

COUNT YOUR Blessings

Appreciating what you have—and delivering positivity to others—has been scientifically proven to enhance your life. Here's how to max out your joy on a daily basis. BY LESLIE GOLDMAN

Be a Force for Good

Giving a friend, neighbor or even a stranger a reminder that the universe can be a happy place may make you happy, too. “When you try to be a blessing to someone else, it shifts the focus from yourself to the important social bonds in your life, building a feeling of gratitude for those relationships and fostering a sense that life is good,” says Kristin Layous, PhD, assistant professor of psychology at California State University, East Bay. Even one kind gesture may boost your mood. Below, simple do-good acts that will make those around you feel blessed.

Let go of a lottery ticket

Buy a scratch-off, put it where a stranger can find it, then watch the fun begin. This works with dollar bills, too. “Every day I plant a single somewhere, like a mailbox,” says Rachel Kessler of New York City. “The other day I released one into the wind. An elderly woman caught it and was so happy.”

Leave a coupon

“I’ll tuck really good coupons beside the product on the store shelf for a dose of random awesomeness,” says Cheryl Laughlin of Lodi, CA. Or, if you’ve used a gift card and have just a few dollars left on it, hand it to the person behind you in line to pay.

Remind a mom she’s doing a stellar job

Applaud a mom (or dad) for wrangling multiple children with skill. Even if the kids are going bonkers, “tell her that she’s doing a great job, and the day will get better,” suggests Kristen Engle of Elmhurst, IL.

Be a snow angel

Clear your neighbor’s driveway, sidewalk or snow-covered car, especially if he or she is old or sick. You will be making that person’s life so much easier and safer.

Ship soldiers a care package

Collect useful items, such as sunblock, toothpaste or bug spray, as well as candy, and add a few drawings from your kids to make someone’s day. Operation Courage is Beautiful (operationcourage.org) also sends items to military women overseas.

Recognize hard work

Police officers, healthcare professionals, social workers—these folks have tough jobs, and often must contend with people when they’re not at their best. Your words of appreciation mean a lot.

Give blood

Donating blood is easy and free, and you could help save someone’s life.



Positive perspective

62%

of women reported being more likely to feel grateful than they were 10 years ago.*



WHY I FEEL BLESSED

“My eight years as a nurse on a cancer ward was the most rewarding work I’ve ever done. It’s where I learned my compassion and found out that miracles were possible.”

Stephanie Smith, 58, Omaha, NE

7 Reasons to Dwell on the Positive

Research shows that gratitude and happiness are strongly connected. Happy people enjoy these perks:



1 You're likely to feel more optimistic.
Noticing and analyzing what goes well in life may help you build the skill of remembering good events over bad, which is linked to feeling happier.

2 You could live longer.
Happier people with positive outlooks that are enhanced by feeling gratitude tend to have longer lives.

3 You may feel less physical pain.
Stress amplifies pain, and thinking positive thoughts, such as what is working in your life or how things are starting to get better and better, helps you cope with stress.

4 Your relationships may feel more meaningful.
Thinking about the people who are blessings to you makes those connections feel more satisfying.

5 You'll possibly catch fewer colds.
Research shows that people who count their blessings report that they have fewer sniffles and sneezes.

6 You may even exercise more.
Positive emotions have been shown to boost energy. Highlighting the good things in your life may also remind you of the many reasons to stay healthy.

7 Your heart could grow stronger.
Experiencing positive emotions like appreciation is linked with the right amount of variation in heart rate, a sign of a healthy ticker.

SOURCES: Kristin Layous, PhD, assistant professor, psychology, California State University, East Bay. Martin Seligman, PhD, professor of psychology, University of Pennsylvania, and director, Penn Positive Psychology Center.



WHY I FEEL BLESSED

“At 70 years old, my mother still keeps up the practice she began decades ago when I went off to college: She mails me a handwritten note of encouragement every single week. I always look forward to receiving that little drop of home. Her beautiful scripted letters—always with a fun stamp and lovely stationery—are something I truly treasure.”

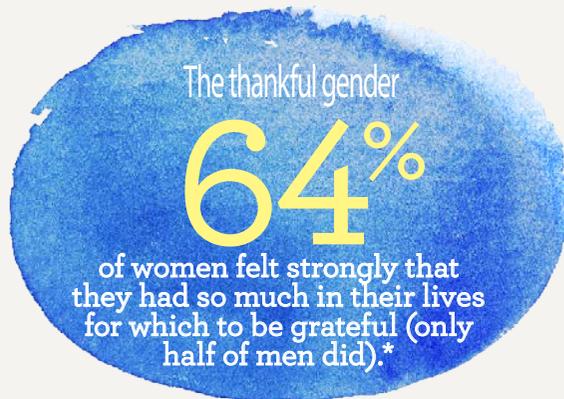
Miji Bell, 45, Baltimore



WHY I FEEL BLESSED

“I feel so lucky when my 10-year-old niece says to me while watching me put on makeup, ‘Auntie, why do you wear makeup? You don’t need it.’”

Stephanie Quilao, 48, San Francisco



CENTER TOP: GETTY IMAGES. BELL: COURTESY OF TBG STUDIOS.



WHY I FEEL BLESSED

“I had liver disease and needed a transplant. Last year on Valentine’s Day, I found out that my husband, Jack, was a match. Now I’m blessed with another 30-plus years of life and I get to watch my children grow up and hopefully see my grandchildren. He gave me my life back.”

Ruth W. Cohen, 49, Denver

Your 4-Week Happiness Plan

WEEK 1

Grab a notebook and write down three things that go well every other day for one week, along with a simple explanation.

WEEK 2

Send a quick email each day to someone in your life, explaining why he or she is a blessing to you.

WEEK 3

Think about things other than your stuff. A 2014 study found that people who are more materialistic are less grateful. Try to focus on the pure, lovely white snow falling outside, not on the fancy new car parked in your neighbor’s driveway.

WEEK 4

Don’t forget to say thank you. Thank the drive-through server for including extra ketchup; thank a stranger for holding the door open for you. Expressing gratitude will give both you and the other person a lift.

With additional reporting by Emily Gregor



WHY I FEEL BLESSED

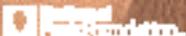
“I live far away from my family but have always had luck finding friends who become like family to me. When my husband passed away five years ago, a close coworker helped me with funeral home arrangements; neighbors brought over food. They have become my dearest friends.”

Lourdes Gandy, 51, Dublin, OH

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