

# Gratuitous TIPS

*Too often we get hung up on what's wrong or what's bothering us, but if we really took the time to think what we're grateful for, we'd be thankful too says **Fiona Hoban***

**C**an you remember the last time you had a really bad toothache? How long ago was that? What tooth was it – top, bottom, left or right side? How was it resolved in the end? Can you remember the relief when the pain eased?

Relief from physical pain really is bliss. Buddhist monk, Thich Naht Hahn says we should daily enjoy our “non toothache”. I smiled when I heard that first. I totally forget (or refuse to remember) that I don't have a toothache. How many times do I wake up and almost immediately start doing a mental list of what the day ahead will entail - often with a sense of tense anticipation. What a difference it would make if I woke up and took even twenty seconds to relish in the bliss of my non toothache!

Imagine what your day would be like if you did everything, went everywhere and met everyone with a real sense of non toothache. Stuck in traffic? Enjoy your non toothache. Caught out in the rain? Enjoy your non toothache. Bored to tears at work? Enjoy your non toothache. Another bill in the door? Enjoy your non toothache. Mother-in-law (or monster-in-law) due to call? Enjoy your non toothache.

We so often race through our days – busy, busy, busy. Eager to get through this in order to get onto that. Totally oblivious to the joy of our non toothache. But, boy oh boy, things are very different when the toothache arrives. We take our non toothache for granted and then grumble ungraciously when we get one. It's like a child who has no interest in any of its toys, but screams and sulks if anyone dares take one away.

## AN ATTITUDE OF GRATITUDE...

To develop an attitude of gratitude means making a habit out of being thankful, of counting your blessings, of noticing simple pleasures (like a non toothache), and acknowledging everything that you receive. It means being aware on a continuous basis of how much you've been given.

Getting into the habit of experiencing and expressing gratitude activates positive emotion centers in the brain. The positive emotions evoked can soothe distress and increase our sense of well-being. Gratitude shifts our focus from what our life lacks to the abundance that is already present. Epictetus a stoic philosopher said almost two thousand years ago: “He is a wise man who does not grieve for the things which he has not, but rejoices for those which he has.”



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## ADVANTAGES OF PRACTISING GRATITUDE:

- \* Increased creativity
- \* Stronger immune system
- \* Stronger social relationships
- \* Bounce back from adversity
- \* Increases your happiness set-point
- \* Greater emotional resilience
- \* Reduces stress and depression
- \* More likely to achieve goals
- \* More likely to exercise
- \* Improved well-being

## COVERwell-being

### RESEARCH SHOWS GRATITUDE HEIGHTENS QUALITY OF LIFE:

Whilst gratitude is often associated with spiritual or religious practices, it has in more modern times been scrutinised by scientific research and experiments. Two psychologists, Michael McCollough of Southern Methodist University in Dallas, Texas wrote an article about an experiment they conducted on gratitude and its impact on well-being. The study split several hundred people into three different groups and all of the participants were asked to keep daily diaries. The first group kept a diary of the events that occurred during the day without being told specifically to write about either good or bad things. The second group was told to record their unpleasant experiences while the last group was instructed to make a daily list of things for which they were grateful. The results of the study indicated that daily gratitude exercises resulted in higher reported levels of alertness, enthusiasm, determination, optimism, and energy. In addition, those in the gratitude group experienced less depression and stress, were more likely to help others, exercised more regularly, and made greater progress toward achieving personal goals.

### GRATITUDE INCREASES YOUR HAPPINESS SET POINT:

Dr. Robert Emmons is considered by many to be the world's leading authority on gratitude and is author of the book, *Thanks! How the New Science of Gratitude Can Make You Happier*. His book is based on research involving thousands of people conducted by a number of different researchers around the world. One of the things these studies show is that practicing gratitude can increase happiness levels by around 25%. This is significant, among other things, because just as there's a certain weight that feels natural to your body and which your body strives to maintain, your basic level of happiness is also set at a predetermined point. If something bad happens to you during the day, your happiness can drop momentarily, but then it returns to its natural set-point. Likewise, if something positive happens to you, your level of happiness rises, and then it returns once again to your 'happiness set-point'. Regular practice of gratitude can change the way our brain neurons fire into more positive automatic patterns. This raises your 'happiness set-point' so you can remain at a higher level of happiness regardless of outside circumstances.

Practicing gratitude isn't about putting a positive spin on things, it's about putting a perspective on things. Dr Emmons says: “To say we feel grateful is not to say that everything in our lives is necessarily great. It just means we are aware of our blessings.”

### DEVELOP AN ATTITUDE OF GRATITUDE:

- 1 - Make a list of 10 things you are grateful for. Pick one item from the list and reflect on it for a minute to help deepen your sense of gratitude.
- 2 - Before you go to sleep at night ask yourself: “What was the best thing that happened to me today?”
- 3 - Ask yourself: “What's going right?” (as opposed to what's going wrong) and “What do I have?” (as opposed to what I feel is missing).