

Does practicing gratitude help us to be less stressed?

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Researchers from Irish universities have carried out a study with 68 adults and found that gratitude has a unique stress-buffering effect on both reactions to and recovery from acute psychological stress. This

effect can contribute to the improvement of cardiovascular health.

Knowing that stress affects human beings and has an impact on their health and well-being, namely causing [high blood pressure](#) and increasing cardiovascular morbidity and [coronary heart disease](#), it is important to know our reactions towards stress and find out if there are any factors that can play key stress-buffering roles.

In the article "Gratitude, affect balance, and stress buffering: A growth curve examination of cardiovascular responses to a laboratory stress task," published in January in the *Journal of Psychophysiology*, Brian Leavy, Brenda H. O'Connell and Deirdre O'Shea propose that although previous research suggests that gratitude and affect balance play key stress-buffering roles, to date little has been known about the impact of these variables on cardiovascular recovery from acute psychological stress.

That was the focus of the study by the researchers from the Universities of Maynooth and Limerick in Ireland, who also sought to find out whether affect balance moderates the relationship between gratitude and cardiovascular reactions to acute psychological stress.

The research carried out at the Irish University of Maynooth involved 68 [undergraduate students](#) (24 male and 44 female), aged between 18 and 57 years. This study used a within-subjects [experimental design](#) with lab tasks in which stress was induced in participants and then cardiovascular reactivity and recovery in response to this was measured.

The results showed that a state of gratitude predicted lower systolic blood pressure responses throughout the stress-testing period, which means that the state of gratitude has a unique stress-buffering effect on both reactions to and recovery from acute psychological [stress](#). It was also found that affect balance amplifies the effects of state gratitude.

These findings have clinical utility, as there are several low-cost gratitude interventions that can contribute to well-being. For example, previous research has shown how cardiac patients who make use of gratitude journals have better cardiovascular outcomes than those who do not. Combined with the results of this study and previous work, [gratitude](#) may thus constitute a useful point of intervention for the improvement of our cardiovascular health.

More information: Brian Leavy et al, Gratitude, affect balance, and stress buffering: A growth curve examination of cardiovascular responses to a laboratory stress task, *International Journal of Psychophysiology* (2022). [DOI: 10.1016/j.ijpsycho.2022.11.013](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijpsycho.2022.11.013)

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