



Gratitude: How it Changes Your Brain

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Increased happiness, less depression, better thinking? Who wouldn't want more of that in their lives? A simple way that we can increase our happiness is through the practice of gratitude. At first glance this may seem like an overly simplified way to impact negative emotions or improve our sense of wellbeing, but the research is conclusive: *gratitude positively impacts our mental health.*

Longitudinal research suggests that higher levels of gratitude reduce depression and stress, even in the face of disease (Wood, 2008). A new study conducted by Deepok Chopra and colleagues (Mills et al, 2015) found that gratitude was associated with numerous benefits including better mood and sleep, and with reduced depression and stress.

In fact, gratitude is such a powerful force that it evens changes the way our brain functions! Participants in a control group at UC Berkely (2017) were asked to write a weekly letter of gratitude to someone in their life. When the brains of those who wrote the gratitude letters were compared with those who didn't, the gratitude letter writers showed greater activation in the medial prefrontal cortex as they focused on gratitude in the fMRI scanner. This is striking as this effect was even found three months after the letter writing began. The medial prefrontal cortex area of the brain is most highly associated with higher-order memory and decision making functions.

Practicing gratitude may help train the brain to be more sensitive to the experience of gratitude down the line, and this could contribute to greatly improved mental health over time. So don't waste another minute.....tap into this simple but powerful way to impact our mental health in a positive way.

Take a few minutes every evening to write down five good things about your day. The entries don't have to be major events—they might be as simple as a good meal, talking to a friend, or getting through a difficult challenge.



In everything give thanks.....I Thessalonians 5:18