

## A Daily Dose of Gratitude



As you know, this is the time of year we take pause to remember what we are thankful for. As we gather around tables and prepare for upcoming holidays, we share thoughts of gratitude and blessings with our families and friends. But what about the rest of the year? What would it look like to practice gratitude every day?

For starters, **we'd be happier**. Emerging research indicates a strong link between mental wellness and expressing gratitude on a regular basis. In one such study at Harvard University, those who regularly expressed gratitude – either verbally or in a daily journal – experienced less anxiety and depression than those who did not express gratitude daily.

**Our hearts like it, too.** Wellness guru Deepak Chopra, MD, teamed up with expert cardiologists to study the health effects of gratitude and found that those who express daily gratitude had increased heart rate variability and reduced inflammatory biomarkers, both measures of reduced risk for cardiac disease.

**Our work benefits from gratitude.** Praise for work well done and recognition of others' talents has long been recognized as contributing to happiness and good morale in the workplace. Saying "thank you" to a colleague may make a positive difference in their productivity and will increase the likelihood that you feel positive about your work.

So how do we make gratitude a daily habit? Here are some ways to get started:

1. **Say thank you** to at least one person daily. Giving and receiving gratitude has the same effect on your wellness. Thanking someone for their work, input or advice is an easy way to cultivate small doses of gratitude.
2. **Keep a journal.** Most of the studies performed on the effects of gratitude required participants to write a brief daily statement about what they were grateful for. Requiring this of yourself – however short it may be – spotlights the positive in our lives even on the hardest days. If you have children at home, invite them to participate too!
3. **Have a gratitude partner (or team).** Whether it's a friend, colleague, family member or trusted advisor, share with others what is going well in your life. Verbalizing the positive solidifies it in our minds, creating the neural pathways for increased mental wellbeing.
4. **Practice mindfulness.** Mindfulness, the practice of focusing on the present moment only, allows us to home in on what we are currently experiencing and removes the anxiety about the future. Sit for a moment each day and focus only on what you have right now: what is present in your life that brings you joy? Who is important to you? What activities, hobbies or ideas excite you? Focusing on these small but meaningful questions help you measure the positive in your life.

Whichever way you choose to cultivate and express gratitude, make it a daily habit, not only during the holidays, but throughout the year. Your mind, body and soul will thank you!



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"Enjoy the little things, for one day you may look back and realize they were the big things."

~Robert Brault

# Mindful Feasting

November and December are the season of parties, indulgent family meals and celebrations of gift-giving. And these all have one thing in common: amazing food!

Sharing meals with others is more than sustenance: it is a part of our culture, our family traditions and often our connection to “home.” What we eat, and with whom, is an important part of the human experience, and the workplace is no exception. As we approach the holidays, cookies, candy and treats adorn our desks and break rooms. Employee appreciation and year-end events are stocked with comfort foods such as casseroles, breads and sweets. No matter where we are, we build relationships when we share food.

Sharing good food provides us a great opportunity to practice eating mindfully. Mindfulness, or the practice of focusing on the present moment, is a mindset that requires us to forego thinking about anything other than our current experience. When we eat mindfully we can fully enjoy the treats we share this time of year.

Here are some steps to eating mindfully:

1. **Eat slowly.** This will not only keep you from overeating but will help you enjoy your food. Our minds need time to send the “full” signal to our bodies. Whether you have a sweet tooth or a savory palette, it will be satisfied by taking the time to chew slowly and pause between bites. Your stomach will thank you: eating slowly also helps digestion.
2. **Pay attention to food with your senses.** What do you like about it? Is it sweet? Crunchy? Chewy? Hot or cold? How does it smell? How is this food nourishing you? Taking the time to really focus on our food is a mindfulness practice that leads to a reduction in calorie consumption and better food choices. And when we actively engage all our senses in the act of eating, our favorite



foods taste even better.

3. **Pay attention to how you feel.** Indulging in the culinary gifts of the season is healthy - in small doses. But when we drift toward more pie because we are nervous or lonely, we can develop negative habits. Pay attention to how you're feeling when you eat and connect it to the types of food you're craving. This will help you avoid overeating or consuming foods that may be harmful to your body's needs.
4. **Eat with gratitude.** Be thankful for the availability of food and the company to share it with. When there are others that experience significant hunger, a large variety and quantity of food is a blessing to be celebrated.

Wherever you are, eat wisely by eating mindfully. Your body, mind and taste buds will enjoy all the fruits of the season.

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