

# Why gratitude matters—even during a pandemic

November 26 2020, by Gisela Valencia

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Every year, Thanksgiving Day ushers in a time of gratitude and joy. It prompts us to slow down, feast on turkey (and all things pumpkin spice), take stock of our blessings and give thanks with a full heart.

But, how exactly do we do that when there's a global pandemic disrupting our lives? We choose to be thankful.

Yes, you read that right.

"Gratitude is a choice," says Lisa Arango, an FIU psychologist at the College of Arts, Sciences & Education. "[It] is noticing the good and recognizing where the good comes from, usually outside of ourselves. It doesn't mean there is nothing bad or negative going on around us, it means that we are intentionally looking for the good."

Good circumstances and opportunities can include things like health (definitely not one to take for granted this year!), a job, a place to live, food, having our family and friends or a strong support system—the list goes on. These are often some of the blessings we attribute to God, the universe or a Greater Being, a Higher Power. This leads us to look beyond ourselves.

Shifting our focus from ourselves to someone or something else is a key part of the [gratitude](#) process.

Acknowledging the good that other people have done for us also takes us out of ourselves and lets us appreciate others. The people who show their love and support for us could be parents, spouses, children, siblings, grandparents, friends, mentors, supervisors—any source of good and joy in our lives.

Recognizing that others are helping us activates the reward centers of our brains, says Arango. We become aware of people's intentions. We appreciate it. The [positive thoughts](#) this unleashes helps create hope and optimism—and motivates us to connect.

"We feel supported by others and less isolated and alone in the world

when we recognize that people are bringing good into our lives," Arango explains.

Gratitude can also impact our overall wellness. This is especially relevant during a time when [social isolation](#), uncertainty and stress are weighing on many of us.

"Research links the practice of gratitude to improved self-esteem and greater life-satisfaction," Arango says. "It has also been found that gratitude is a protective factor when it comes to stress and depression."

Simply put, Arango says: Thanksgiving points us toward a way of life, not just an idea for one day of the year. "Gratitude is a practice, a mindset and an approach," Arango explains. "[It] has the potential to heal, energize, change our lives and our relationships."

## **Ways to embrace gratitude**

So, how do you practice the art of gratitude this year? Here are some tips from Arango.

### **1. Reflect.**

"Take a moment to reflect on the good that this challenging year has brought you," she says. "Ask yourself: What lessons have I learned from this? In what ways, big or small, have I benefitted during this time?"

Did you take up a new hobby you've always wanted to try? Have you re-connected with old friends online? Have you spent more time with family members at home? Have you learned how to multi-task?

### **2. Keep a gratitude journal.**

You can list things you are thankful for in a notebook, write out sticky-notes and post them around your desk or purchase an official gratitude journal, which often includes prompts to help you identify the positives in your life.

### 3. Express your gratitude.

Any way that you can communicate appreciation for someone works, Arango says. You can call, text, Zoom or send a thank you note.

You can also try a fun, interactive activity during Thanksgiving Day, whether you're sitting around a physical dinner table with loved ones or hosting a remote celebration via Zoom.

Here's how the activity works: Identify one to three adjectives that describe each person you're celebrating with, and try to remember a moment when they exhibited this quality. For example, "I appreciate your thoughtfulness, like the time you made my favorite dinner without my asking."

### 4. Find the good.

In the end, Arango says, it all comes down to two simple questions: What's good in my life? And where does that good come from?

Answer that, and you'll celebrate Thanksgiving every day.

Provided by Florida International University

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