

Practising Gratitude

Noticing what is good without pretending everything is good

Gratitude is sometimes presented as though we should simply think positively and difficult feelings will disappear. That is not what this resource is about. Practising gratitude means deliberately noticing moments, people, sensations or experiences that have some value to us, while still allowing room for grief, anger, anxiety, exhaustion and disappointment. A difficult day can still contain one comfortable cup of tea, a dog settling beside you, a message from somebody who remembered, five quiet minutes, warm sunlight through a window, or simply the relief of reaching the end of something hard.

Why can it help?

Our attention naturally becomes drawn towards threat, problems and unfinished tasks, particularly when we are stressed or overwhelmed. Gratitude practice does not erase those problems; it gives our attention another place to land as well. Over time, repeatedly noticing small positive experiences can help us become more aware of what supports us, what brings moments of ease, and what we want more of in everyday life. The aim is balance rather than forced optimism.

Start smaller than you think

You do not need to produce a list of impressive things. In fact, very ordinary observations are often more useful because they are believable: the shower was warm; I liked the smell of clean bedding; somebody made me laugh; the traffic was quieter; I heard a favourite song; my pet greeted me; I managed something I had been putting off. On days when life feels heavy, your gratitude may simply be, 'I got through today.' That counts.

A simple three-notice practice

- 1. Notice:** Choose one small thing that felt pleasant, helpful, comforting or meaningful.
- 2. Stay:** Give it ten or twenty seconds of attention instead of immediately moving on.
- 3. Name:** Ask yourself what made that moment matter. Was it comfort, connection, safety, achievement, beauty, humour, rest or relief?

Try this today

At the end of the day, write or say three short sentences: **Something I noticed... Something that helped... Something I want to carry into tomorrow...** If three feels too much, choose one. If writing feels like another task, take a photograph, make a voice note, or simply pause and notice it in your mind.

When gratitude feels difficult

There are times when gratitude exercises can feel irritating, false or even invalidating. This is especially understandable during bereavement, depression, burnout, trauma, chronic stress or a major life change. You do not need to force yourself to feel grateful. Instead, soften the language. Try 'What was slightly less difficult today?' or 'Was there anything that gave me a moment of relief?' Sometimes neutral noticing is more accessible than positivity.

Gratitude and comparison

Avoid using gratitude to tell yourself that you should not struggle because somebody else has it worse. Pain does not need to win a competition before it deserves attention. 'Other people have less, so I should be grateful' can become a way of silencing your own needs. A healthier version is: 'This is difficult, and there are also things I value.' Both statements can be true at the same time.

Make the practice fit you

There is no correct gratitude routine. Some people like journals; others abandon them after three days and then feel they have failed. You might prefer a photograph each day, a jar containing tiny notes, a shared question at dinner, a weekly voice memo, or noticing one good thing while brushing your teeth. Attach the practice to something you already do rather than relying on motivation to create a completely new habit.

Your gratitude check-in

Today I noticed...	What did it give me?
_____	comfort / connection / relief / joy / other
_____	_____
One thing that helped me today	_____
One small thing I want tomorrow	_____

Message from Maggie

Gratitude should never become another demand placed on you. I do not want you to look at a painful day and tell yourself that you ought to be more positive. I want you to be able to acknowledge what hurts and, when you can, notice what is still holding you. Sometimes that is a person. Sometimes it is an animal, a familiar room, a tiny routine, a sunrise, music, warmth, or the fact that you kept going. Small things are not insignificant when they help us through difficult days.

A gentle reminder

If your mental health is deteriorating, gratitude is not a substitute for professional support. It can sit alongside therapy, medical care, practical help, rest, connection and other forms of support. If you feel unable to keep yourself safe, seek urgent help through appropriate local emergency or crisis services.