

Gratitude Improves Health

Often around Thanksgiving you may hear the song “Count Your Blessings.” This daily practice of gratitude can significantly:

- increase your happiness
- promote healthier sleep patterns
- boost your immunity
- decrease your risk of disease

Here are a few tips to help you get started:

Keep a gratitude journal. Use it on a daily basis. Jot down notes of positive thoughts or actions, count them, no matter how small.

Use gratitude cues. Keep pictures of people, experiences or things that make you happy. Post inspirational quotes around you.

Make a gratitude jar. Encourage everyone in your house or visitors who stop by this month to write down one thing that they're grateful for and drop it in the jar every day/visit. Later enjoy reading one another's thoughts. This helps to make gratitude second nature.

Try these experiments:

1. Think of one thing or person you're grateful for when you wake up in the morning and before you go to sleep at night.
2. Meditate on a scripture breathing slowly with closed eyes. Start with Luke 6: 38. *Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.* NIV Let positive thoughts fill your mind.
3. Give gratitude and it will be given back. It is contagious.
4. Consider using essential oils as you meditate.
5. Read a book about gratitude. I suggest “Living in Gratitude: A Journey That Will Change Your Life” by Angeles Arrien or a weekly devotional called “Spirituality of Gratitude: The Unexpected Blessings of Thankfulness” by Joshua Kang.

Does Social Media Affect Mental Health?

As we are still encouraged to practice social distancing and limit unnecessary gatherings, all ages are increasingly using social media. It can be helpful by:

- Providing a way to stay in contact with friends & family,
- Reducing feelings of isolation & help combat loneliness,
- Promoting a more positive well-being.

It's also helpful because it has the ability to reach a large majority of the population to promote public safety. However, some people using social media may experience unintended consequences.

Potential Harms of Social Media Overuse or Misuse

For some, overuse or certain interactions can result in negative emotions, such as stress, anxiety, anger, or depression.

Overuse is difficult to quantify. Signs of overuse include:

- cutting into work (or study or family) time,
- feeling a need to immediately check messages
- feeling anxious when not able to access social media.

According to the [American Psychological Association](#), teenagers who spent more than two hours per day checking their text messages, emails, and social media accounts were more likely to rate their mental health as “fair” or “poor.”

Overuse of social media can have a negative impact on in-person relationships. As a result, friends and family can become disconnected from those individuals, even when they are physically together.

For some social media creates comparison stress. People tend to share vacations, life highlights, and achievements. Those not having the same experiences start to have feelings of envy, jealousy, and lower self-worth.

Another reaction can be “fear of missing out,” which is also known as FOMO. This can cause feelings of anxiety or loneliness when seeing others seem to be having fun or others are participating at a social gathering. These are all signs of social media misuse.

Caffeine and Health

Is caffeine safe? Taken in normal doses, it appears very safe. The American Medical Association says that “moderate tea or coffee drinkers probably need have no concern for their health relative to their caffeine consumption, provided other lifestyle habits are [healthy] as well.” The FDA also classifies caffeine as “safe in appropriate doses”.

What is “moderate” consumption of caffeine? Per the Mayo Clinic up to 400 milligrams (mg) appears to be safe for most healthy adults. Roughly that’s about four cups of brewed coffee, 10 cans of cola or two “energy shot” drinks. Starbucks trumps other coffees in caffeine content. Their site says caffeine amounts vary but approximately there are 180 mg in an 8 oz., 260 mg in 12 oz and 330 mg in 16 oz. A regular strength “No-Doz” tablet has 100 mg of caffeine.

What are the effects of coffee? Perceived beneficial effects of caffeine are improved alertness, reaction time, energy and mood. Doses of 20-200 mg also provide short term improvement in mood, a sense of well-being, more energy and can increase social interactions. At doses higher than 200-300 mg some people begin to feel some anxiety, irritability, nervousness, jitteriness, and an upset stomach.

What about energy drinks? Actual caffeine content especially varies among energy drinks. Energy drinks and shots usually include caffeine, additional stimulants, often large amounts of sugar, and other chemicals. Like any beverage or drug, energy drinks have risks. These risks are multiplied in people who have existing medical problems.

What if you are a coffee lover? The findings don't suggest people should give up their java. Knowing how much caffeine you consume in a day is important. Six or more cups per day is considered a lot and cutting back a bit while research continues would be a good idea. Results of a large study suggests drinking six or more cups of coffee a day is associated with smaller brain volume and a 53% increased risk for developing dementia. Doesn't seem worth the possible risk.

References: Anderson P., Coffee and the Brain: 'Concerning' New Data **July 26, 2021**

<https://www.medscape.com/viewarticle/955378>

Caffeine and Health, <https://www.bewellsolutions.com/caffeine-and-health/>

Caffeine and Health Conditions

Maybe you have heard that coffee is good for your health or bad for your health. It kind of depends on your state of health in general. Yes, previous studies have suggested since coffee contains antioxidants, it might be beneficial. However, results of a large study suggested that drinking six or more cups of coffee a day is associated with a 53% increased risk for developing dementia. Other studies show caffeine improves endurance, probably by increasing the pain threshold, and helps the body burn fat rather than carbohydrates. Stating coffee is good for health seems “too simplistic.” Conversely, stating coffee is bad is not exactly true either. Taken in normal doses, it appears safe.

Perhaps the best way to determine how much consumption is “OK” for you is to survey your own health status, consider your family history for risk factors and consult your health professional. As with many things in life *moderation* is the key. Below are some recent research findings.

Parkinson’s Disease — Studies indicate that drinkers of caffeinated coffee had a lower risk of developing Parkinson’s Disease.

Headaches — Caffeine helps improve some headaches. Many medications include caffeine as an ingredient.

Migraines — Caffeine may make *chronic* migraine headaches *more* frequent. Those experiencing them should discuss the use or avoidance of caffeine with their doctor.

Heart Disease — Recent research states there is no relationship between caffeine intake and heart disease. However, caution should be used. Caffeine temporarily increases heart rate and blood pressure.

High Blood Pressure — Although regular caffeine use may cause a temporary rise in blood pressure, the effect seems to disappear with continued use. Some may develop “unpleasant sensations” and stop drinking coffee before a serious adverse event occurs. People with genetically higher blood pressure tend to drink less coffee. This might naturally limit the adverse effects of coffee on the risk of stroke.

Dehydration: Those predisposed to this might consider simply drinking some water every time they have a cup of coffee.

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