

A Prescription for Gratitude

Research shows that regularly expressing gratitude can lessen anxiety and depression — even during the most difficult times. It can also help people feel happier, live healthier lives and boost feelings of optimism.

Leif Hass, M.D., is a hospitalist at Alta Bates Summit Medical Center and an advisor for U.C. Berkeley's Greater Good Science Center. He has written extensively about the role of gratitude in peoples' overall health.

"It's easy to focus on everything going wrong but stepping outside our own narratives can allow us to see the beauty and privilege in bearing witness to important life moments," he says.

Giving thanks can even change our brains. A study from 2008 found that gratitude boosts serotonin and activates the brain stem to produce dopamine.

As a licensed clinician for Sutter Health's Employee Assistance Program, Anna Morgado, LMFT, helps employees through personal and work-related challenges.

"As humans, our brains default to look for danger and for the bad. That's helpful for survival but isn't healthy. So, we must be intentional in looking for the good in our lives," she says.

Morgado notes that incorporating a regular practice of gratitude doesn't negate your struggles. In fact, she advises using "and" statements when you're struggling: For example, "I am overwhelmed with work, *and* I enjoy my co-workers."

"This isn't toxic positivity. We're not denying the truth," she says. "It's about recognizing and intentionally integrating the good stuff in your life. It can help us from going down the rabbit hole of depression and sadness — and even a couple minutes each day can help."

Incorporating a Mindful Practice of Gratitude

Tips for living a more grateful life



- **Keep a Gratitude Journal.** Write about things you enjoy each day.
- **Remind yourself about how far you've come.** Remember past struggles you've successfully overcome.
- **Volunteer to help others.** Small acts of kindness can be impactful for the giver and the receiver.



What is the Employee Assistance Program (EAP)?

Sutter EAP provides referrals to licensed therapists who can help with personal problems that may impact your job, relationships or overall well-being. EAP is:

- Confidential
- Open to all employees and eligible family members
- No charge to you

Sleep Well, Feel Better

Tossing and turning all night is not only frustrating and exhausting, it can also be dangerous. When you miss out on much-needed rest, your reasoning and problem-solving skills can falter — and you're at a much higher risk for injury and traffic accidents.

Chronic sleep deprivation can be even more serious, leading to health issues such as high blood pressure, diabetes, and heart failure. Other potential problems include obesity, depression, and a diminished immune system.

"Good sleep is so important for our mental and physical health," says Dr. Laurie Gregg, a Sacramento obstetrician. "It affects everything."

Throughout her 25-year career, Dr. Gregg has been awakened countless times in the middle of the night to deliver babies. Her experience with sleep deprivation led to her interest in the study of sleep—and how to get a better night's rest.

She worked on a study of the sleep habits of 25 women. They used an Oura ring — a small device that fits on your index or middle finger — to track sleep quality.

"When we looked at the womens' sleep patterns, the biggest take home was the importance of a steady bedtime and wake-time schedule," says Dr. Gregg. "If you can keep to the same routine each day, including Saturdays and Sundays, that's hugely beneficial."

Some of Dr. Gregg's other tips for a good night's rest:

- **Ban the blue light.** Power down your computer and phone for at least an hour before bed.
- **Make yourself comfortable.** Keep your bedroom cool, dark and quiet.
- **Watch what you eat.** Avoid large meals, caffeine and alcohol before bedtime.
- **Get some exercise.** Being physically active during the day can help you sleep.

