

Stop Complaining!

The way you look at your life dramatically affects your health

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If you've ever enjoyed a good gripe session with friends or neighbors, you know how satisfying it can be.

But new research has found that you can actually lower your blood pressure and stabilize your heart rhythm by adopting an attitude of appreciation rather than chronically complaining about your problems.

WHAT IS APPRECIATION?

Everyone is familiar with the basic concept of gratitude. This means you are aware of the good things in your life, notice what others do for you and respond to them with thanks.

Appreciation goes even further. It *actively* seeks what is good, even in situations where they are far from obvious. It finds something of value just about anywhere.

Example: You're stuck in traffic. Not much to be grateful for, right? Actually, there's plenty to appreciate if you're willing to look. Gridlock gives you quiet time to sit and think. Or you can simply appreciate the fact that you have a means of transportation, which sometime soon will carry you toward your destination.

BECOME AN APPRECIATOR

When you practice appreciation often enough, it becomes your basic approach to life.

Best strategies...

Play "the appreciation game." Make a game of seeing how many things you can find to appreciate in every situation, good and bad.

Example: Instead of dwelling on conflicts that occur between you and some of your relatives, appreciate the loving relationships in your life.

Be authentic. Don't simply mouth thanks for services unrendered and gratitude for nonexistent support. You've got to feel appreciation for it to have impact.

Example: Your friend suggests dinner and a movie. It was nice to see her, but the food was terrible, and the film -- your friend's choice -- was even worse.

If you say, "What a great evening," you're not being truthful. It's better to be sincere and focus on what you did appreciate by saying, "I enjoyed our chat over dinner. It's great to share things."

IMPROVE YOUR RELATIONSHIPS

Appreciation makes relationships blossom by promoting...

Respect for others. Paying attention to the things you value about your spouse, friend or coworker makes you feel more positive toward him/her. When you notice things you like, behavior that bothers you seems less important.

Example: Any time your spouse is in a bad mood, remind yourself of all you appreciate about him and your relationship. This will help keep you emotionally steady, even during times when your spouse is being exasperating.

Mutual cooperation. When you appreciate someone close to you, differences of opinion become opportunities to find mutually satisfactory solutions. Think of a time when you felt truly appreciated by someone. Did you want to do less -- or more -- for that person?

BOOST YOUR HEALTH

It's hard to feel much appreciation while you're in pain. If you're really sick, it may seem almost impossible. But this is when your body most needs its positive, stress-reducing benefits.

To tap into it, think *wellness*, not illness. Consider all the parts of your body that are working away, business as usual.

Example: You have a splitting headache. But instead of recycling "Why me... I'll never feel better" thoughts, imagine how the rest of your body is running like a finely tuned machine. Your heart is pumping blood through a vast network of arteries, and your digestive system is efficiently turning food into energy.

Even if you're seriously ill, you can appreciate the loving attention of caregivers... the comfort of your bed... and the life force within your body that's working to restore your health.

Bottom Line/Health interviewed Noelle C. Nelson, PhD, a therapist and workshop leader based in Malibu, California. She is host of a syndicated radio program, "The Problem Solution Lady" and coauthor of [*The Power of Appreciation: The Key to a Vibrant Life*](#) (Beyond Words). Copyright © 2006 by Boardroom Inc.

