

Spiritual Wellness

Spiritual wellness occurs when we have meaning and purpose and a sense of balance and peace. For many, spiritual wellness comes from religious faith, traditions, and community. For others, spiritual wellness comes from spending time in nature, with family, and with others in activities that transcend our individuality, such as making music or helping others. Spiritual wellness is an important aspect of health and recovery.

Gratitude

Many cultures and traditions have organized rituals and activities focused on giving thanks and self-reflection. In the United States, the fourth Thursday in November is a formal time to pause when many families and friends will gather together on Thanksgiving to reflect, give thanks, and express gratitude. However, taking time more often to reflect and be thankful can be beneficial to our health.ⁱ

Throughout history, both philosophers and religious leaders have described gratitude as a virtue that contributes to a sense of peace and well-being. Gratitude is a state of mind that arises when you affirm a good thing in your life that comes from outside yourself, or when you notice and relish little pleasures. Gratitude is a virtue that can be cultivated as a regular practice, much like meditation or yoga.

In recent decades, research on gratitude is showing health benefits as well. Thankfulness is linked to effective coping with life's challenges and stressors. People who practice gratitude tend to be optimistic and to have healthy habits such as exercising, eating well, and arranging for needed medical care and screenings. These habits, in turn, help us recover more quickly from illness and enjoy more robust physical health, including lower blood pressure and better immune function.ⁱⁱ

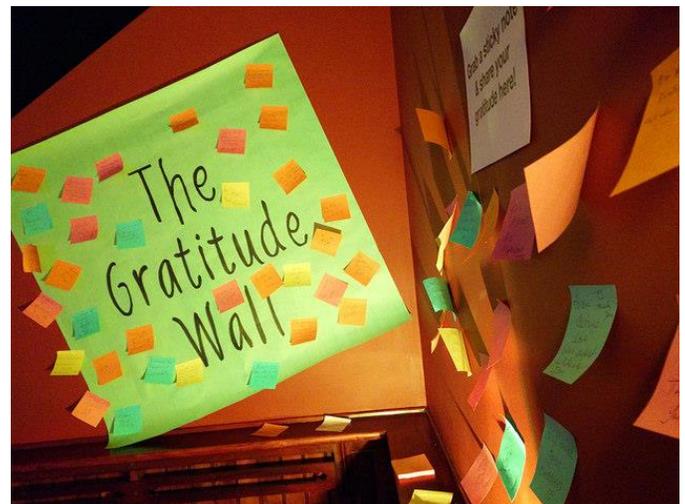
Gratitude is strongly linked to mental health and life satisfaction,ⁱⁱⁱ leading to a sense of joy, energy, and a firm

belief or faith that goodness exists, even during times of suffering and doubt. Gratitude can protect us from destructive emotions like jealousy and bitterness. Its healing nature may explain why gratitude reduces lifetime risk for depression, anxiety, and substance use disorders.

Gratitude Practice

Thanksgiving and other winter holidays can be a time of celebration and a time of stress. We can take advantage of this season to jump start our own gratitude practice. In addition to giving thanks as we gather with friends and family, we can take a few moments at other times to list the small things we appreciate. For people who feel lonely or depressed during this season, for whatever reasons, listing what we are grateful for can help us deal with our challenging emotions and may give us the energy to reach out to others in need.

One way to begin the practice of gratitude is writing about it in a journal or in a letter. It often helps to see all that we have on paper, bringing us to realize that life is not all bad and that there are those who have less. Shifting our focusing from what we *don't* have to what we *do* have in our lives can provide a sense of well-being.^{iv} Another idea is to create a gratitude bulletin board posting things you are grateful for, such as letters, cards, pictures, and expressions of love from family and friends.



The Youth Gratitude Project

Although gratitude is known to contribute to health and well-being, little research has explored its development in youth.^v As with adults, grateful youth are happier and more satisfied with their lives, friends, family, neighborhood, and themselves, compared with their less grateful peers. They report more hope, engagement with their hobbies and interests, higher GPAs, and less envy, depression, and materialism. The Youth Gratitude Project (YGP) aims to enhance gratitude for young people through four aims:

- Create gratitude scales for children and teens, and for parents to rate children's level of gratefulness.
- Study factors that contribute to gratitude during adolescence, including self-control, social support, self-efficacy, community involvement, health behaviors, religiosity or spirituality, and participation in extra-curricular activities.
- Examine links between specific parenting practices and gratitude in children and adolescents, such as parents' modeling, valuing, and reinforcement of gratitude expression and the roles of parent-child attachment, self-competence, and friendship quality.
- Research a school-based curriculum that teaches children how to think gratefully. Pilot studies show that students who participated in a gratitude class showed increases in grateful thinking, gratitude, and positive emotions up to five months later.



One does not need to wait
until things are perfect
before being grateful;
in fact, it may be
just the opposite.

It could be that the act of being grateful,
in itself, makes one receptive to life's
blessings, and these blessings continue
as we continue to be thankful.

--Robert Emmons

8 Dimensions of Wellness

Remember to attend to all 8 dimensions of wellness at Thanksgiving and throughout the winter holiday season.

Emotional: Use this time to nourish the relationships you have with your friends and family. You may not get the opportunity to see these people together during the rest of the year, so make the most of the time.

Spiritual: The love and affection that you share with your friends and family can be uplifting. You may need them; they may also need you. The people you love give your life meaning.

Social: Talk to your friends and family! Share memories and tell them about what's going on with your life. Sometimes just being around people you care about can make YOU feel good.

Intellectual: Have you read a good book lately or an interesting news article? Tell someone about it. Engage your friends and family in conversation and talk about things that are intellectually stimulating.

Occupational: If you have time off, try to not think about work over the holidays. Give yourself a break and focus on other things to recharge yourself.

Financial: Remember to be grateful for what you have. Stick to your budget so you can take care of your needs but try to set aside any worries about money and enjoy the holiday season.

Environmental: Being in an environment surrounded by your friends and family is very beneficial to your wellness.

Physical: Build in some exercise before or after Thanksgiving. Make a point to find some way to maintain your physical wellness by getting to the gym or sharing in an outdoor game or a walk with friends and family. Enjoy holiday food, but don't use it as an excuse to fall into poor eating habits. While it can be tempting to indulge in foods that are not so healthy, strive for balance. Cut back on the fatty foods and eat more vegetables. Be mindful of portion size. If you're a guest at a celebration, volunteer to prepare a healthy side dish.

Share wellness with your family and friends!

Self-Assessment

Spiritual wellness involves having meaning and purpose and a sense of balance and peace.

Rate each item below using this scale:

- 4 If the item is **Always True** for you
- 3 If the item is **Sometimes True** for you
- 2 If the item is **Rarely True** for you
- 1 If the item is **Never True** for you

- I can name my own personal values and beliefs about life.
- When I get depressed or frustrated, I draw on my beliefs and values to give me direction.
- I reflect quietly each day.
- Life is meaningful for me and I feel a sense of purpose in life.
- I try to learn about others' beliefs and values, especially those that are different from my own.
- I feel positive about life.
- I feel gratitude for the good things in my life.
- I read or listen to inspiring messages.
- I participate in spiritual activities with others—either in an informal social setting or with a formal group.
- I have role models who serve as guides for me.

Total Score (out of a possible 40): _____

The Great American Smokeout

Each year, the American Cancer Society promotes *The Great American Smokeout* to get Americans to quit smoking. If you can't quit completely, consider cutting back. Smoking can cause many diseases, including many forms of cancer, as well as premature death. Some people use smoking as a way to unwind. But the relief it provides isn't worth the health consequences. There are far more productive ways to reduce stress, like exercise, yoga, and meditation. And the best part about those things? They are all inexpensive or free. It doesn't cost you anything to exercise and there are free yoga and meditation classes. Check your local newspaper or check online to see if there are any in your area.

While smoking rates continue to decline, other dangerous habits are on the rise, such as vaping. Harmful effects can occur from nicotine, even if you use a vaporizer.^{vi}

Not only is smoking bad for your health but it is expensive. A pack of cigarettes can range in cost from \$6.00 to \$13.00.^{vii} That may not seem like a lot if you're not smoking that much but it adds up. You can save thousands of dollars every year by cutting back on your smoking or quitting completely.

The movement to get people to stop smoking has been going on for years. In fact, PEZ® dispensers^{viii} were invented as a way of getting people to stop smoking. The first PEZ® dispenser, in the shape of a lighter, was introduced in 1949 at a trade show in Vienna, Austria. The creators thought that, instead of popping a cigarette, people would pop a Pez® candy instead.



SCORING KEY

- ✓ If you scored from 30 to 40 points, that's excellent! You are clearly doing a lot for your spiritual wellness!
- ✓ If you scored from 15 to 29 points, you're doing great, though you might want to look over the items again and see where there are areas that you want to strengthen.
- ✓ If you scored from 0 to 14 points, review your responses to see if there is one area where you may want to strengthen. Consider one small thing you could do. Build on what you are already doing well.

Resources

For printable graphics and other resources to support your own *Great American Smokeout* Campaign, such as the “badge” on this page, see <https://www.cancer.org/healthy/stay-away-from-tobacco/great-american-smokeout/resources.html>

The theme for Great American Smokeout 2018 is “Day 1.” This theme was selected to reflect what we know about smoking cessation. That quitting smoking isn’t easy. It takes time. And a plan. GASO isn’t necessarily the day for smokers to quit smoking, but rather the day for smokers to start their journey toward a smoke-free life. The American Cancer Society provides resources and support to help smokers quit smoking for good.



Nov 16, 2018



Happy Thanksgiving

Thanksgiving is a time to be thankful for friends and family. There are lots of things to be thankful for, including your health and wellness. The people in your life can help give your life meaning. Take time to think about and connect with the people you care about. Sometimes people can feel unappreciated in their efforts, so why not make sure you let them know that they are appreciated. If someone has helped you significantly in your overall wellness, let them know that you appreciate what they’ve done for you and how much they mean to you. Reaching out in this way can strengthen your connection.

References and Resources

Thanks to Clare Marie Celano and William Latin for the article on gratitude and to William Latin for the articles on Thanksgiving and Smoking. The photo of Teddy the Turkey was taken by Lori Heslop, and is used with permission.

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ⁱ E. Heubeck, *Boost Your Health with a Dose of Gratitude*, from <https://www.webmd.com/women/features/gratitude-health-boost#2>

ⁱⁱ See the work of Robert Emmons at <https://emmons.faculty.ucdavis.edu/>

ⁱⁱⁱ Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence at ei.yale.edu

^{iv} https://www.huffpost.com/entry/gratitude-tips_b_4084278

^v Greater Good Science Center at UC Berkeley which launched the Youth Gratitude Project (YGP),

https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/how_to_teach_gratitude_to_tweens_and_teens

^{vi} infographic: https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/basic_information/e-cigarettes/pdfs/Electronic-Cigarettes-Infographic-508.pdf

^{vii} www.theawl.com/2017; <https://newyork.cbslocal.com/2018/06/01/pack-of-cigarettes-in-new-york-city-highest-in-the-nation/> and see lifetime costs at <https://wallethub.com/edu/the-financial-cost-of-smoking-by-state/9520/>

^{viii} <https://us.pez.com/pages/history>

