



## Key Advice

### Why Gratitude

In positive psychology, gratitude is considered a central theme due to its strong links with well-being. But what gratitude actually is, remains the subject of ongoing study.

As Emmons and Crumpler (2000, in Allen, 2018) describe, "Gratitude has been conceptualised as an emotion, a virtue, a moral sentiment, a motive, a coping response, a skill, and an attitude. It is all of these and more." Gratitude is not just about being thankful for material things, but about recognising non-material support, opportunities or experiences, often in connection with others.

In the context of gratitude journaling, gratitude can be defined as recognising that one has obtained a positive outcome and recognising that there is an external source for this positive outcome (Emmons & McCullough, 2003).

Gratitude has been found to strongly correlate with various indicators of mental well-being. Experimental research shows that regular gratitude practice, for example, keeping a daily journal or writing a gratitude letter, can lead to more positive emotions, greater life satisfaction, and reductions in stress and depressive symptoms (Emmons & McCullough, 2003; Seligman et al., 2005).

The idea is simple: by regularly pausing to notice positive experiences and expressing appreciation, we shift our focus from what is wrong to what is going well. At the same time, more research is needed to understand the exact biological mechanisms behind these effects.

For students, who often face academic stress and life transitions, a gratitude routine may support emotional well-being and enhance resilience, the ability to recover from setbacks. A recurring finding is that gratitude journaling not only increases the positive but also reduces the negative.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, for example, students and other participants were assigned either a brief online gratitude writing exercise or a control exercise involving expressive writing about stress. After one month, the gratitude group showed significant reductions in stress and negative affect, while the expressive writing group showed no improvement. Control groups without any writing also showed no reduction in stress. This suggests that in times of high stress, focusing on gratitude may be more effective than simply venting worries (Fekete & Deichert, 2022).