

It's the little things: Everyday gratitude as a booster shot for romantic relationships

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Our busy lives sometimes feel like they are spinning out of control, and we lose track of the little things we can do to add meaning to our lives and make our loved ones feel appreciated. A new article in *Personal Relationships* points the way to the methods of gratitude we can use to give a boost to our romantic relationships, and help us achieve and maintain satisfaction with our partners.

Humans are interdependent, with people doing things for each other all the time. Simply because a person does something for another does not mean that the emotion of gratitude will be felt. In addition to the possibility of not even noticing the kind gesture, one could have many different reactions to receiving a benefit from someone else, including gratitude, resentment, misunderstood, or indebtedness.

Positive thinking has been shown to have a longstanding constructive effect on our [emotional life](#). Extending these positive emotions and gratitude to our romantic partners can increase the benefit of [positive thinking](#) tenfold, say the authors of this new study. Lead author Dr. Sara Algoe says, "Feelings of gratitude and [generosity](#) are helpful in solidifying our relationships with people we care about, and benefit to the one giving as well as the one on the receiving end." The authors propose that the emotion of gratitude is adaptive, and ultimately helps us to find, remind, and bind ourselves to people who seem to care about our welfare.

Events such as one partner planning a celebratory meal when the other

partner gets a promotion, taking the children to the zoo so the other partner can have some quiet time, or stopping to pick up the other partner's favorite coffee drink are each examples of gratuitous behavior that could strengthen romantic relationships, if the recipient feels grateful in response.

The study authors chose to study over sixty-five couples who were already in ongoing, satisfying, and committed relationships. They tracked the day-to-day fluctuations in relationship satisfaction and connection for each member of the relationship. These little, everyday, ups and downs in relationship quality were reliably marked by one person's feelings of gratitude. The effects on the relationship were noticed even the day after feeling the gratitude was expressed. This research thus suggests that even everyday gratitude serves an important relationship maintenance mechanism in close relationships, acting as a booster shot to the relationship.

The authors of the study claim that this emotional response may be beneficial for relationships that are on the rocks, or in a context where people already have solid and satisfied relationships—a little gratitude may go a long way toward maintaining the connection. By temporarily changing the perspective on the relationship, everyday gratitude may work as a booster shot for ongoing [romantic relationships](#).

However, the authors are quick to warn that the everyday [emotional](#) response of indebtedness did not facilitate relationship maintenance. Indebtedness implies a need to repay kind gestures. This may work to help to keep relationships in working order, but will not yield as many benefits or long-term growth in the relationship as an expression of gratitude. Algoe says, "Gratitude triggers a cascade of responses within the person who feels it in that very moment, changing the way the person views the generous benefactor, as well as motivations toward the benefactor. This is especially true when a person shows that they care

about the partner's needs and preferences."

More information: "It's the Little Things: Everyday Gratitude as a Booster Shot for Romantic Relationships." Sara Algoe, et. al. Personal Relationships.

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