

Practicing gratitude

Do you remember the last time you felt grateful for one of life's small pleasures? For example: a day of sunshine after weeks of rain; a perfectly ripe tomato from a local garden; a thoughtful comment from a colleague. These little gifts happen daily, but how often do we pause and feel grateful for them?

Complaining is easy, problems appear crystal clear, unwanted and definitive: a cold in the summer, too many unanswered emails, not enough free time, weeks of rain, a difficult coworker - we can always find something that isn't right or ideal. Noticing the things in our lives that are going right is not as easy because good things don't shout and beg for attention in quite the same way as the things we deem bad or negative. Good things can more easily go unnoticed or unrecognized in our busy problem-solving lives.

However, research shows that practicing **gratitude** has many positive effects on mental and physical health and overall well-being. In a recent study at the University of California, three groups of people were asked to make weekly logs of their experiences: one group focused on tracking negative things in their week, another on what they were grateful for or positive things, and a third was simply asked to make a note of something that affected them, without emphasizing whether it was good or bad. At the ten week mark, the people who recorded what they were grateful for were generally more optimistic. They even exercised more and had fewer trips to the doctor.

Many such studies have been conducted on the effects of expressing gratitude. People who regularly express gratitude experience fewer symptoms of pain and take better care of their overall health. They are also happier and have less intrusive negative emotions such as envy, resentment and regret. That's not all; here are some more of the amazing benefits of gratitude:

- Improves sleep
- Positively affects self-esteem and self-worth

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- Increases resilience
- Boosts the immune system
- Boosts our careers
- Strengthens our emotions
- Makes us more optimistic

So now that we have covered the ways gratitude has an amazing impact on many facets of our lives, how do we implement it? It is not easy to make the switch from focusing on negatives to emphasizing positives, especially when we live in a culture that endorses near constant complaining.

One tried and true way to increase your daily dose of gratitude is to **keep a gratitude journal**. This means that each day you record five things you are grateful for (doing it right when you wake up or before sleep tends to make it easier to stick to). Some things of course will repeat big ones like having a roof over your head, a loving family or a career you care about. Others might be smaller and only occur that day, like when a friend cooks you a good meal, or that you caught the bus just as it was pulling up. Big or small, paying attention to the little gifts that fall upon us every day will increase your awareness of them and you will begin to feel more grateful overall and reap the many benefits of saying thanks.

You can also **express gratitude aloud**. This means doing things like telling people what you appreciate about them and sharing positive stories and feelings from your day. It also means that when you feel the urge to complain or criticize, you should make an effort to find something you are happy about to voice in its place.

Of course, this does not imply that you must put an end to telling people when something is wrong - it can be extremely beneficial to have the compassionate ear of a friend when times get tough. However, if you can eliminate some of your daily complaining and turn up the dial on gratitude, you are sure to bring more positivity and good health into your life and the lives of those around you.

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Time management strategies that really work

Stress is inevitable, it can even be healthy and manageable, but too much negative stress can be detrimental to our physical and mental health. Stress reduction techniques are important and developing your own toolkit for managing stressors is of vital importance. Another aspect of stress management is **prevention** and one of the most important ways to prevent stress is to have effective time management strategies. Time management, as we all know too well, is one of those things that may sound easy but can be really difficult to implement; procrastination, blurry priorities and inaccurate estimates of how long things take can be significant obstacles to a well-managed schedule. Below, you will find some tips to help you manage your very valuable time.

Prioritize

Take a look at the tasks ahead of you and rate them according to these four categories:

- Important and urgent
- Important but not urgent
- Urgent but not important
- Neither urgent nor important

People with optimal time management skills spend most of their time on tasks that are important but not urgent, decreasing the chances that an important task will become urgent and thus more stressful.

Start your day by scheduling your day

At the beginning of the day, take notice of what needs to get done and take a guess at how long it will take. Then, make a schedule for the day according to this list. Stick to your schedule. Taking 30 minutes to do this will actually save you time in the long run.

Learn how long things take

Record how long tasks take. You may find things you thought took a long time actually can be accomplished quite quickly, while tasks you thought you would breeze through indeed take longer than anticipated.

Break correspondence into the four D's

Emails tend to be overwhelming and suck up a lot of time. When you look at your inbox, apply the four D's:

- Delete: Many emails can be deleted immediately, so get rid of them
- Do: Emails that are urgent and/or have a simple answer can be responded to immediately
- Delegate: If you are not the right person to field the email, forward it to the person who is
- Defer: For emails that require more attention and further thought, flag them for later

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Work in short time chunks

When overload hits, it's important to prioritize tasks and manage your time wisely. Rather than working "non-stop" until something is finished, work in short 25-minute chunks with 5-minute breaks in between.

The challenge lies in internalizing the habits of monitoring time and regularly analyzing and revising your time management plan until it works for you. [Find out more about this technique here.](#)

Schedule "time-wasters"

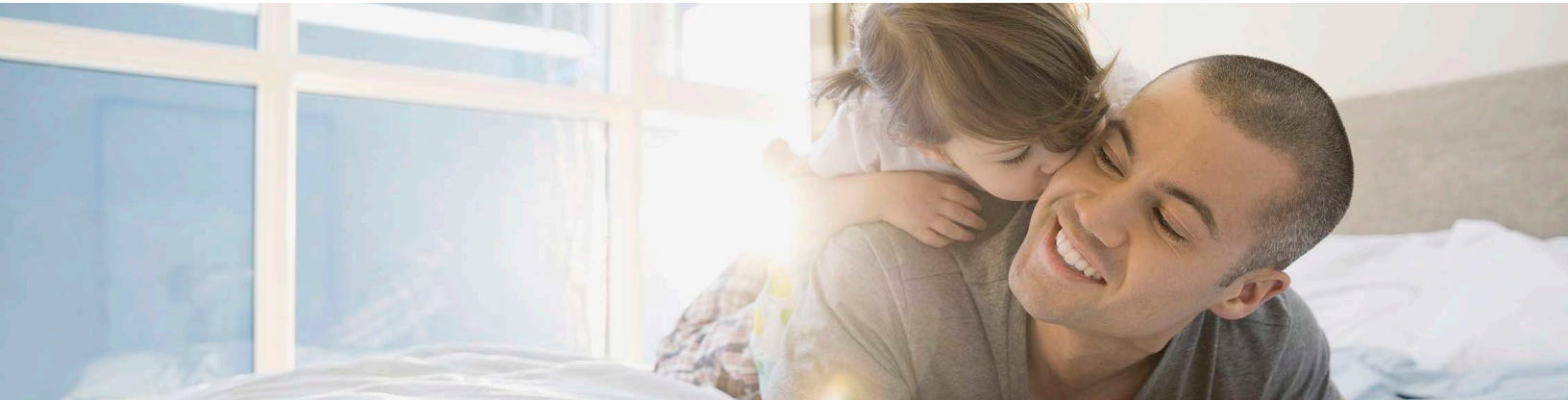
It is unrealistic to completely eliminate so called "time wasters" like social media and browsing. Instead, work them into your schedule and stick to that schedule.

Leave buffer time

Things won't take exactly how long you think they will. When you schedule your day, leave room for the unexpected by adding five to ten minutes to either side of each task.

Time management requires diligent effort because for most of us, it does not come naturally. These tips are proven to work but only if you actually implement and adhere to them. "It only works if you do it" may seem like an overstatement of simplicity but it is all too easy to do these things for a week and then let them fall away and return to old habits. Move through the growing pains and keep at it. Eventually these techniques will replace old habits with new ones and get you ahead of the curve on stress.

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