



What happened when I PRACTISED GRATITUDE

Ever wondered what saying thanks could do for your health? Senior content writer Stacey Carter investigated...

When I think of what gratitude means, I think of two things. The first is saying thank you for what people give you, like when someone offers you a biscuit, and the second is when something good coincidentally happens – like the rain stopping just as you pop to the shops. Recently, gratitude has become a bit of a wellness buzzword. Studies show that just thinking about the things you are grateful for will improve your quality of sleep, lower your blood pressure, and even boost your immunity. I was interested to see whether gratitude could bring any health benefits, so I grabbed a blank notebook and a pen, and gave myself three weeks to feel the effects.

“Reminding myself of the positive things takes away the time I have to dwell on the negatives”

Daily muses

I came into gratitude journaling thinking that in the first week I would be able to jot down some work achievements, and maybe even a new personal best at the gym. Instead, when I came face-to-face with my notepad on Friday evening, I felt like I didn't have a lot to say about work and I'd hurt the left side of my hip from lifting weights and not stretching properly afterwards. The next night, I did a yoga flow before bed to help with my hip, and locked eye contact with myself in the mirror while doing pigeon pose. This was not how week one was supposed to go, I thought. The next morning, I got up early and went on a walk to catch the sun rising. 15 minutes in, and my

umbrella had its insides turned out by the wind, and I was getting splashed by cars driving through puddles because I was trying to adhere to the 2m distance rule while walking on the pavement. I took a different route than usual and ended up down an alleyway with high fences either side. I'd only been walking for a few minutes when I realised there was a ginger cat trailing behind me. When I stopped, the cat stopped. This carried on for a little while longer, until the weirdness of the situation started to make me laugh. Finally, as I reached the end of the alleyway, the cat ran past me, brushing my leg with its tail. When I got back home I grabbed my notepad and pen. Every day I've been writing the date and then the sentence: 'I am grateful for (insert thing/person/moment). Today is no different: 'I am grateful for... the little ginger cat who wanted to play a game on a rainy day.'

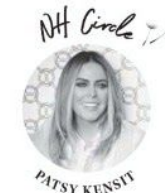
Silver lining

It's not until the end of the second week that I start to notice the benefits of practising gratitude. I'm in a better mood than usual and I also find that I'm less stressed about work than I have been in previous weeks. Reminding myself of the positive things takes away the time I have to dwell on the negatives. Benefits such as this aren't unusual, according to gratitude expert Pujja McClymont, coach at House of Wisdom (houseofwisdomstudio.com): "Gratitude is incredible for helping you manage your emotions. Our minds harbour negative thoughts, so even on a seemingly terrible day, gratitude can help us discover the good things that occurred as well. Knowing that you can still find things to be grateful for contributes to a greater sense of meaning in your life." The more research I do, the more I realise that my initial desire to jot down accomplishments was wrong. "It's important to note," says Pujja, "that gratitude isn't about the grand stuff, such as completing a project or buying a house. It's about the little things, such as waking up in the morning, having money in the bank to pay bills, the food you eat and the people around you. It's a daily reminder that you have a beautiful life

worth living, which often gets lost in our ever-demanding society, where people are always striving for something greater."

Small things

It's during week three, I decide as I'm sitting on my mattress, allen keys, screws and various other tools laid out in front of me, that I'm grateful for two things: the first being my perseverance with DIY jobs and the second, that I got assigned this particular feature this issue. This month could have felt a lot harder (moving house with a second lockdown looming has been challenging) and I'm confident that gratitude journaling has made it less stressful. Shaking off the annoying/bad/difficult stuff becomes a lot easier when you realise that part is only 10-30 percent of your life. The rest of it is good. I can afford to cook myself nice meals. I have friends who I can lean on for support. Both my parents are healthy and happy. And, even within that 10-30 percent, I've learnt that I can find small things that make my day a bit brighter: like the cat that followed me out on a walk and the man at the dump who let me drop my rubbish off, despite it being 10 minutes to closing time. Even watching the leaves on the trees turn crisp and brown has cheered me up this month. Sometimes I don't realise this in the moment, but writing it down helps me to notice. I think this is a good way to look at the world: in life there will be inevitable setbacks, but if you look around, there are far more small moments of everyday joy.



"OVER THE YEARS, THE MOST CONTENTED TIMES IN MY LIFE WERENT THE PERFECT ONES, BUT THE ONES IN WHICH I TOOK TIME TO APPRECIATE THE LITTLE THINGS"

