

# FOCUS

## VISTA PSYCHOLOGICAL & COUNSELING CENTRE, LLC

### Gratitude Tips

**Create positive emotions by being thankful every day:**

**Take a moment.** Think about the positive things that happened during the day.

**Journal.** Make a habit of writing down things you're grateful for. Try listing several things.

**Savor your experiences.** Try to notice positive moments as they are happening.

**Relive the good times.** Relive positive moments later by thinking about them or sharing them with others.

**Write to someone.** Write to someone you feel thankful toward. You don't have to send it.

**Make a visit.** Tell someone you're grateful for them in person.

### Practicing Gratitude: Ways to Improve Positivity

How often do you feel thankful for the good things in your life? Studies suggest that making a habit of noticing what's going well in your life could have health benefits. Taking the time to feel gratitude may improve your emotional well-being by helping you cope with stress.

Early research suggests that a daily practice of gratitude could affect the body, too. For example, one study found that gratitude was linked to fewer signs of heart disease. The first step in any gratitude practice is to reflect on the good things that have happened in your life. These can be big or little things. It can be as simple as scoring a good parking space that day or enjoying a hot mug of coffee. Or, perhaps you feel grateful for a close friend's compassionate support. Next, allow yourself a moment to enjoy that you had the positive experience, no matter what negatives may exist in your life. Let positive feelings of gratitude bubble up. "We encourage people to try practicing gratitude daily," advises Dr. Judith T. Moskowitz, a psychologist at Northwestern University. "You can try first thing in the morning or right before you fall asleep, whatever is best for you." Moskowitz has been studying the impact of keeping a daily gratitude journal on stress relief and health. Practicing gratitude is part of a set of skills that her research team encourages people to practice. These skills have been shown to help some people increase their positive emotions. Her team is trying to better understand how a daily boost in positive emotions can help people cope with stress and improve their mental and physical health. "By practicing these skills, it will help you cope better with whatever you have to cope with," Moskowitz explains. "You don't have to be experiencing major life stress. It also works with the daily stress that we all deal with.

Ultimately, it can help you be not just happier but also healthier." While practicing gratitude seems to work for some people, it doesn't for everyone. That's why Moskowitz's research team teaches other skill, too. These include meditating and doing small acts of kindness. Her team has been developing and testing these skills with people who have illnesses like advanced cancer, diabetes, HIV infection, and depression. She's also worked with people who care for others with serious illness.

## Altruism is Deeply Satisfying — in the Bedroom

The issue of why people act selflessly has long puzzled evolutionary psychologists. If our behavior is truly driven by Richard Dawkins' famous "selfish gene," why do we waste time and resources helping strangers? New research provides a plausible answer: Altruists do indeed get rewarded—with better sex lives. Previous research has found "altruists are more attractive than non-altruists, all else being equal," writes a research team led by Canadian psychologist Steven Arnocky. "The present study is the first to show that this may translate into real mating success." In the *British Journal of Psychology*, Arnocky and his colleagues from Ontario's Nipissing University describe two studies. The first featured 192 unmarried women and 105 unmarried men between the ages of 16 and 33. The participants, all Canadians, filled out a detailed questionnaire that included their sexual histories, current sexual activity, and altruistic activities. They indicated the accuracy of such statements as "I have helped push a stranger's car out of the snow," and "I have donated blood." "Even after controlling for age and personality," the researchers write, men who regularly acted in altruistic ways reported more

When you make gratitude a regular habit, it can help you learn to recognize good things in your life despite the bad things that might be happening. Moskowitz says that when you're under stress, you might not notice all the moments of positive emotion that you experience. With her research program, she's trying to help people become more aware of the moments of positive feelings. "Put some effort into experiencing gratitude on a daily basis and see how it goes," Moskowitz advises. "It might just surprise you that—despite how bad things are—there are things you feel grateful for alongside it." And feeling grateful may help improve both your mind and and your body.

**Source: For more about gratitude, see "Links" in the online article: [newsinhealth.nih.gov/2019/03/practicing-gratitude](https://newsinhealth.nih.gov/2019/03/practicing-gratitude)**

lifetime sex partners and more casual hook-ups. In their view, this suggests men, more than women, use altruistic behavior as a way "to attract partners for short-term copulations." OK but were the participants' self-reports an accurate gauge of their actual altruism? The similarly structured second study addressed that issue by informing participants – 335 female and 189 male college students – that they had been entered into a \$100 drawing. In the event that they won, they were asked to indicate whether they planned to keep the money, or if they were going to donate some portion of it to a charity of their choosing. "Participants who were willing to donate potential monetary winnings reported having more lifetime sex partners, more casual sex partners, and more casual sex partners over the past year," the researchers report. "Men who were willing to donate also reported having more lifetime dating partners."

So why is selflessness sexy? Arnocky and his colleagues argue that altruistic behavior is what biologists call a "costly signal" – an activity that requires some exertion, but also advertises one's attractive qualities to potential mates. Who doesn't want a partner is kind and giving? There is no evidence that people are conscious of this equation, nor that it's the only dynamic that encourages altruistic behavior. But from an evolutionary standpoint, our "selfish genes" need a well functioning society if they are to survive and thrive. It makes sense that a behavior that helps sustain this positive social environment would, over the course of natural selection get rewarded. So singles who are tired of Tinder may want to opt for a different strategy. Volunteering at the local food pantry won't only make you feel good; it may be an excellent way to meet a mate. **Source: Pacific Standard Magazine, Tom Jacobs, Aug. 10, 2016. <https://psmag.com/news/altruism-is-deeply-satisfying-in-the-bedroom>**

## How to Rein in Social Media Overuse

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So, what can we do to manage the downsides of social media? One idea is to log out of Facebook completely and take that “hard break.” Researcher Morten Tromhold of Denmark found that after taking a one-week break from Facebook, people had higher life satisfaction and positive emotions compared to people who stayed connected. The effect was especially pronounced for “heavy users, passive Facebook users, and users who tend to envy others on Facebook.” We can also become more mindful and curious about social media’s effects on our minds and hearts, weighing the good and bad. We should ask ourselves how social media makes us feel and behave, and decide whether we need to limit our exposure to social media all together (by logging out or deactivating our accounts) or simply modify our social media environment. Some people I’ve spoken with find ways of cleaning up their newsfeeds — from hiding everyone but their closest friends to “liking” only reputable news information, and entertainment sources. Knowing how social media affects our relationships, we might limit social media interactions to those that support real-world relationships, instead of lurking or passively scrolling through a never-ending bevy of posts, we can stop to

to ask ourselves important questions like, *What are my intentions?* and *What is this online realm doing to me and my relationships?* We each have to come to our own individual decisions about social media use, based on our own personal experience. Grounding ourselves in research helps us weigh the good and bad and make those decisions. Though the genie is out of the bottle, we may find, as Shakyia and Christakis put it, that “online social interactions are no substitute for the real thing,” and that in-person, healthy relationships are vital to society and our own individual well-being. We would do well to remember that truth and not put all our eggs in the social media basket. **Source: Ravi Chandra M.D., D.F.A.P.A., is a psychiatrist in San Francisco. He recently published *Facebuddha: Transcendence in the Age of Social Networks*, a book on the psychology of social networks through a Buddhist lens. Details at [www.facebuddha.com](http://www.facebuddha.com). (This article is adapted from his book.) [https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/how\\_to\\_use\\_social\\_media\\_wisely\\_and\\_mindfully](https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/how_to_use_social_media_wisely_and_mindfully)**

## Getting a Genetic Test

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Your doctor may suggest a genetic test to detect your risk of certain health problems, such as cancer. If you have symptoms of a disease, a genetic test may help with the diagnosis. Genetic testing looks for changes in genes. It’s usually done in a lab using a blood sample. Thousands of genetic tests are currently available. Deciding whether to get a genetic test isn’t easy. It’s important to consider what you may learn. Test results can be a relief. It may give you peace of mind to know that you don’t carry a genetic change linked to a certain disease.

But test results can be alarming too. Learning that you’re at risk of developing a certain disease may make the future look uncertain. Keep in mind that certain results may not mean that you’ll get that disease. Genetic counselors are one type of health professional who can help you understand the benefits and the risks of genetic testing. Your doctor may refer you to one. They can help you decide whether to undergo testing. And they can help explain what test results mean. **Learn more about genetic testing at [www.genome.gov/19516567/faq-about-genetic-testing](http://www.genome.gov/19516567/faq-about-genetic-testing)**



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**Vista Psychological & Counseling Centre, LLC**  
1201 South Main Street, Suite 100  
North Canton, Ohio 44720  
Phone: 330.244.8782  
Fax: 330.244.8795  
Email: [info@vistapcc.com](mailto:info@vistapcc.com)  
Website: [www.VistaPCC.com](http://www.VistaPCC.com)

## How Much Activity Do You Need?

Are you and your family getting enough exercise? Being active can help you improve your health and feel better. It can lower your blood pressure and reduce your risk of chronic diseases, like type 2 diabetes and certain cancers. Physical activity can boost your mood right away and help sharpen your focus. It can also reduce stress and help you sleep. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services recently updated advice about how much physical activity you and your family should try to get. The new Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans is based on the latest research on how activity affects health. Adults need at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity per week. You can start with just 5 minutes at a time. Swim, garden, walk the dog, dance, or bike your way to feeling better. Whatever gets you moving counts! Strengthening your muscles is important too.

At least two days each week, get those muscles working with things like push-ups or lifting weights. Children ages 3 to 5 should be physically active for at least 3 hours throughout the day. Kids 6 through 17 need at least 1 hour per day. All your physical activity adds up.

Moving more often throughout the day can help you get enough activity. **Source: NIH News in Health, January 2019. A monthly newsletter from the National Institutes of Health, part of the U.S. Department of Health Services.**

### Kids and teens ages 6 to 17 need 60 minutes of activity every day.

Most of their 60 minutes can be **moderate-intensity aerobic activity** — anything that gets their heart beating faster counts.

And at least 3 days a week, encourage them to step it up to **vigorous-intensity aerobic activity**, so they're breathing fast and their heart is pounding.



### As part of their daily 60 minutes, kids and teens also need:

#### Muscle-strengthening activity at least 3 days a week

Anything that makes their muscles work harder counts — like climbing or swinging on the monkey bars.



#### Bone-strengthening activity at least 3 days a week

Bones need **pressure** to get stronger. Running, jumping, and other weight-bearing activities all count.

AND

