­­Looking after your mental health

Our brains are really good at noticing and thinking about the bad things that happen. This tendency helps us avoid problems, but isn’t accurate.

Our brains work better when we have a more balanced and realistic view of the world. The gratitude exercise below will help you notice and appreciate the good things in your life.

Every day for two weeks, write down three good things that happened that day and what caused them. The things can be work-related or personal. Do this just before bed because that will help you sleep better. Print out this exercise sheet and put it on your pillow so you remember.

## Think about these things as you do the exercise

Keep these things in mind to get the most from the exercise and increase gratitude:

* Be specific. What happened? Who was involved? Say: “I’m grateful that Chris helped me solve the problem that was driving me up the wall,” instead of: “I’m grateful for supportive colleagues.”
* Go for depth over breadth. More detail about one thing is better than mentioning things in passing.
* Focus on people you’re grateful for, as well as on things.
* Appreciate what you have. Think of good things as gifts and think about what life would be like without a certain thing or person.
* Appreciate surprises: the good things that you weren’t expecting.
* Appreciate what didn’t happen, like near misses, and things that you avoided or turned into something positive.

Day 1

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| --- | --- |
| First thing that happened |  |
| What caused it? |  |
| Second thing that happened |  |
| What caused it? |  |
| Third thing that happened? |  |
| What caused it? |  |

Day 2

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| First thing that happened |  |
| What caused it? |  |
| Second thing that happened |  |
| What caused it? |  |
| Third thing that happened? |  |
| What caused it? |  |

Day 3

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| First thing that happened |  |
| What caused it? |  |
| Second thing that happened |  |
| What caused it? |  |
| Third thing that happened? |  |
| What caused it? |  |

Day 4

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| First thing that happened |  |
| What caused it? |  |
| Second thing that happened |  |
| What caused it? |  |
| Third thing that happened? |  |
| What caused it? |  |

Day 5

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| First thing that happened |  |
| What caused it? |  |
| Second thing that happened |  |
| What caused it? |  |
| Third thing that happened? |  |
| What caused it? |  |

Day 6

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| First thing that happened |  |
| What caused it? |  |
| Second thing that happened |  |
| What caused it? |  |
| Third thing that happened? |  |
| What caused it? |  |

Day 7

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| --- | --- |
| First thing that happened |  |
| What caused it? |  |
| Second thing that happened |  |
| What caused it? |  |
| Third thing that happened? |  |
| What caused it? |  |

Day 8

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| --- | --- |
| First thing that happened |  |
| What caused it? |  |
| Second thing that happened |  |
| What caused it? |  |
| Third thing that happened? |  |
| What caused it? |  |

Day 9

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| --- | --- |
| First thing that happened |  |
| What caused it? |  |
| Second thing that happened |  |
| What caused it? |  |
| Third thing that happened? |  |
| What caused it? |  |

Day 10

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| --- | --- |
| First thing that happened |  |
| What caused it? |  |
| Second thing that happened |  |
| What caused it? |  |
| Third thing that happened? |  |
| What caused it? |  |

Day 11

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| --- | --- |
| First thing that happened |  |
| What caused it? |  |
| Second thing that happened |  |
| What caused it? |  |
| Third thing that happened? |  |
| What caused it? |  |

Day 12

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| --- | --- |
| First thing that happened |  |
| What caused it? |  |
| Second thing that happened |  |
| What caused it? |  |
| Third thing that happened? |  |
| What caused it? |  |

Day 13

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| --- | --- |
| First thing that happened |  |
| What caused it? |  |
| Second thing that happened |  |
| What caused it? |  |
| Third thing that happened? |  |
| What caused it? |  |

Day 14

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| --- | --- |
| First thing that happened |  |
| What caused it? |  |
| Second thing that happened |  |
| What caused it? |  |
| Third thing that happened? |  |
| What caused it? |  |

## Challenge your thinking when things seem bad

After two weeks of doing the exercise, you should be better at thinking about what’s going well and what makes your life better.

Think about what caused the good things. What are the patterns, and how can you make them happen more often? For example, if a particular person causes a lot of the good things, can you tell the person how much you appreciate them? If spending time with your family causes good things to happen, can you prioritise that time more?

You can also challenge your own thinking. For example, do the gratitude exercise when you think you’ve had a bad day, to put things into perspective. Stop and think what good things happened. Or if you’re worried and can’t sleep, think about the good things that happened that day.