



# Your Brain on Gratitude

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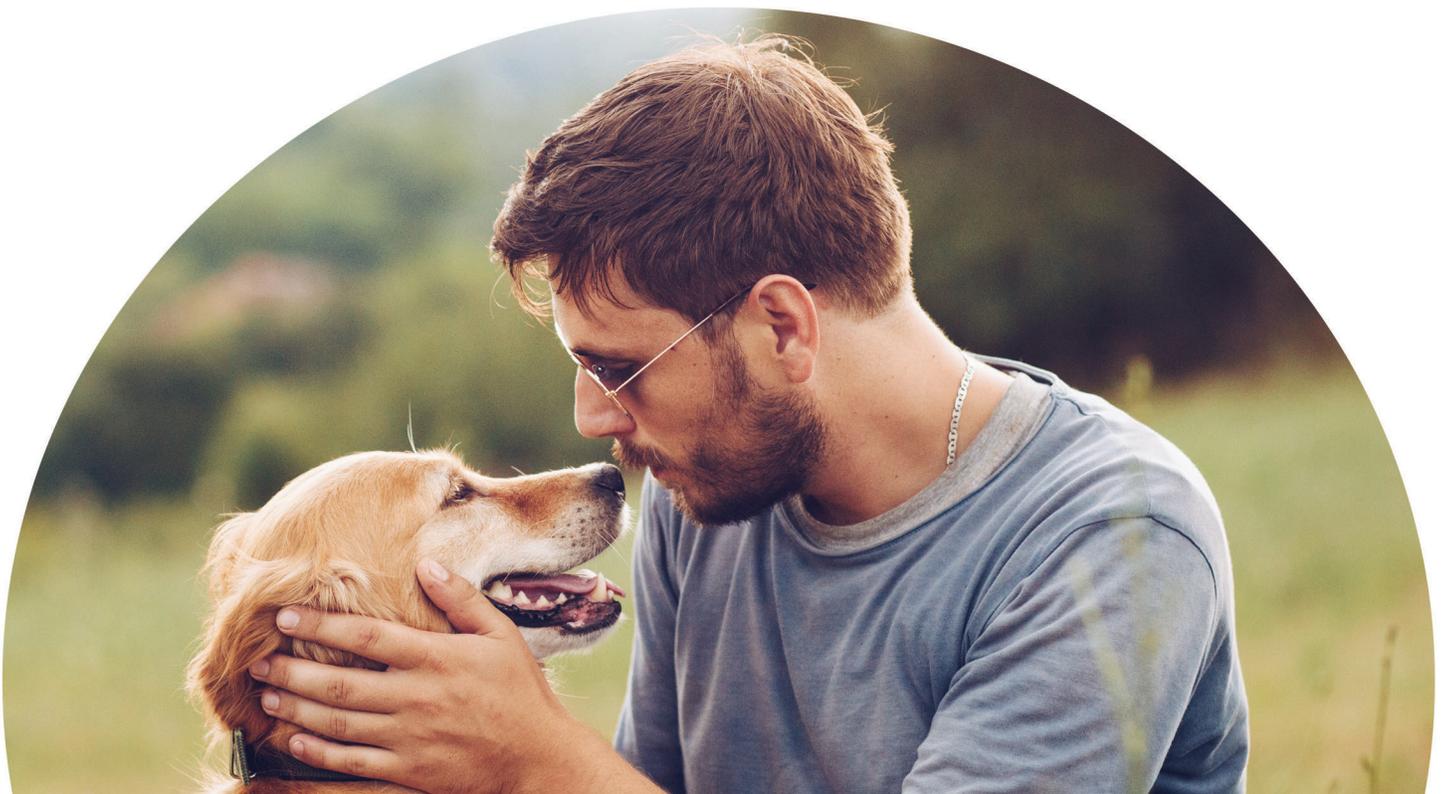
When it comes to your mental health, gratitude should be not only the focus of Thanksgiving, but also an everyday habit. You see, just expressing gratitude can result in better sleep, promote generosity, foster social support, and even protect against stress and depression.

Forming a habit of gratitude actually leads to “profound and long-lasting neural effects in the brain” according to a study that examined brain scans of those suffering from anxiety and depression who wrote letters of thanks to people in their lives. Scientists don’t quite understand how this works mechanically, but they agree that gratitude exerts a myriad of positive effects. See how your brain changes on gratitude by making these activities habitual:

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**Start a gratitude journal.** In a 10-week gratitude journaling study, people who wrote about things that they were grateful for felt more optimistic and better about their lives in comparison to those who wrote about things that displeased them or were neutral. The grateful group also exercised more and had fewer physician visits.

If you already keep a journal, try to note at least one thing you’re grateful for each day in addition to your other thoughts. If you’re brand-new to journaling, start with just gratitude alone. Whether on paper or in an app like Sanvello\*, simply jotting down a few things you’re grateful for can help you gain perspective and feel happier.



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### Make these activities part of your everyday routine.

**Send thank you notes.** Gratitude journaling is a solo activity, so a great way to spread the positive effects of gratitude beyond yourself is to send a thank you note or letter. A recent psychology study required one group to write about early memories and the other to deliver a letter of gratitude to someone who had never been properly thanked for their kindness. Those in the latter group experienced huge increases in happiness scores, with benefits lasting over a month! They probably made the recipient's day as well, so it's really a win-win.

Pick up a pack of thank you notes (there is something about snail mail when it comes to expressing thanks!) and take a look back at the last several months. Who has gone out of their way to help you, or who have you not told how much you truly appreciate them? Let them know how grateful you are, and be specific about why. Send them off, and watch the warmth you feel for them boost your mood.

**Count the little things.** When you're suffering from anxiety or depression, it can feel difficult or impossible to find things you're feeling grateful for. When it feels like everything is going wrong, count the little things that you may take for granted.

In a content analysis of gratitude journals, people reported to appreciate small things like the warmth of the sun, or access to clean water. Looking for these things, no matter how small, makes you more aware of all of the things you do have in life. Soon, you may expand on these little things to express gratitude for your personal strengths and growth, and then build on that to your relationships, work, or school.

Start with expressing gratitude for the "small stuff" that is around you. By making that routine, you can experience the positive benefits of gratitude and gradually snowball to gratitude for other areas.

**Build a gratitude habit.** The most important thing for all of these activities is to make them part of your everyday routine. Start by trying to attach just one of these activities to something you already do daily. For example, maybe you commit to just gratitude journaling each night after you brush your teeth before you go to bed.

Make note of how you feel after doing any of these activities. I would be willing to bet that the mental health benefits you experience will be so great, it will eventually feel weird when you don't make time!

So let me practice what I preach: Thank you for reading this far, and for making gratitude a regular part of your life. I can't wait to see what it does for you.



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For more information about the Sanvello app, visit [Sanvello.com](https://www.sanvello.com). To download the app, visit [Apple App Store](#) or [Google Play](#). \*The standard version is free to all Idahoans and Idaho Medicaid members may upgrade to a more fully-featured Premium, paid version at no additional cost by selecting "Idaho Health Plan" in the insurance plan menu when setting up the app.

