

TO YOUR HEALTH

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Giving Thanks

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At this time of year we are surrounded by messages about making the holidays joyful. However, during these stressful times in our world, it can be reflex to put our attention towards what isn't working and more of a challenge to shift our focus to the myriad of things for which we are grateful. For those that have recently suffered the loss of a loved one, this time of year holds a particular challenge. How can we cope with our grief and survive the pressures of the holidays? Are there ways to cultivate an attitude of gratitude in the midst of grief?

For one mother whose 23-year-old son died suddenly and unexpectedly, her path to healing started with a simple act. Kelly Buckley, a former nurse from North Carolina, began to keep a journal of "one little thing" to be grateful for each day. Even in the midst of her pain and deep sorrow, she was able to recognize and find one small gift in each day. In her words, *"With each passing day, I was able to see that even though my heart was breaking, much goodness still surrounded me."*

Each little thing she made note of in her journal did not need to be earth-shattering or profound. It could be as simple as: *"I woke up. I have a roof over my head. I have clothes to wear. I have food to eat. I have running water. I am thankful."*
- www.kellybuckley.com

Over time, this repeated act of daily giving thanks added up and became a positive force during her grieving process. This is not to say that she didn't experience despair; she was truly devastated by her loss and continues to feel that part of her will be forever broken. However, writing down one little positive thing every day became a habit and helped her through the darkest part of her grief.

Buckley draws a connection between gratitude and resilience. This can have practical applications in many areas of our lives. For example, if we are experiencing serious illness, we can either focus on our limitations or we can choose to focus on what we can still do going forward.

Eventually, Buckley's daily habit of focusing on her gratitude became a book called, *"Just One Little Thing"*, that has gone on to help others in varying circumstances. In conjunction with her book, she started a global Facebook community that has grown to over 100,000 people from more than 45 different countries. The focus is on affirming life and compassion through the regular practice of gratitude. According to her website, *"By writing about my experience, I was lucky enough to connect with thousands of other people who were looking, as I was, for a positive way to shift their perspective on life, even in the toughest of circumstances. Some had lost loved ones; some endured a painful divorce, or debilitating illness. So many I connected with had lost jobs, homes and stability. We all have our stories of pain, and we all just need something to hang on to, to let us know tomorrow may be a better day."*

To some, this may sound a bit Pollyanna, or like a way to escape facing difficulties, however it is not meant as a way to avoid hardship. Rather, it is a way to hold all the emotions we are experiencing while at the same time remembering that there is still good in the world. It can be a lifeline to uncovering peace of mind even in the midst of tragedy. We humans are complex beings capable of holding many conflicting emotions at the same time. Have you ever been able to find a moment of peace even when it seemed like your world was falling apart? If we can consciously choose to put our focus on one little thing daily, and we repeat this process until it becomes a habit, it can slowly brighten our outlook on life.



It is common sense that whatever we choose to put our energies into will expand. As in the Native American story below, we can choose to feed negativity and despair or we can choose to feed positivity and light.



A Native American grandfather was talking to his grandson about how he felt.

He said, "I feel as if I have two wolves fighting in my heart. One wolf is the vengeful, angry, violent one. The other wolf is the loving, compassionate one."

The grandson asked him, "Which wolf will win the fight in your heart?"

The grandfather answered: "The one I feed."



This simple concept is freeing and empowering, and yet it can be a challenge. One way to form the habit of focusing on gratitude is to keep a Gratitude Journal. Keep a blank notebook and pen next to your bed. Every night before turning out the light or first thing in the morning, write down 5 things for which you are grateful. They can be small or grand, it doesn't matter. What matters is the simple act of consistently giving thanks for that which we are grateful. Make it a habit. Notice if over time it changes your outlook on life. If it has helped you feel lighter and happier, keep going! Even in the darkest of times, there is always something to be grateful for.

*From all of us in the Clinic,
we wish you Happy Holidays and
a New Year filled with good health and happiness.*



From: Susan Cusson, Debbie Camilleri, Michelle Scott, Donny Chanthavong, Emily Robinson,



Elizabeth Keane, Pamela Duchene and Judi Tabor.