

The Power of Gratitude and Positive Thinking

It can be easy to get caught up in everyday stress and negativity. However, practicing gratitude can be a powerful tool to improve mental health. Gratitude involves recognizing and appreciating life's positive aspects. By focusing on what one has rather than what one lacks, gratitude helps shift the mindset to a more positive and resilient state.

Gratitude is similar yet different from appreciation. The American Psychological Association defines gratitude as "a sense of happiness and thankfulness in response to a fortunate happenstance or tangible gift."

Gratitude encourages individuals to savor the present moment and acknowledge the good in their lives, no matter how small. This positive focus can lead to a more optimistic outlook and stronger relationships. It also encourages resilience, the ability to bounce back from setbacks more quickly. Similarly, gratitude instills a sense of control over emotions, enabling calmer and more effective responses to stressors. A positive outlook doesn't mean ignoring life's challenges; rather, it means approaching them with a constructive and hopeful attitude.

Ways to Practice Gratitude

Regularly acknowledging what you're grateful for can cultivate a sense of contentment. Starting small and being consistent can make a significant difference. Consider these tips to get started:

- Keep a gratitude journal, writing down things you're grateful for and reflecting on why they're meaningful to you.
- Try gratitude affirmations to reinforce positive thinking. Instead of writing down what you're grateful for, repeat it to yourself daily.
- Express thanks to others, sharing why you're grateful for them or how they're positively impacting your life.
- Embrace mindful moments by pausing to appreciate the beauty or the good around you, such as a sunny day or a kind gesture.
- Take a walk and consciously notice things you're grateful for in your surroundings. Then, reflect on how they enhance your life.

Remember, gratitude is a journey; every small step can lead to a more positive and fulfilling life.

Combatting Tech Neck

While not an official medical diagnosis, “tech neck” has become a familiar phrase. As smartphones, laptops and tablets have become everyday tools, people spend more time hunched over screens. The result is a growing number of individuals reporting stiffness, discomfort and pain in their neck and shoulders. Tech neck refers to the strain placed on the cervical spine (the part of the spine in the neck) when a person consistently looks down at a device or sits in poor posture while using technology.

The good news is that tech neck is preventable and manageable. A few small changes in daily habits can make a big difference, so consider these tips:

- **Improve ergonomics.** Set up your workstation to reduce unnecessary strain. Position your computer monitor so the top of the screen is at or just below eye level. Sit in a chair that

supports your back, with feet flat on the floor and shoulders relaxed.

- **Follow the 20-20-20 rule.** Every 20 minutes, look at something 20 feet away for at least 20 seconds. This not only eases eye strain but also encourages you to reset your posture.
- **Strengthen and stretch.** Encouraging short stretch breaks (e.g., chin tucks, neck stretches and shoulder blade squeezes) during the workday can be particularly effective in preventing long-term strain.
- **Mind your phone habits.** When checking your phone, bring the device up to your eyes rather than bending your head down.

Contact a doctor if tech neck symptoms persist or worsen. Physical therapy, massage or exercise programs can help address severe discomfort.

Adjusting to Daylight Saving Time

Most of the United States shifts between standard and daylight saving time (DST) each year in an effort to “save” natural light. Clocks will get set one hour back on Sunday, Nov. 2, when the DST period ends. Although you may be excited about gaining another hour in your day, the disruption of DST can wreak havoc on your physical and cognitive health for several days, weeks or even months.

Your internal clock regulates critical processes, including the immune system. Interruptions to the circadian rhythm, your body’s 24-hour cycle that regulates wake and sleep, can also impair your focus and judgment. If your area follows DST, consider these tips to help adjust to the time change:

- Exercise in the morning to increase your wakefulness and reset your internal clock.

- Prioritize daylight exposure to help preserve your circadian rhythm.
- Keep a regular sleep routine and aim for seven to nine hours of sleep each night.
- Remove sleep disturbances (e.g., excess amounts of alcohol, caffeine and blue light exposure) a couple of hours before bedtime.

While you may be tempted to use the bonus hour to indulge in various activities, health experts recommend using that time for sleep. To help make the DST transition easier, consider going to bed 15 to 20 minutes early in the days beforehand to help your body get used to the difference. If you have specific concerns, talk to your health care provider.

Recipe of the Month

Slow Cooker Pork Stew Over Brown Rice

Makes: 8 servings

Ingredients

- 2 lbs. lean pork stew meat
- 3 cups baby carrots
- 1 large onion (sliced)
- 1 ½ tsp. dried thyme leaves
- ½ tsp. coarse ground black pepper
- ¼ tsp. salt
- 1 clove garlic (minced)
- 1 ½ cups complete bran and wheat flakes ready-to-eat cereal (crushed to ¾ cup)
- 1 cup dried tart cherries
- ¾ cup 100% apple juice or apple cider
- 4 cups hot cooked brown rice

Preparations

1. Trim fat from the pork.
2. Spray a large pan with nonstick cooking spray. Cook half of the pork at a time until browned.
3. In a 4- to 6-quart slow cooker, layer the carrots, onion, thyme, pepper, salt and garlic. Sprinkle with cereal and cherries.
4. Top with the pork and pour apple juice or cider over the contents in the cooker.
5. Cover and cook on low for 7 to 8 hours or on high for 3 ½ to 4 hours.
6. Prepare the brown rice according to package directions toward the end of the stew cooking time. (Brown rice typically takes about 40 to 45 minutes to cook.)
7. Stir the pork mixture and serve over a ½ cup of brown rice.

Nutritional Information

(per serving)

Total calories	412
Total fat	7 g
Protein	30 g
Sodium	280 mg
Carbohydrate	57 g
Dietary fiber	6 g
Saturated fat	2 g
Total sugars	20 g

Source: MyPlate