Gratitude Activities for Adults

Self-Care: Five Ways to Practice Gratitude

These gratitude activities for adults are five short ways to notice and share what you are thankful for, each with space to try it. They build on research by psychologists Robert Emmons and Michael McCullough and by Martin Seligman and colleagues. Each one takes about 5 to 15 minutes. Try them all over a week or two, then keep the ones you enjoy.

1 Send a thank-you message

Think of someone who helped you recently, in a big or small way. Send them a short text, email, or note today. Say what they did and what it meant to you.

Who I thanked, and what I said:

Example: Sam, for covering my shift. It meant I could be with my mom at her appointment.

In studies by Amit Kumar and Nicholas Epley, people who wrote thank-you notes expected them to feel awkward to receive. The people who got them felt happier and less awkward than the writers had guessed.

2 Notice the helpers

Pick one everyday thing you used today, like your morning coffee or the bus you rode. List the people who helped make it possible, from the people who grew or built it to the people who brought it to you.

My everyday thing, and the people behind it:

Why does this work? *Emmons describes gratitude as noticing the good in your life and seeing that much of it comes from other people. In his study with McCullough, people who wrote down what they were grateful for each week for ten weeks felt better about their lives than people who wrote about hassles. In a 2005 study by Seligman and colleagues, people who wrote and delivered a thank-you letter felt happier for up to a month. Reviews of many studies find the benefits are real but modest, so it helps to treat these as small, regular habits rather than a quick fix.*

3 Take a gratitude walk

Go for a 10 to 15 minute walk with your phone put away. Look for things you are glad to see, hear, or feel, like a tree in bloom, a kind face, or the sun on your back. Pause for a moment with each one.

What I noticed and enjoyed:

**This worksheet provides information but is not a substitute for therapy. It works best with guidance from a professional.*

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4 Tell someone close what you appreciate

Notice one thing a partner, friend, or family member did for you this week, even something small. Tell them what it was and why it mattered.

What I appreciated, and how they reacted:

In a study of couples by Sara Algoe and colleagues, on days when people felt more grateful toward their partner, both partners tended to feel more connected and satisfied the next day.

5 Look back at a hard time

Choose a hard time from your past that no longer feels raw. Write about anything good that came from it, such as a skill you learned, a person who showed up, or something you now value more.

What I am grateful for now, looking back:

Skip this one if it brings up a painful or traumatic memory. A therapist can help you work through those safely.

6 Which ones fit you?

Activity	When I tried it	How I felt after
Thank-you message		
Notice the helpers		
Gratitude walk		
Tell someone close		
Look back at a hard time		

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