

Gratitude Therapy

Three Good Things

“Three Good Things” (TGT) or “What Went Well” (WWW) are scientifically proven gratitude exercises to boost happiness on a daily basis. Just a few days of setting aside 5 minutes per day to practice Gratitude Therapy where you focus on ‘Three Good Things’ or ‘What Went Well’ can positively impact your levels of happiness and give you a more optimistic outlook.

Gratitude therapy works by helping us to view things in a more positive light so that there’s a shift away from negatively processing things. This improves mood and helps develop more positive thinking patterns thus moving us away from automatic negative thoughts. Overall, it can help you be more grateful, develop a strong positive mindset, improve your physical health and your behaviour toward others.

What is the science behind Three Good Things?

TGT has been well researched. In 2004 Sheldon and Lyubomirsky investigated the effects of TGT. In 2005 Seligman, Steen, Park, and Peterson also studied this.

Sheldon and Lyubomirsky found that after one week TGT participants were 2% happier. This increased to 5% after one month and 9% by the end of six months.

It’s worth noting that this effect was observed only for those who expressed gratitude every Sunday night whereas this was not found in a group who were told to practice three times a week (every Tuesday, Thursday and Sunday). Sheldon and Lyubomirsky suggested that this may be the result of the latter group finding the practice a bit of a chore and boring, whereas those that practiced gratitude only once a week may have continued to find it fresh and meaningful over time.

Professor Sonja Lyubomirsky, one of the first modern positive psychologists and author of the book ‘The How of Happiness’, said:

“As we expected, our simple exercise was effective in producing higher levels of thankfulness and appreciation. More important, those participants who counted their blessings on a regular basis became happier as a result. It works because it changes your focus from the things that go wrong in life to the things that you might take for granted that go well. And focusing your attention on things that go well breaks up depression and increases happiness.”

So, it’s no wonder that TGT is said to be one of the most powerful positive interventions to increase happiness and wellbeing. Research shows that TGT can strengthen the immune system and increase job satisfaction. It can also develop hope, optimism and resilience.

An analysis of 51 studies on positive psychology interventions resulted in the conclusion that people became noticeably happier when they carry out individual positive interventions (Sin and Lyubomirsky, 2009). Activities including practicing kindness, being altruistic or expressing gratitude all increase happiness.

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How to get the most out of Gratitude Therapy

To ensure TGT/ WWW is as effective as possible there are three conditions or rules to keep in mind:

1. Putting TGT/ WWW in writing is vital as it helps you to focus on what you are grateful for.
2. Reflecting on what you did is important, as it adds to your sense of control and perceived well-being.
3. Timing is significant with research highlighting that you will get the best results if you write TGT every day for one week or try it once a week for six weeks.

The process

To carry out gratitude therapy, you need to find a quiet place where you can think without being disturbed. You could try doing it before going to sleep, or sitting on a train, or simply sitting by yourself in a room without any distractions. You may also like to try it when you may be feeling down or experiencing a low mood, it is up to you.

There are many things in our lives, both large and small, that we might be grateful for. The process of gratitude therapy requires you to reflect on what you are grateful for whether you think about things from that day, the past week, month or year.

The practice of TGT obviously requires you to write down just three things so it's always good to keep this number in mind however you practice Gratitude Therapy. Here are some examples: wonderful parents, being healthy, a friend being kind, your partner or you being successful at something.

When you have finished your list, take the first item and concentrate on feeling grateful about that item for about half a minute. Then move on to the next item and tune into 'being grateful' for the second item and the feelings associated with this. Do this for each item in turn and try to reconnect with the positive feelings you experience when feeling grateful.

Allow around five minutes for this so that Gratitude Therapy can take effect and begin to make you feel better. Five minutes may not seem like a long time, but setting aside specific time to focus on what you are grateful for will make it easier to experience more positivity throughout each day.

When you carry out this task you may find your mind wandering. Don't worry. Once you notice your mind has wandered, simply bring it back to the feeling of being grateful. Writing down three things you are grateful for every day for seven days or weekly on a Sunday for 6 weeks may seem a daunting task, but you will get better at it with practice.

If you start to find it difficult thinking of new things, just try thinking through your day. For instance, 'I am grateful that it didn't rain today' or 'I am grateful that my work went well today...'. If you are still struggling you can think of even the smallest things 'I am grateful that there was cereal in the cupboard'.

It really isn't that important what you are grateful for, rather that you are spending time feeling thankful. This is the key to enhancing positivity in your life, and lessening negative moods.

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If you're stuck with a journal in your hand, trying to pull out of your memory the good happenings in the day, then here are five themes you could explore. Ask yourself:

- What is one way you made the most meaningful use of your time today?
- What support did people give you today?
- What one good thing happened at your work/ school/ college today?
- What one good act of generosity or kindness did you do today?
- What one thing made your smile today?

Here are some more examples of Gratitude Therapy:

- I am grateful for having food in the cupboard and that I know how to cook.
- I am grateful for the feeling of love I experienced when someone checked how I was doing.
- I am grateful for having a roof over my head. I have shelter and warmth.
- I am grateful that a customer took the time to give positive feedback.
- I am grateful for time to talk with my family over dinner.
- I am grateful for time to stop and appreciate nature.
- I am grateful for being able to take the time to look at some old pictures of family/ friends.

It's now time to start gratitude therapy in whatever way feels right for you. Do make a commitment to doing this by using the action plan on the following pages, as this will ensure you practice regularly and reap the true benefits of Gratitude Therapy.

Remember as well as writing down three things you need to allow time to focus on the feeling of gratitude that you experience as you think of each.

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Action plan

My goal is...

Example: to practice gratitude therapy regularly

Now on to action planning; it is important to include the following in any action plan:

What action(s) you are going to take

How much you are going to do

When you are going to take action

How many days a week/ month you plan to take action

Example:

Starting this week (insert date) I will practice gratitude therapy (WHAT) for 10 minutes (HOW MUCH) in the morning before I have breakfast (WHEN) every Sunday for a minimum of 6 weeks (which ends on) (HOW MANY DAYS)

Complete the following:

This week I will...

------(WHAT)

------(HOW MUCH)

------(WHEN)

------(HOW MANY DAYS)

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How committed and motivated are you to this action plan on a scale from 0-10 (10 being the highest)?

What would increase your motivation and commitment? How can you use this to help yourself?

Gratitude Therapy Template

Use the following template each time you practice gratitude therapy.

List up to 3 things that you are grateful for in your life on the lines below

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

Remember to spend some time focusing on the feeling of gratitude that you experience as you think about and write down the things in your life that you feel grateful for.

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