

Give Gratitude for the Holidays!

According to an article in the Harvard Health Publications, expressing gratitude has proven to increase happiness, as it enforces positive emotions and experiences, leading towards improved health and relationships. There are many ways you can express gratitude this season.

The holidays can be a time of stress for many. This year, why not turn your feelings of stress into gratitude instead? Start a new tradition by acknowledging both the big and little things in your life that you are grateful for.

Expressing gratitude is good for your mental health, as it takes you out of your individual experience and connects you to other people, to nature, or to your beliefs.

There are many ways you can express gratitude this season, including:

Keeping a Gratitude Journal

Try writing a journal of things that you are grateful for. You can write in this journal any way you choose—the important thing is to remember to write regularly— either every day or on a weekly basis.

Start by recording a list of five things you have experienced in the past week that you are grateful for. They can be as simple as— *I am grateful for my cosy down comforter*, or can be more personal— *I am grateful for having such an amazing mom who supports me with every career decision I make*.

Paying it Forward

Giving back to those less fortunate is another way of showing gratitude. According to a 2013 study in Psychology and Aging, adults who volunteered at least 200 hours in the past year (approximately 4 hours per week) four years later were 40% less likely than non-volunteers to develop hypertension. Volunteering also helps establish new social connections and motivates you to take care of yourself.

Try volunteering at a local food bank, donating your old clothes or toys for holiday drives, or taking part in Governor General David Johnston's **My Giving Moment** campaign (www.mygivingmoment.ca). This campaign focuses on Canadians giving back— either in a small or a large way. You can donate your time, your talent, or your money for a number of different organizations and causes.



Using Social Media

Many people like to use social media for expressing their gratitude. For example, in a 30-day Gratitude Status Challenge, Facebook users post a different status every day for one month about something that they are grateful for. You can use other social media outlets, such as Twitter or Instagram, to take part in the challenge. You can also post pictures about things you are grateful for. Using social media to express what you're grateful for can encourage others to do the same, as well as can let people know how blessed you are feeling.

Using Visual Cues

Obstacles that may get in the way of expressing your gratitude include a lack of awareness, or forgetfulness. To counteract these obstacles give yourself visual cues to trigger awareness of things you are grateful for. Visual cues can be anything from hanging pictures of people or places you are grateful to have in your life, to placing post-it note reminders of things you are grateful for in obvious spaces, ie on your bathroom mirror. If you're very committed, you can even set an alarm on your phone to remind you at random times of the day to pause and be thankful.



Grabbing a Gratitude Partner

Having a gratitude partner increases the likelihood of being committed to expressing gratitude. Discuss your gratitude lists together, or talk about how being grateful positively influences your life. You can also remind each other to be grateful for things that you may have personally missed. Just like a workout buddy, a gratitude partner will encourage you to keep feeling, expressing, and acknowledging the special things in life.

Bring grateful for things in your life will help you have a more positive outlook this holiday season, and put your holiday stress into perspective. Instead of trying to achieve that "perfect" happiness when it comes to the holidays, take a moment (or a month) to realize what you already have. If you feel like you are having a tough time finding things in your life to be grateful for, contact your EFAP to be connected with a counsellor to help you recognize things to be thankful for.

For confidential assistance
Brown Crawshaw 1.800.668.2055
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