

SCIENCE

Notebook

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Counting Blessings Is Healthful

Count your blessings. Count them one by one. You may find yourself sleeping better, exercising more and caring more about other people.

New research shows that people who consciously remind themselves every day of the things they are grateful for show marked improvements in mental health and some aspects of physical health. The results appear to be equally true for healthy college students and people with incurable diseases, according to new research published in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*.

College students asked to fill out a weekly report of five things for which they were grateful cited things such as "the generosity of friends" and "the Rolling Stones." Another group of students was asked to keep a daily diary for two weeks and express gratitude for things that had gone well each day. A third group, comprising adults with incurable diseases such as polio, were asked to write down what they were thankful for each day for three weeks.

Compared with similar groups who counted hassles, such as "hard to find parking" and "finances depleting quickly," the grateful groups felt better about their lives and more optimistic. The college students exercised more; the chronically ill adults reported sleeping longer and waking up refreshed.

The grateful people were also nicer to others and more willing to help people with personal problems, leading the researchers to conclude that "gratitude serves as a moral motivator."

Being grateful was also superior to its distant cousin -- seeing oneself as better off than others. People who took pleasure in troubles of others -- *Schadenfreude* -- had better mental health than those who counted hassles, but worse than grateful people.

The research was conducted by Robert A. Emmons at the University of California at Davis, and Michael E. McCullough of the University of Miami.

-- Shankar Vedantam