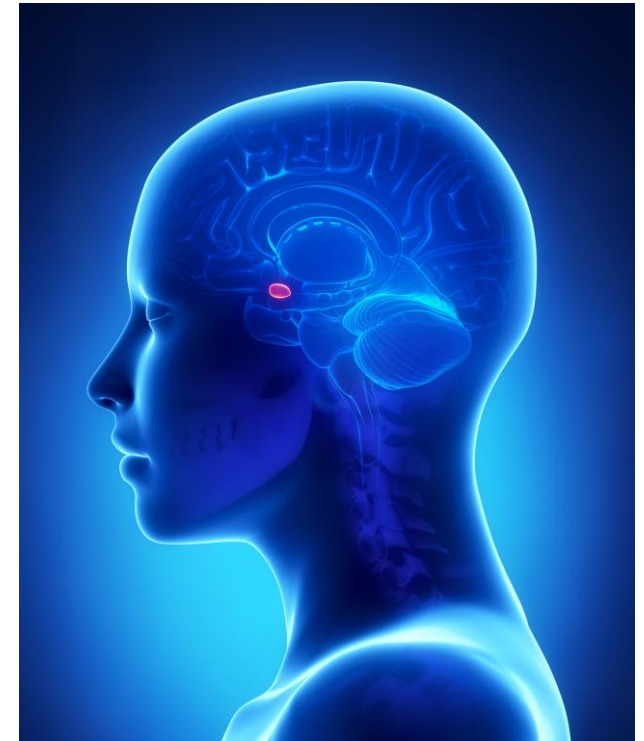


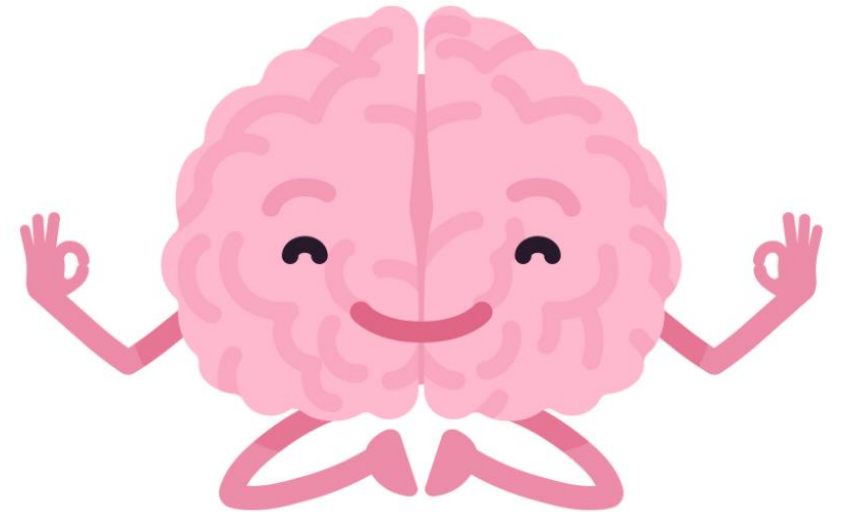
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What's this got to do with Gratitude?



Science has shown us that there are a number of wellbeing tools that we can use to 'switch on' our Pre Frontal Cortex – the 'Wise, Kind' Brain, and downregulate our Amygdala – the 'Worried, Frightened' Brain.

Gratitude is one of those practices.





The Importance of Gratitude

Studies show that gratitude particularly activates the medial prefrontal cortex (mPFC)

This area of the brain is associated with emotional regulation, decision-making, and social cognition. When this area is activated, it can lead to increased feelings of happiness, well-being, and positive emotions

According to the Mindfulness Awareness Research Center of UCLA, it may even lead to lasting neural changes in the mPFC and other related areas, improving cognitive functions associated with these regions



<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC4588123/>

<https://positivepsychology.com/neuroscience-of-gratitude>



Benefits of Gratitude



Various research studies show that gratitude can:

- Calm the nervous system (Krause et al., 2017)
- Shift attention from negative ruminations (Watkins et al., 2003)
- Cultivate hope and resilience (Algoe, 2012)
- Improve coping in chronic illness (Peterson & Seligman, 2004)



Benefits of Gratitude

Gratitude practice can:

- Improve sleep (Wood et al., 2009)
- Reduce depression/anxiety (Seligman et al., 2005)
- Enhance immunity (Mills et al., 2015)
- Increase optimism (Emmons & McCullough, 2003)

Key Study: Emmons & McCullough (2003)

Participants who kept gratitude journals for 10 weeks:

- Had fewer physical complaints
- Exercised more
- Felt more optimistic



The Importance of Gratitude



Gratitude activates reward systems, increasing dopamine and serotonin.

It involves the hypothalamus and ventral tegmental area (Fox et al., 2015).

The hypothalamus regulates stress, and gratitude has been shown to reduce the production of stress hormones

Ventral Tegmental area releases dopamine and serotonin – feel-good chemicals – we get a boost of good brain chemicals when we feel gratitude.

Regular practice rewires the brain via neuroplasticity.



Gratitude and Health

We cannot feel gratitude and fear at the same time – not physically possible!

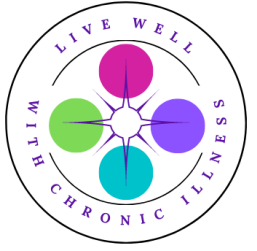
No one feels grateful when they are about to be eaten by a Sabre-Tooth Tiger!

The **genuine** sensation of gratitude signals to our limbic brain that we are safe – and so we can switch into parasympathetic, rest and digest mode.

By deliberately generating feelings of gratitude, even for a few moments, we are rewiring our brains so our body can come out of ‘defence’ mode and entering the ‘healing state’ of ‘rest and digest’.



Gratitude and Connection



As humans, we have a fundamental need for connection with others

We are designed to 'co-regulate' – our nervous systems respond to and mirror the nervous systems of those around us

When we are connected with others, our wellbeing, physical and mental, improves

Gratitude helps us to perceive ourselves as connected to others

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/gb/blog/evidence-based-living/202311/giving-thanks-how-gratitude-strengthens-relationships>



Connection Practice



Connection practice



Gratitude and chronic pain



Reduced Pain Perception

Participants reporting stronger feelings of gratitude experienced lower pain intensity and interference with daily activities (Hill et al., 2013).

Enhanced Emotional Well-Being

Regular gratitude journaling was linked to fewer depression symptoms and greater positive affect among chronic pain sufferers (Ng et al., 2012).

Decreased Distress

Gratitude exercises helped patients shift away from “distressing” thoughts about pain, improving coping (Rudich et al., 2008).

Improved Physical Function and Sleep

Those who practiced gratitude reported better sleep quality and more engagement in gentle exercise, supporting overall physical resilience (Wood et al., 2009; Mills et al., 2015).



Health Benefits of Gratitude



Research has shown that regular gratitude practice can

- It can rewire the brain, changing brain structure, increase grey matter, which is associated with better cognitive functioning
- Regulates our emotions by its effect on the limbic system, helping us to reduce difficult emotions.
- Lowers blood pressure
- Boosts serotonin and dopamine production
- Increases activity in two primary regions of the brain: the anterior cingulate cortex (ACC) and the medial prefrontal cortex (mPFC) – the areas associated with empathy, decision making, controlling negative emotions and impulses
- One study by Emmons RA, McCullough ME. (2003) showed marked effects on both depression and pain
- Other studies have show improved anxiety and sleep with gratitude practice



Gratitude and Health



You don't need to be grateful for pain and illness.

Can you notice

- A soft pillow
- A kind text
- A supportive relative or friend
- A calm moment
- A pet

Inviting our brains to notice that there can be good even amongst suffering

Eliciting genuine feelings of gratitude- changes our brains and our physical body

Can make things a little bit more bearable



How to Practice Gratitude



It doesn't matter WHAT we feel grateful for.

This is NOT a stick to beat ourselves with. It's not about feeling that we 'should' feel grateful. That we 'ought' to be grateful for being ill or in pain!!

That's no help, because it doesn't generate a genuine sensation of gratitude in us.

It's about eliciting the genuine sensation of gratitude within us, and how that reprogrammes our neurobiology

Can feel grateful for the sun in the sky, for a cup of cocoa on a chilly afternoon, a beautiful flower, a loving family member, a warm bath, a good book, a smile from a stranger, someone who has helped us, a supportive friend, a phone call. Anything.



Gratitude and Nature



Nature inspires awe and gratitude
(Stellar et al., 2015)

- Look at photos
- Go outside if able
- Practice mindful noticing of beauty
- Notice feelings of awe, curiosity, gratitude



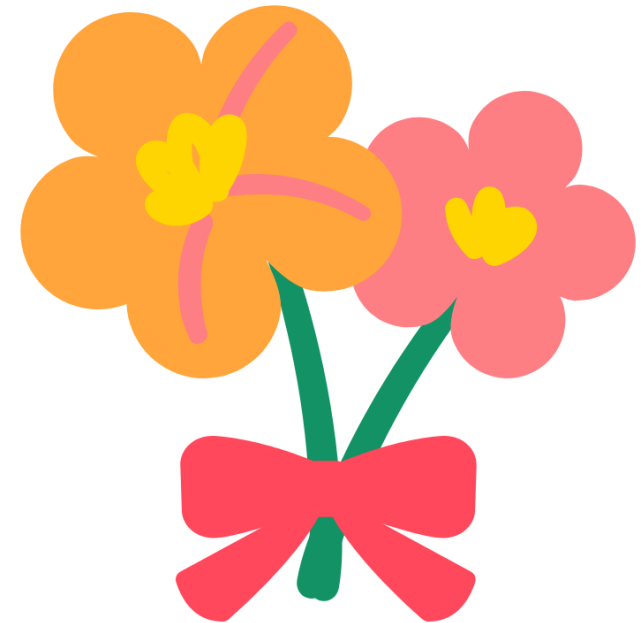
Practice



Practical – 3 P's – Person, Pleasure, Promise

Mindfulness is Experiential – is a Practice

Feedback – how did you find that?





How to Practice Gratitude

- The 3 P's – Person, Pleasure, Promise
- Change 'I've got to' to 'I get to' – I've got to take my medications – I get to take my medications. I've got to go to hospital. I get to go to hospital. I've got to cook for my family tonight – I get to cook for my family tonight. I've got to go to work today – I get to go to work today
- Gratitude journal – noting down 3 things we are grateful for at the end of each day, or at the start of each day.
- Gratitude Jar – write down 1 good thing each day and put in the jar – review after 1 year
- Thank you notes – write a thank you note to someone each day (or to yourself)
- Look at all the things around you – consider who has been involved in the production of these things.



How to Practice Gratitude



Remember, it doesn't matter WHAT you are grateful for, it's the act of prompting that emotion in ourselves that has measurable physical benefits. The more often you can elicit those feelings, the more benefit you will get.



No Right Way

- No perfect practice
- Adapt to your energy and beliefs
- If you are doing it, you are doing it right!
- When you notice a moment of gratitude, amplify it, stay with it for a few seconds or minutes
- Commit it to memory
- Try writing, speaking, or visual gratitude

"Acknowledging the good that you already have in your life is the foundation for all abundance."

— *Eckhart Tolle*



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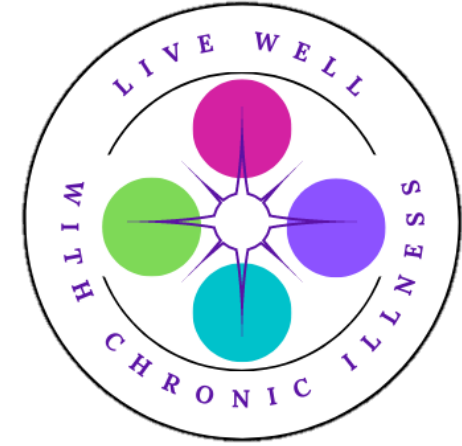


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The End

Thank you for Listening

