Expressing gratitude year-round: the gift that keeps on giving

November is the month of Thanksgiving. But what about feeling grateful the other 11 months of the year? Research shows that expressing gratitude year-round can offer physical, mental, social and emotional benefits. Being grateful means expressing a thankful appreciation of the many things — and the important people — in your life.

Gratitude benefits the giver, too

It feels good to give back and express gratitude. Not only will the recipient of your gratitude feel better, but you will, too. As it turns out, expressing gratitude can help improve our own well-being.

Focusing on the good things in life may actually help us improve mental and physical health. When you are grateful, you feel positive emotions that release dopamine, the “feel-good” chemical in the brain. This may help help address mental health issues such as stress, anxiety and depression. It’s well known that high levels of stress lower the body’s immune response to potential threats.

Preliminary research shows that people who consider themselves “grateful,” have fewer physical health issues than those who don’t. However, more research is needed in this area. Does gratefulness result in better health, or does better health promote gratefulness? The two appear to be connected.

Additional benefits of gratitude

Grateful people often report increased self-esteem, perhaps because of their ability to recognize and appreciate other peoples’ accomplishments. They are less likely to compare themselves to others. When you feel grateful, you’re more likely to think of yourself in a positive light, too.

Gratitude is one of many factors contributing to positive physical and mental health. Being grateful can also deepen personal relationships. Expressing gratitude may help partners feel more satisfied with each other. Feeling grateful also allows people to maintain a more hopeful, positive attitude about the future.

Advocate Aurora EAP: 800-236-3231
**Tips to foster gratitude in children**

- Model gratitude and empathy on a daily basis. Demonstrate this through your own expressions of gratitude to others.
- Create age-appropriate opportunities for children to help others.
- Do things together such as volunteering at an event, bringing food to a sick neighbor or sharing a baked treat with others.

**The bottom line**

Grateful people seem to be happier, healthier and more resilient. They may have an advantage in overcoming trauma and bouncing back from highly stressful situations. However, practicing gratitude may only provide modest benefits to someone suffering from clinical depression, severe anxiety or other mental health concerns. Professional treatment options such as counseling, behavioral therapy and medications may be needed.

*If you or a family member in your household is struggling with family issues, mental health concerns or other problems affecting your life, please contact Advocate Aurora EAP. Professional counselors — available 24/7 — are there to help. Callers can be assured of complete confidentiality.*

---

**Tips for practicing gratitude at work**

- Routinely show your appreciation at work for people you value.
- Send an email or leave a handwritten note on a coworker’s desk to say “thanks.”
- Never underestimate the power of a simple “thank you.” Over time, sincere expressions of gratitude can lead to a stronger working relationship among co-workers.

**Tips for practicing gratitude at home**

- Avoid taking the people in your life for granted.
- Say “thank you” for the big and little things they do (taking out the trash...doing the laundry...cooking a nice meal).
- Share heartfelt messages of gratitude with loved ones (write a note... make a phone call...send a card).

Don’t forget to thank other people who make your life easier or better (maintenance or support people, military personnel, delivery drivers, health care workers).

For assistance, please contact Advocate Aurora Employee Assistance Program: 800-236-3231

---

"As we express our gratitude, we must never forget that the highest appreciation is not to utter words, but to live by them."

- John F. Kennedy