

## A moment of gratitude: a gift that keeps on giving

As we enter this holiday season, each of us brings the past year of experiences to the moment. Some of us may feel we've had a "good" year, but others may not be feeling so positive. Many have experienced loss, pain, and grief this year. Given the economy, many people may be feeling overwhelmed, angry, and scared.

So how do we step into a season that is "supposed" to be uplifting and full of meaningful connections when our hearts might feel otherwise? The seasonal directive to "be grateful" can feel like a lot of pressure when you're not finding too much to be thankful for.

But, ironically, stepping into gratitude is especially important for those who bring anger, fear or loss to this season. Why?

***Because gratitude changes you. Literally.***

It really is an inside job - it's all about biology. Our cells have two options: either they're in defense or growth mode. They can be on alert and protect, or they can go off-guard, let concerns go, and just relax and be in the moment. When we are on-alert (in defense), it negatively impacts our health systems, impairs our ability to think logically, and inhibits our ability to manufacture the hormones we need for happiness or contentment. Defense, anger, and anxiety are biochemically incongruent with health, happiness, and well-being.

Gratitude shifts us out of defense. It triggers a shift in the cells. Gratitude releases the chemicals that cause a worried, hyper scan, "on alert" focus to give way to feeling ease and relaxation. Plus, when you breathe deeply and focus on gratitude at the same time, you'll raise your DHEA level. That's a good thing - it's the anti-aging, stress-reducing hormone.

Try it. Especially if you've had a lot of stresses, losses, or worries. You might want to identify a couple things you are grateful for in advance, so the next time you feel yourself tensing up you can pick a gratitude focus easily. It only takes about a minute or two of focused breathing and gratitude to get the chemicals rerouted. And when your cells are back in growth mode, you'll also have a much easier time thinking clearly and navigating challenges. Plus you'll just feel a whole lot better.

The gratitude list will be different for each of us. If you have trouble finding something, remember - it doesn't have to be big and profound. It could be anything. There have been times when I simply felt grateful that my ankles were working!

So take a moment to think about it. What are you grateful for?

Happy Thanksgiving.

StayWell,  
Robin