

# life | in | nes

information for your life



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## Take Care of Yourself While Caring for Others

Many people will end up becoming a caregiver at some point in their lives. The stress and strain of caregiving can take a toll on your health. It's important to find ways to care for your health while caring for others.

Positive social habits can help you build support systems and stay healthier mentally and physically. Here are some tips for connecting with others. Depending on your circumstances, some self-care strategies may be more difficult to carry out than others. Choose ones that work for you.

### Tips to Take Care of Yourself While Caring for Others

- **Ask for help.** Make a list of ways others can help. For instance, someone might sit with the person while you do errands.
- **Get organized.** Make to-do lists, and set a daily routine.

- **Try to take breaks each day.** Finding respite care can help you create time for yourself or to spend with friends.
- **Keep up with your hobbies and interests** when you can.
- **Join a caregiver's support group.** Meeting other caregivers may give you a chance to exchange stories and ideas.
- **Eat healthy foods, and exercise** as often as you can.
- **See your doctor regularly.** Be sure to tell your health care provider that you're a caregiver, and mention if you have symptoms of depression or sickness.
- **Build your skills.** Some hospitals offer classes on how to care for someone with an injury or illness. To find these classes, ask your doctor or contact your employee assistance program (EAP) for help.

U.S. National Institutes of Health (NIH). (n.d.). *Social wellness checklist*. Retrieved July 31, 2019, from <https://www.nih.gov>

# Pay It Forward with Kindness and Generosity



The practices of kindness and generosity are at the core of the world's religious faiths. They're also key to personal wellbeing, according to modern research findings. Learn how paying it forward with kindness and generosity can benefit the people around you while boosting your happiness and your mental and physical health.

## What does it mean to pay it forward?

Paying it forward is an old idea with a growing modern following. It acknowledges that the love and support you receive in your life—from parents, friends, teachers, mentors, and others—can't usually be repaid, but it can be passed along to others. When you pay it forward, instead of returning a favor or kindness, you do something generous for someone else. Paying it forward is the art of keeping generosity flowing. It honors the help you've received in life and the people who've helped you, not by recognizing or thanking them directly (though you can certainly do that), but by passing that help and kindness on in an ever-widening circle.

The magic of paying it forward and of practicing kindness and generosity is that it can be contagious. Your smile can lead someone else to smile at others, brightening their days. Your kindness in offering a hand to someone in need can prompt them to help someone else. The more you pay

it forward and practice kindness and generosity, the greater your positive influence on the world.

The beauty of generous acts is that the more selfless they are and the more kindness you share, the more you stand to benefit—in greater happiness, stronger social connections, and improved mental and physical health.

## How Kindness and Generosity Can Improve Your Wellbeing

Research into the effects of kindness and generosity on the giver has revealed a wealth of positive benefits. The greatest benefits come to those who perform acts of kindness and generosity in person rather than at a distance (by donating money to charity, for example), and who expect nothing in return. In a paradox, being kind for kindness's sake, with no selfish motive, appears to be key to gaining the greatest personal benefit.

Benefits of acting and speaking with kindness and generosity include the following:

- **"Feel-good" chain effect**—The effect your kindness has on others and the gratification of knowing that a kind word or an act of generosity can lift another's spirits can be beneficial in itself. Often, the emotional lift provided by your kindness inspires the other person to

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## Pay It Forward with Kindness and Generosity (Contd.,)



extend a similar kindness to someone else. That can be as simple as a contagious smile or a chain reaction of generous acts.

- **A boost to your happiness**—Performing and receiving acts of kindness activates the same area of the brain that responds positively to good food and even addictive drugs. The warm glow you feel from being nice and having someone be nice to you is an actual physiological effect. Reflecting on past acts of kindness can trigger a similar mood-lifting response. Studies have also shown that spending money on others has a greater positive effect on the happiness of the giver than spending money on oneself.
- **Improved mental health**—Practicing kindness and generosity has protective psychological effects that go beyond temporary boosts in happiness. People feel better about themselves when they are kind and generous, which helps to counter negative self-talk and lift self-confidence. Other benefits include higher levels of life and job satisfaction and reductions in stress and symptoms of depression.
- **Physical health benefits**—The regular practice of kindness and generosity through actions such as volunteering has also been found to have some surprising physical health benefits. These include reductions in chronic pain, migraines, and inflammation; lower blood pressure; better sleep; and improvements in heart health and immune response.

- **Social benefits**—Being kind and generous improves relationships, strengthens feelings of belonging and community, and encourages other people to trust and respect you. Stronger social connections, in turn, have a powerful positive effect on physical and mental health.

### Ways to Show Kindness and Practice Generosity

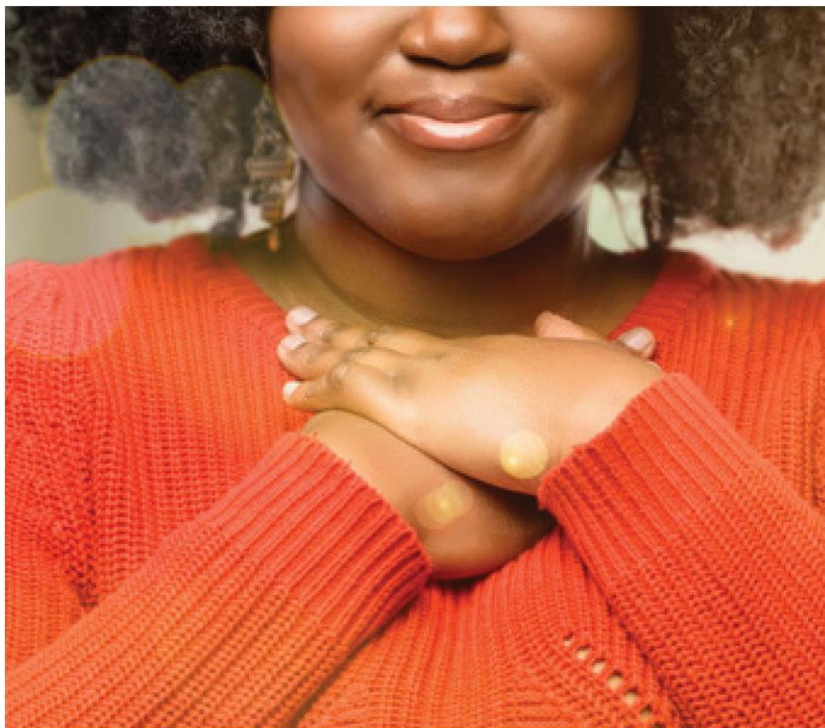
Look for opportunities in your daily life and your encounters with others—family, friends, coworkers, or strangers—to perform small and large acts of kindness. You might try these ideas:

- Share a smile.
- Offer compliments and praise.
- Call someone to find out how they are.
- Listen with your full attention.
- Lift the spirits of someone who is feeling down.
- Teach someone a skill you've mastered.
- Be a mentor.
- Volunteer in a way that helps people in need.
- Participate in a clean-up day at a local park.
- Donate blood.
- Accept and be grateful for another's generous act toward you and find ways to pay it forward.

Use your creativity to find new ways to be kind and generous. Apply your understanding of the people you know to offer kindness and caring attention in meaningful ways.

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Morgan, H. (2021, June 3). *Pay it forward with kindness and generosity* (C. Meeker & B. Schuette, Eds.). Raleigh, NC: Workplace Options.



# The Power of Gratitude

Taking the time to feel gratitude can have powerful and positive emotional benefits. It can even help your physical health, as shown in an ever-growing body of research.

Practicing gratitude can make you happier, reduce your stress levels, improve your relationships, cause you to be more patient and compassionate, and help you stick to healthy eating and exercise habits. In an amazing way, this single practice can improve many important elements of your wellbeing.

## What is gratitude?

At a basic level, gratitude is simply the feeling of being grateful. However, it's deeper and more important than that. Robert Emmons, one of the leading researchers into gratitude and its effects, defines two distinct elements of gratitude. First, it is "the acknowledgment of goodness in one's life." Second, it is the recognition that "the sources of this goodness lie at least partially outside the self" (Emmons, 2007).

So, gratitude is both an appreciation—a reminder to yourself of what's good—and a humble acceptance that those positive aspects of life aren't all your own doing—that you have other people and other forces outside yourself to thank.

## What are the benefits of practicing gratitude?

Researchers have tested the effects of gratitude on people who have adopted gratitude practices or been made to feel gratitude as part of controlled experimental studies. The results of this ever-growing body of research show a wide range of positive effects flowing from the experience and practice of gratitude. Below are some of the benefits of gratitude that have been found through research.

### Emotional Effects

#### Emotional effects include

- Higher levels of positive emotions, such as joy, serenity, optimism, and hope
- Improved self-esteem
- Greater emotional resilience

### Physical and Mental Health Effects

#### Physical and mental health effects include

- Reduced stress and a strengthened ability to handle stressful situations
- Improved exercise and eating habits
- Improved sleep quality
- Lower blood pressure
- Fewer symptoms of illness

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# The Power of Gratitude

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- Reduction in symptoms of physical pain
- Reduction in symptoms of depression
- Reduction in suicidal ideation

## Improved Relationships

### Gratitude has been shown to correlate with

- Improved quality of relationships
- A wider network of friends
- An increased tendency to be helpful, generous, and compassionate
- A reduction in negative social emotions such as envy and aggression
- A greater tendency to be forgiving
- Reduced feelings of loneliness and isolation
- Higher levels of social support

## Positive Effects at Work

### Positive effects of gratitude at work include

- Reduced work stress
- Greater effectiveness as managers and team members
- Greater patience and improved decision-making abilities
- Higher job satisfaction and improved feelings of fulfillment at work

## Effects on Behavior and Self-Control

Gratitude results in an improved ability to act for long-term benefit, rather than giving in to short-sighted urges. This includes a greater inclination to exercise, eat healthy foods, and save money for future needs.

## How does gratitude lead to these positive effects?

David DeSteno, another leading researcher into the effects of gratitude, sees gratitude as a positive emotion

that helps people build better futures for themselves. By practicing gratitude, you unleash a cascade of positive effects—on your emotions, health, relationships, and your ability to adopt healthy behaviors—by increasing your desire to treat others and yourself with care and compassion. While it's possible to use willpower to control negative emotions, suppress self-defeating urges, and behave as people know they should, it can also be exhausting. DeSteno believes that the practice of gratitude leads people to value caring, future-oriented actions in ways that make it easier to act in ways that improve their lives (DeSteno, 2018).

## How to Apply the Power of Gratitude

To harness the full power of gratitude, it helps to make a habit of considering what (and who) you are grateful for and taking the time to feel this positive emotion. This is the practice of gratitude. Here are some ways to build more gratitude into your life:

- **Pay attention to the good.** Look for opportunities to be grateful in your daily life. That might be something beautiful you notice—the light in the morning sky, a tree, or a bird. It might be a simple act of civility—another driver making way for you in traffic, help from a coworker, or the generosity of a friend. Look for new, good things every day.
- **Take a moment to savor those good things.** As you get into the habit of noticing the good things in your life, however small they might be, take a moment to savor and appreciate them. Let yourself feel the sensation of gratitude.

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# The Power of Gratitude

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- **Build a brief gratitude session into your day.** Take one or two minutes at the start or end of your day to reflect on what you are grateful for—what is good in your life that comes from outside of you. Those might be the gifts of nature, family, friendship, or your religious faith.
- **If you follow a religious practice, learn or create a prayer of gratitude.** Gratitude is a basic tenet of many of the world's religions, and prayer is a way to express and connect with it. Find a gratitude prayer from your spiritual tradition or create a prayer of your own.
- **Keep a gratitude journal.** Write down the things you are grateful for in your life. Add to your list with new entries, trying not to repeat yourself. If you make this a habit, with new entries every week or two, you'll probably find that your feelings of gratitude grow with your expanding list. A blank notebook is all you need. Or you might use one of the many available gratitude apps on your phone.
- **Express your thanks to others.** Take the time to thank the people who are, or have been, an important part of your life. Call your mother or father and tell them how much you appreciate them. Thank a friend for being who they are. Thank the people at work who collaborate with you to accomplish something. Write a letter to someone who has made an important difference in your life, letting them know how grateful you are and how their influence has changed you for the better.

## For More Information

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# Stress and Your Health

*Stress* is a feeling of emotional or physical tension. It can come from any event or thought that makes you feel frustrated, angry, or nervous. Stress is your body's reaction to a challenge or demand. In short bursts, stress can be positive, such as when it helps you avoid danger or meet a deadline. But when stress lasts for a long time, it may harm your health.

## Considerations

Stress is a normal feeling. There are two main types of stress:

- **Acute stress is short-term stress that goes away quickly.** You feel it when you slam on the brakes, have a fight with your partner, or ski down a steep slope. It helps you manage dangerous situations. It also occurs when you do something new or exciting. All people have acute stress at one time or another.
- **Chronic stress is stress that lasts for a longer period of time.** You may have chronic stress if you have money problems, an unhappy marriage, or trouble at work. Any type of stress that goes on for weeks or months is chronic stress. You can become so used to chronic stress that you don't realize it is a problem. If you don't find ways to manage stress, it may lead to health problems.

## Stress and Your Body

Your body reacts to stress by releasing hormones. These hormones make your brain more alert, cause your muscles to tense, and increase your pulse. In the short term, these reactions are good, because they can help you handle the situation causing stress. This is your body's way of protecting itself.

When you have chronic stress, your body stays alert, even though there is no danger. Over time, this puts you at risk for health problems, including

- High blood pressure
- Heart disease
- Diabetes
- Obesity
- Depression or anxiety
- Skin problems, such as acne or eczema
- Menstrual problems

If you already have a health condition, chronic stress can make it worse.

## Signs of Too Much Stress

Stress can cause many types of physical and emotional symptoms. Sometimes, you may not realize these symptoms are caused by stress. Here are some signs that stress may be affecting you:

- Diarrhea or constipation
- Forgetfulness
- Frequent aches and pains
- Headaches
- Lack of energy or focus
- Sexual problems
- Stiff jaw or neck
- Tiredness
- Trouble sleeping or sleeping too much
- Upset stomach
- Use of alcohol or drugs to relax
- Weight loss or gain

U.S. National Institutes of Health (NIH), National Library of Medicine (NLM), Medline Plus. (Updated 2019, October 2). *Stress and your health*. Retrieved November 7, 2019, from <https://medlineplus.gov>