

# **Better Daily Mindfulness Habits: Simple Changes with Lifelong Impact**

By Kristen Manieri

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BONUS CHAPTER

## **How to Be Consciously Thankful**

There's a framed quote in my house that says, "The best things in life aren't things." It reminds me to notice what really matters in my life—love, relationships, and laughter, for example. When I bring my sense of awareness to these values, I'm filled with a sense of abundance. While having nice things and not wanting for anything may seem like a valid aspiration, the truth is that true contentment comes from finding happiness in this moment and being grateful for what it offers. Gratitude, as you'll learn in this chapter, is a skill that requires nurturing. The more you're present to what you're thankful for, the happier you'll become.

It's been said that the key to happiness is not about getting what you want but wanting what you already have. Researchers at the University of California, Davis, the University of Miami, and the University of Pennsylvania have all explored the link between happiness and gratitude and found that the more intentional people are about counting our blessings, the more blessed we feel.

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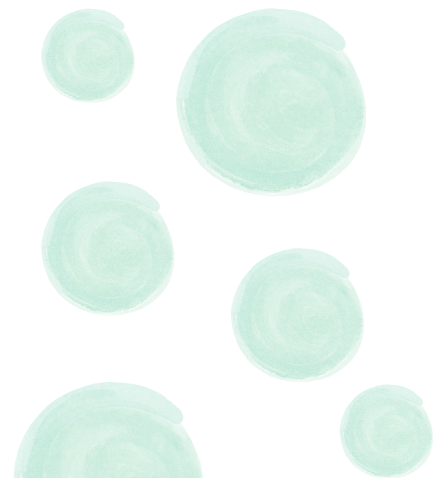
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The trouble is, the brain isn't wired to see the positive in the same way that it's wired to fixate on the negative. The brain has a negativity bias, born from a necessity to stay alert to potential threats. It scans the world for what's wrong because doing so helps us stay safe and avoid suffering, both physically and emotionally.

But when you're intentional about seeing what's going right, and you cultivate the habits of being present to what's good, you begin to bolster your positivity bias. In other words, the more you look for what's positive in your life, the more you see it.

Increasing your awareness of what you're grateful for is a formula for a rich life. Gratitude helps you deeply savor your moments on good days, but it also gives you something to hold on to on bad days. In times of struggle, or when you're faced with unexpected adversity, solace comes from the ability to see what is going right, even when there are things that going wrong. This boosts your resilience and help you weather tough moments with more grace.

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# Say Good Night with Gratitude

One of the best things you can do before you fall asleep at night is increase your sense of calm and ease. Ruminating on troubles and allowing the mind to fixate on worries will only make it more difficult to fall and stay asleep. But when you cultivate a gratitude practice at bedtime, you point the mind toward positive thoughts, calm the nervous system, and gently guide yourself to rest.

Once you've climbed into bed and are ready for sleep, take the last few minutes before closing your eyes to think of three to five things you are grateful for. Reflect on your day and the interactions you had.

Think of your meals, the weather, your home, and your surroundings. Listing things you're grateful for gives the mind a positive project to engage in, especially if you deliberately amplify your positive emotions along the way.

Rather than relating to the list as something to get done, engage in the process as something to be slowly savored. Close your eyes, feel your feelings, use your senses. The more vibrant you can make your gratitude practice, the more deeply it will sink in. Let the feelings of gratitude enhance your sense of calm and peace as you drift off to sleep. The reward for this habit is falling asleep with a sense of peace and calm.

# Use Your ABCs

Sometimes it can be hard to think of things to be grateful for. The reason is not a lack of gratefulness, but rather that the creativity to generate ideas isn't readily accessible. Making a gratitude list can be like brainstorming, and depending on how much you already have on your mind, it can feel challenging. When I feel creatively stuck or in a bad mood and I want a practice to help me shift, I use the ABC gratitude practice. I learned this practice from A Network for Grateful Living, an organization that supports grateful living by offering lovely practices anyone can use.

The ABC practice is simple: use the alphabet to help you think of things to be thankful for. Going through each letter, begin to create a list of what you appreciate in the current moment. For example, today I am grateful my (A) aunt is feeling better after her surgery, for (B) bananas being such a great snack, and for the (C) crepe myrtle trees that are beautifully blooming in my neighborhood. As you can imagine, it becomes kind of a game you can play with yourself and others.

This ABC gratitude practice is a perfect companion when you're stuck in line or waiting for an appointment. You might also practice it on your gratitude walk or as a nighttime ritual with your partner or kids. Stack this practice with your device-free dinner routine or as part of your evening commute. By yourself or with others, you'll find it's a fun way to shift into a more thankful state of mind. This habit rewards you with a feeling of fun and levity, especially when you do it with others.

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