



# Huron County Board of Mental Health and Addiction Services

2 Oak Street • Norwalk, Ohio 44857 • 419-681-6268

## Gratitude and Mental Health

*“Even in the chaos of everyday life, moments of gratitude remind us to hold on to the good things.” – Brit Morin*

November is National Gratitude month, and the beginning of the season when many people may begin to think about what they are grateful for in their life. While it is nice to count your blessings during the holidays, practicing gratitude for the big and small things in your life can benefit your life all year round. When we practice gratitude on a regular basis, it not only impacts our mental and physical health, but also those around us. Research shows that focusing on gratitude can reduce stress and improve physical and mental health and people who consciously count their blessings tend to have less stress, sleep better, experience improved interpersonal relationships, tend to be happier and less depressed. In fact, these reports have found that a single act of thoughtful gratitude produces an immediate 10% increase in happiness, and a 35% reduction in depressive symptoms.

Additional studies have shown that those who practice gratitude are more optimistic about their lives, tend to exercise more, and have better relationships with those around them. In fact, a study conducted at University of California Berkley compared three groups of college students: One group wrote letters of gratitude to another person weekly for three weeks; one group wrote about negative personal experiences; and one group did not write at all. The researchers found that the letter-writing group reported significantly better mental health for weeks after the experiment ended. Regardless of whether they mailed their letters (only 23% did), they experienced better outcomes than those who wrote about their negative experiences or did not write at all.

Gratitude can be a powerful practice to cultivate and can honestly be a life changer. It helps train our brain to notice and appreciate the little things in life and, in doing so, shifts our life experience tremendously. Gratitude may be a gesture or a group of kind words that we give or receive from others. But these simple exchanges of thankfulness go a long way in affecting our overall biological functioning, especially the brain and the nervous system. Below are some of the physical effects of gratitude:

1. Gratitude helps release toxic emotions
2. Gratitude can reduce pain
3. Gratitude can help improve sleep quality
4. Gratitude aids in stress regulation
5. Gratitude can reduce feelings of anxiety and depression

Staying grateful in challenging times can feel difficult when you do not know where to start. But with a little practice, it can become much easier to see the good instead of focusing on the negative or unknown. The research above shows that practicing gratitude can have long lasting mental health benefits, even if you keep it to yourself. And although it can feel hard, there are effortless ways you can start today.

### How can you practice gratitude?

- *Say, “Thank you!”* All the time. It may sound simple but saying “thank you” and meaning it can boost your mood. Not only is it polite, it also will make the person you are thanking feel good too. You can thank someone who holds the door for you, the person at the cash register, or even a loved one for simply being in your life.
- *Write down what you appreciate most.* This is a great exercise to help you see how much you truly have. Try not to focus just on material things. Perhaps you feel grateful for your family, a healthy body, or the nice weather outside. You will see that being grateful can really have a positive impact on your mental health.
- *Pay attention to your emotions.* It is important to stay in tune with how you are feeling so you can make changes when necessary. Meditation and mindfulness exercises are great to take a breather and escape from everyday stressors. This can look different from person to person, but it can help to separate yourself and think about all of the positives around you. Being present, feeling your breath, or having a few minutes of silence can all be exercises in gratitude when you practice focusing on the positive.



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It can be easy to get busy with life's responsibilities and especially with the holiday season approaching but taking a few minutes every day to practice gratitude can have a positive and long-lasting impact on your mental and physical health.

### Resources for Help

If you or someone you know is in an emergency, call 911 immediately.

If you are in crisis or are experiencing difficult or suicidal thoughts, you can call:

- Huron County Crisis Hopeline: 567-867-HOPE
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 988

If you are uncomfortable talking on the phone, you can also text **4HOPE** to 741-741 to be connected to a free, trained crisis counselor on the Crisis Text Line.

*For a list of local treatment providers and support services visit: [www.hcbmhas.org](http://www.hcbmhas.org).*

*Mentalhealthfirstaid.org*

*<https://positivepsychology.com/neuroscience-of-gratitude/>*

*<https://namica.org/blog/the-impact-of-gratitude-on-mental-health/>*

*<https://alexkorbphd.com/how-gratitude-shapes-your-brain/>*

*<https://www.jstor.org/stable/23801698>*

*<https://www.nationwidechildrens.org/family-resources-education/700childrens/2020/05/gratitude>*

*<https://adaa.org/learn-from-us/from-the-experts/blog-posts/consumer/gratitude-mental-health-game-changer>*

*<https://www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org/2019/11/being-grateful-can-improve-your-mental-health/>*