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The Science of Gratitude

Robert Emmons, Ph.D., a leading scientific expert on gratitude, believes that practicing gratitude encourages people to identify some amount of goodness in their lives. His research identifies the many ways gratitude benefits our physical and emotional health, including increased happiness, less depression, better sleep, reduced fatigue, and decreased feelings of materialism and burnout. Gratitude also inspires us to be more kind, more generous and helpful, and strengthens relationships. It can also help celebrate the present, block negative emotions, deal with stress, and gain feelings of self-worth.

Simple ways to practice gratitude:

- **Keep a journal.** Write down one or two things you are thankful for on a regular basis. This could be as simple as the beauty of the sunrise or the kindness of family and friends. Then, periodically, take time to read the journal so you can reflect on past experiences and feelings.
- **Use gratitude language.** Take time to express your thankfulness to others for the things they do in your life. For example, tell someone, “Thanks for helping me with this project” or “I appreciate you washing the dishes.”
- **Be creative.** Think about creative ways to express gratitude. It can be as simple as placing reminder notes to be thankful on your refrigerator or naming things you are thankful for that day. Another idea is to write messages using sidewalk chalk in the driveway, such as, “Thank you” or “I’m glad you are my neighbor.”
- **Make a vow to practice gratitude.** Making a promise to do something helps you get into the habit of doing it. Write down your gratitude vow and place it somewhere to be reminded of it often, such as your car or desk. The vow can be as simple as, “I will state three things I am thankful for every morning” or “I will tell someone each day why I appreciate them.”

Source: Michelle Krehbiel, Ph.D., Nebraska Extension; The Science of Gratitude - University of California, Berkeley go.unl.edu/gratitude-science