

## **The Gratitude Project: Are there physical benefits to practicing gratitude?**

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During our research into this article, I kept seeing a scene of an Old West snake oil salesman hawking a bottle labeled gratitude. “This bottle right here makes men stronger, women more resilient, and turns children into perfect little angels. This will make your everyday life absolutely fantastic! No more worries or hardships. Drink this and you will be better, greater, the best!”

In the Greater Good Science Center’s Thnx4 project, results found that participants who maintained an online gratitude journal reported improved physical health; overall, they had fewer headaches, reduced stomach pain, clearer skin, and less congestion. In a study done by Robert Emmons and Michael McCullough, college students who counted their blessings each week for 10 weeks were significantly more likely to exercise compared to their counterparts who counted their burdens. In *Can Gratitude Be Good for Your Heart?*, Paul Mills and Laura Redwine found that people with asymptomatic heart failure who did daily gratitude journaling reported better sleep, less fatigue and depression, higher confidence, and lower levels of inflammation.

The physical health benefits taken individually were subtle, but they appear to inter-relate with one another, which seems to create a cumulative benefit to one’s overall general health and sense of well-being. The practice of gratitude has been shown to help induce the body’s relaxation response. This in turn helps to improve the quality of sleep, reduce blood pressure, lessen the perception of physical pain. If I continue to extrapolate, those benefits could lead to exercising more consistently, an increase in energy levels, increase one’s ability to handle stress

While the studies are interesting ... The physical health benefits of practicing gratitude aren’t necessarily cause and effect. It isn’t like taking an aspirin and your headache goes away. The mental health benefits one gains from this practice, seems to allow for more follow through on taking care of your physical health, such as exercising and eating healthfully. While gratitude may not be a cure-all, these scientific studies imply the regular practice of gratitude seems to contribute to one’s overall well-being.

Homework: How have you found gratitude to impact your life?

Next topic will discuss an example of gratitude in literature.