

# Attitude of gratitude

Thanksgiving can be good for your health

By Lisa Evans

Who knew that a holiday that included pumpkin pie, turkey stuffing and cranberry sauce could be good for your health? The fall harvest, also called Thanksgiving, is celebrated on the second Monday of October. This year, it falls on Oct. 10.

It's not the food, however, that is good for your health, but the

act of giving thanks. Studies have shown that having an attitude of gratitude can improve our psychological, emotional and physical well-being.

For newcomers who are struggling to find work, adjusting to new living conditions and facing the stresses of learning a new language, cultivating an attitude of gratitude may be key to your success.



Aki Matsumoto, 50, immigrated to Canada from Japan last year and plans to celebrate Thanksgiving with his wife and daughter. With roast chicken, cranberry sauce and homemade cranberry juice on the table — “A turkey is too big for my family,” he says — the Matsumotos plan to give thanks for the harvest and their health.

When Matsumoto immigrated to Canada, he did so to enhance his professional skills and to join his daughter who had been in Canada for four years and is now in high school. He, like many newcomers, faced difficulties finding a job and still struggles to perfect his English.

He is grateful for the opportunities given to him by his parents who sent him and his wife to Canada. “We appreciate [that they gave us an opportunity so] that we could challenge for a new life here,” he says. Knowing that they made this sacrifice makes Matsumoto work even harder to achieve success in his new country.

### Benefits of gratitude

While ancient Greek and Roman philosophers extolled gratitude as an indispensable human virtue, modern-day social scientists are just beginning to understand its effect on our health and emotional well-being.

Studies have demonstrated that people like Matsumoto, who display an attitude of gratitude, are less likely to be depressed, have more energy, are able to handle stress easier, have more social connections, have increased immunity against viruses, tend to earn more money, sleep more soundly and experience greater happiness than those who don't engage in the practice of showing thanks.

A 2003 study by Dr. Robert Emmons and Michael McCullough published in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* demonstrated the positive emotional benefits of counting your blessings. The study included more than 100 undergraduate students who were divided into three groups.

The first group was asked to list five things they were grateful for during the last week over 10

consecutive weeks.

The second group was asked to list five things that annoyed them and the third group was simply asked to list five events that had occurred during the week. The students who were asked to count their blessings had fewer health complaints over the 10-week study, exercised more regularly and generally felt better about their lives than the other two groups.

Why does being thankful have such an impact on our overall happiness?

Social scientists argue that being grateful forces us to overcome our innate “negativity bias” — our tendency to dwell on problems, annoyances and injustices rather than the positive events in our lives. By refocusing our energy on our blessings, we can build greater resistance to depression in times of stress.

### Give thanks all year

Letty Apostol recognizes the importance of showing gratitude in her daily life. After immigrating to Canada from the Philippines, Apostol is grateful for her job and friends who have helped her to settle in her new country. She demonstrates her thankfulness to Canada by “being a good citizen, respecting this country and abiding by the rules, regulations and laws of the government,” she says.

And Apostol appreciates the October holiday of thanks as a time to give thanks for the blessings in her life and to spend time with her family. “Thanksgiving means we should thank god that we have this great country and for our family, health and good life. [My family and I] usually go to church to get god's blessings and then our family gets together for a good dinner so we can socialize and connect,” she says.

Canada's national holiday of thanks is a great time to express such gratitude, but showing it on a regular basis throughout the year is even more important to experience the resulting psychological, emotional and mental health benefits. 🍁

Thank  
you



## 5 ways to cultivate gratitude

**1 Start a gratitude journal** Keep a daily record of the things you are grateful for. If you're tech-savvy, there's an app for gratitude journaling and online gratitude groups that can help keep you motivated. Start a gratitude journaling club with your friends or family and have everyone share their recordings.

**2 Smile often** Physical gestures that show appreciation to others can help to cultivate an attitude of gratitude. Wave to a driver that lets you merge on a busy highway, smile at your co-workers, and share hugs with your close family and friends.

**3 Inspiring quotes** Post inspiring quotes or phrases on your refrigerator, desk or mirror to remind you of the things you have to be grateful for.

**4 Remember to say thanks** Send a thank you note to someone who has helped you. Perhaps they have helped you get in touch with a potential employer or settle into your new apartment. Whatever the reason, they will appreciate the gesture and you can feel good knowing you have helped to brighten someone else's day. It doesn't hurt as a networking tool, either.

**5 Give back** Volunteering is a great way to demonstrate gratitude. With Christmas around the corner, there are plenty of opportunities to lend a hand and reach out to your community through holiday toy drives, food banks and soup kitchens.