

Published November 27th, 2019

Attitude of gratitude: Live longer and healthier

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We have an entire day set aside to focus on gratefulness: Thanksgiving. However, what if we focused on gratitude at least one day each week? Doing so can have a positive impact on our health.

Do you wake up every morning appreciative of another day or do you roll out of bed with the thought, "Oh, another day of the same old thing?" Our attitude sets the stage for how each day plays out. Attitude can affect our health, our marriage, our career and the very essence of our lives.

Most of us probably model our attitudes based on our parents - that can be both a negative and a positive. If you had parents who were very critical, you might make a real effort at not being like them and always be looking for someone or something to compliment. On the other hand, you might be overly critical of others and yourself. If you find yourself in the latter group, your attitude might be hindering your ability to live life fully.

There is much research on attitudes of gratitude in the medical community and most of it points to less illnesses, better sleep, better relationships and adding an additional two years to your life.

A positive attitude is always seeing the possibility in every situation as a potential gift. Yes, the forest fire can bring about new life and clear the forest of the overgrowth.

Harold S. Kushner said, "If you concentrate on finding whatever is good in every situation, you will discover that your life will suddenly be filled with gratitude, a feeling that nurtures the soul."

The positive attitude seems to bleed into an "attitude of gratitude." We like to be around positive people. They make us feel good about ourselves and usually help us feel both grounded and safe. They always say "thank you" and you may find that they smile a lot as well.

If you tend to make "mountains out of molehills," these three tips could help you reduce stress and increase gratefulness:

1. Stop - Tell yourself you are not going to do this "mountain" thing again!
2. Breathe - Focus on your breath. Practice deep belly breathing for about two minutes.
3. Refocus - Reframe that mountain into bite size pieces and find someone who is grounded to help you forge a better path.

My 19-year-old granddaughter had a recent experience with a flat tire and a flat spare tire while also undergoing the stress of taking hard classes and the confusion of parents giving her differing advice. She became so overwhelmed that it was hard to know where to go and how to get herself back to a stress-free place. Reminding her of these three actions and to focus on what she was grateful for changed her whole experience from one of stress to an opportunity.

As a geriatric care manager, I have been honored to work with individuals who are in their 90s and have had multiple losses and health challenges. Yet they feel good about their lives and see good in every day and in every person. They tell me that loss is just part of life and you need to expect it, grieve and move on. Many have added that the moving on is a way to honor those you have lost.

If you feel you're in need of an "attitude adjustment" try the following:

Reading

Journaling

Deep breathing

Meditation

Giving compliments

Seeking professional counseling

Many care managers are licensed therapists and can help you make this change. Let your life be one of light! Be healthy and live longer by making gratitude part of every day.

Happy Thanksgiving!

Affirmation: "I practice being grateful for what I have in my life daily."

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