Written by Connie Troska

Years ago, after a very traumatic life event, I wrote the following on a napkin: “See the glory in every day and then say, ‘Thank you.’” to remind myself that even on the darkest of days, there is always something to be grateful for. It has been my motto ever since.

In 2020, finding something every day to be thankful for seemed like a tough thing to do. But when you get in the habit of finding at least one thing, it changes your perspective. Maybe getting to the bathroom on time is all you’ve got for the day. Well then, be thankful for it. Even the little things can readjust our perspective.

As we enter 2021, it is the perfect time to make gratitude a habit. Gratitude doesn’t have to be just about big things. Start with little things, and soon you will see that those little things add up. Gratitude is beneficial for your health too.

According to Robert A. Emmons, Ph.D., psychology professor, University of California, Davis, and author of The Little Book of Gratitude, “Gratitude is good medicine.”

Emmons states, “Clinical trials indicate that the practice of gratitude can have dramatic and lasting effects in a person’s life. It can lower blood pressure and improve immune function. Grateful people engage in more exercise, have better dietary behaviors, are less likely to smoke and abuse alcohol, and have higher rates of medication adherence.”

Gratitude can also improve relationships. In a study published in the Journal of Theoretical Social Psychology, if you feel grateful toward your partner or other family members (and visa versa), it can improve your relationship by being more connected.

So, for your physical health, mental health, and your relationship health, there are simple things you can do to practice gratitude and make it a habit. Experts say it takes 21 days for something to become a habit, so commit 21 days to practicing gratitude and see what happens!

- **Write it down.** Keeping a gratitude journal makes this quest to form a new habit intentional. Choose a time each day where you can sit, relax, and be mindful of being thankful. Write down small things. Write down big things. Write down everything in between! Or start small…write down one thing today and two things tomorrow, etc. Whichever way you decide to do it, just start doing it. Also, make sure you can go back and read what you are grateful for. Whether it is in a journal or a gratitude jar, be sure to
jot down the date too. Having the opportunity to go back and read your musings is an uplifting activity.

- **Tell others that you are grateful for them.** Want to make someone’s day? Let them know how grateful you are for them. Call them on the phone, write a note and mail it to them. Whichever way you decide to express yourself, remember, it is contagious; start a gratitude revolution!

- **Use gratitude reminders.** Whether it is a picture of someone you love, an inspiring quote, a reminder of a place you like to go. All of these things can help with your quest to make gratitude a habit.

- **Notice nature.** Our natural world is beautiful. Take the time to see it, smell it, and feel it. Use your senses to appreciate the nature around you.

- **Turn off the news.** While it is important to be informed, try to strike a balance. According to Graham Davey, Ph.D., in his article “The Psychological Effects of TV News,” published in Psychology Today, Davey stated, “the negative sensationalism in the news has been gradually increasing over the past 20 to 30 years. There is also an increasing tendency for news broadcasters to ‘emotionalize’ their news by emphasizing potential negative outcomes, no matter how low the negative outcome might be.” Negative news broadcasts can make you sadder, raise your blood pressure, and likely exacerbate your anxiety and worry.

- **Volunteer.** Find an organization where you can volunteer to help others. Research shows that just two to three hours per week has significant benefits for you.

- **Practice being grateful at the same time every day.** Until gratitude becomes a habit, set an alarm, put it on your calendar. Whatever you need to do, set aside the same time every day to focus on gratitude until it becomes a habit.

Gratitude is a way of life that is intentional until it no longer needs to be intentional...it just becomes who you are. Once it has become a habit, your outlook on life shifts. Take the challenge for 21 days, be grateful, and see what happens. What do you have to lose, except negativity?