

# TO YOUR HEALTH

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Happy Spring

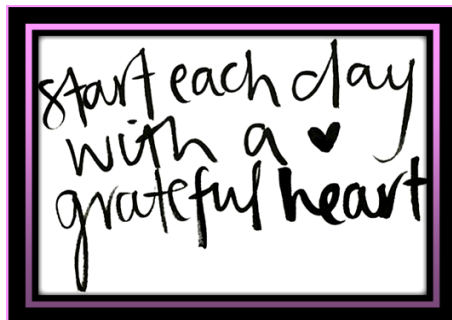
April 2017

## PRACTICING and CULTIVATING GRATITUDE:

By Judi Tabor, MSW, LCSW

Two weeks ago, Mother Nature brought us a late winter blizzard, just as spring was rounding the corner! Temperatures were rising, birds were chirping, and the days were longer. Many looked out their windows that following morning to see mounds of white, a brilliant blue sky and the sun reflecting off a snow covered landscape. Comments ranged from “What a stunningly beautiful morning!” to “Thank goodness it’s March and this will all soon melt!!” What do these responses have in common? Both look for what’s positive, and both encourage feelings of gratitude.

According to Dictionary.com, gratitude is “the quality or feeling of being thankful”. Psychology Today elaborates further, defining gratitude as “an emotion expressing appreciation for what one has, as opposed to an emphasis on what one wants”. However, Dr. Robert Emmons, a leading gratitude researcher at the University of California Davis, suggests that gratitude is much more than feeling thankful for something; it is a deeper appreciation for someone (or something) which in turn produces longer lasting positivity.



Indeed, gratitude is getting a great deal of attention these days as a facet of Positive Psychology, and practicing gratitude has been shown to have a variety of health benefits. Studies show that we can also cultivate gratitude, and by doing so, can increase our happiness and well-being. Practicing gratitude can have a transformative effect over time. Here are seven scientifically proven benefits of gratitude:

- 1) *Gratitude opens the door to more relationships:* A study found that thanking a new acquaintance makes them more likely to seek an ongoing relationship. Acknowledging other people’s contributions can lead to new opportunities.
- 2) *Gratitude improves physical health:* Gratitude is a positive emotion, and positive emotions can benefit overall health. Grateful people report feeling healthier than other people, and are also more likely to take care of their health. They exercise more often and are more likely to attend regular check-ups.
- 3) *Gratitude improves psychological health:* Gratitude has been shown to reduce a multitude of toxic emotions, from envy and resentment to frustrations and regret. Dr. Robert Emmons 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 study by the University of Kentucky.

They experienced more sensitivity and empathy toward other people and a decreased desire to seek revenge.

- 5) **Gratitude improves your sleep:** Just thinking about a few things that we're grateful for when we go to bed at night can induce a relaxation response, helping us to fall asleep. Writing in a gratitude journal can improve sleep, and you may sleep better and longer.
- 6) **Gratitude improves self-esteem:** Studies have shown that gratitude reduces social comparisons. Rather than becoming resentful toward people who we perceive as doing "better" than us—a factor in self esteem—grateful people are able to appreciate both the good in their lives, and the lives of others.
- 7) **Gratitude increases mental strength:** Research has shown that gratitude not only reduces stress, but may also play a major role in overcoming trauma. Studies have shown that gratitude is a major contributor to resilience. Recognizing all that you have to be thankful for, even during the most difficult times, fosters resilience.

In the Harvard Health Publications article "In Praise of Gratitude", the author discusses ways to cultivate gratitude:

- 1) **Write a thank you note:** Consider writing a thank you note to someone, expressing your enjoyment and appreciation of that person's impact on your life.
- 2) **Keep a gratitude journal:** Make it a habit to do a daily, or weekly review—writing down the moments, exchanges and experiences you were most grateful for. Connect with how you felt in the moment.
- 3) **Count your blessings:** Big and small.
- 4) **Prayers of thanksgiving:** People who are religious and/or spiritual can use prayer to cultivate gratitude.

- 5) **Meditate:** Mindfulness meditation and yoga involve looking at the present moment without judgment, and can often have a focus on gratitude.

Gratitude helps people focus on the goodness in their lives. And research shows that gratitude grows stronger with use. Practicing and cultivating gratitude can have a huge impact on your life. Allow yourself to reflect on special moments, exchanges and experiences with a truly grateful heart.

### Health Education Lecture

Dr. Ginette Lafleche will give a presentation,

### **"Building the Brain's Annuity Plan"**

Dr. Lafleche is a neuropsychologist who specializes in brain disorders and has evaluated Residents at the Village Clinic for a number of years. The focus of her presentation will be ways to protect the brain and keep it healthy.

Please join us for this lecture on  
**Wednesday, April 5, 2017**  
**10:30 am — 11:30 am**  
**Auditorium Center**



**What if today, we were just grateful for everything?**