



# Make gratitude your new attitude

Be thankful for the good things in life and you'll do more than just put a smile on your face. Enjoying every step of your weight-loss journey could be the extra boost you need to reach your slimming goal

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PHOTOGRAPHS: MARTIN BROWN AT WWW.INFINITI-IMAGERY.COM

Sometimes we say thanks out of habit, without really meaning it. Saying it from the heart, though, and feeling truly grateful for what's going right in your life – the people you love, your achievements and milestones – is one of the most powerful ways to boost positive emotions. 'I know from experience that getting into the habit of pausing to ask myself, "What is good in my life?" and "What went well?" can completely change your perspective on the greyest of days,' says positive psychology coach Miriam Akhtar ([www.positivepsychologytraining.co.uk](http://www.positivepsychologytraining.co.uk)). And the more positive you feel day-to-day, the easier you'll find any challenge – including losing weight. Here's how to get the gratitude habit, and how saying thanks can help you slim.

## Make a gratitude board

'One of the most effective ways to boost your positive emotions is to create a gratitude board,' says psychologist Dr Pamela Rutledge. 'Spending a few moments looking at it in the morning can help create a positive mood that lasts all day.' Your board could include images of the changing seasons, a beautiful beach you once visited, pictures of people who have inspired you or of happy children and pets, or just photos of people you love. 'Pictures get processed by a different part of the brain to words – one that taps directly into our emotional state,' says Pamela Rutledge.

**THANK-YOU NOTE** Treat yourself to an afternoon collecting pictures from magazines, digging out old greeting cards or postcards you love, and snaps of →

friends and family, then arranging them on a large piece of card or a cork board. Or, for a mess-free version, sign up to Pinterest ([www.pinterest.com](http://www.pinterest.com)) and create a gratitude board in an instant by ‘pinning’ pictures you love onto a virtual board.

### Keep a good-news journal

Writing in a journal could make you fitter as well as happier. According to one study, people who regularly scribbled down what they were grateful for, whether it was the big picture (having healthy children or a secure job) or smaller-scale (hitting green lights all the way home), felt 25 per cent more optimistic about life. It also brought an unexpected bonus – those who kept their gratitude journal for 10 weeks increased their regular exercise time by 90 minutes a week. The theory is that reducing stress and anxiety can free up energy for fitness.

**THANK-YOU NOTE** Choose a pretty notebook to use as your journal. ‘Write a list of things you’re thankful for once a week, rather than every day, to keep it fresh,’ says Miriam Akhtar. ‘Sunday evening is good – it sets you up for the

week ahead.’ For inspiration, log on to [www.thxthx.com](http://www.thxthx.com) – a witty, warm blog of thank-you notes for anything from stray chin hairs to burnt toast.

### Want what you have

Shifting your focus from what you don’t have to what you *do* have can make a huge difference to your happiness levels – it’s what your granny called ‘counting your blessings’. ‘Our brains are wired so that we generally notice what’s wrong before what’s right,’ says Miriam. ‘The more you actively savour the good things, however small – such as a great cup of tea, a clear blue sky or a joke shared with friends – the more you increase your capacity to notice them as they happen in future.’ And keeping up this flow of positive feelings can help you make better choices about healthy eating, too.

**THANK-YOU NOTE** Jot down good things as they happen on a gratitude app such as Gratitude Diary (free from iTunes) or Attitudes of Gratitude Journal (free from Google Play), then scroll through your list whenever you need a boost.

### Say thank you to you

While setting new goals is a great motivator on a weight-loss journey, it’s also important to say a big thank-you to yourself for how far you’ve come already. ‘Appreciating how much you have achieved can help you feel confident that things will go well in the future,’ says Miriam. ‘It’s so easy to forget your milestones. Reliving these past achievements, though, can be invaluable when things get tough. Recognising the part that you yourself play when things go well acts as a reminder of your strengths and talents –

and it’s these that help you to move forward and reach your goals.’

**THANK-YOU NOTE** Pin ‘before’ and ‘after’ photos on your fridge and look through the Personal Progress Record in your Food Optimising book regularly. And don’t be shy about sharing your success on Facebook or Twitter. ‘Enjoying positive feedback from friends is a great way to say thank you to yourself,’ says Miriam.

### Bring back thank-you letters

Studies show that being generous with your thanks strengthens relationships, whether with partners, colleagues or friends. And gratitude habits also improve relationships in other ways. Research by psychologist Dr Robert Emmons from the University of California shows that people who keep gratitude journals feel closer and more connected to others. ‘It’s simple – gratitude stops you from taking people for granted,’ says Miriam. And the stronger and more supportive your relationships, the easier your weight-loss journey will be.

**THANK-YOU NOTE** Writing a letter of appreciation to someone who has made a difference to your life, then handing it to them in person, will boost your mood for up to a month, according to one study. You’ll also reap benefits from sending texts and emails. Relationship expert Dr John Gottman says counting five blessings to every one complaint about your partner is the recipe for a happy relationship.

### Give thanks, sleep better

You probably know from experience that not getting enough sleep can play havoc with your healthy-eating intentions. Studies show that tiredness throws two key hormones out of balance, leaving you feeling more hungry. Getting into the gratitude habit could help you sleep better – according to research from the University of Manchester, mentally going through what’s going right in your life last thing at night can help you fall asleep quicker and wake up more refreshed.

**THANK-YOU NOTE** Make gratitude a bedtime habit. It’s easier to stick to new habits if you link them to something you already do regularly – so when you brush your teeth at night, ask yourself ‘What is good in my life today? What went well?’ ●

