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Riding Gratitude Down the Home Stretch

The month of "AprilMayJune" is already upon us! And, as you look down the home stretch to summer break, take a gratitude ride to finish the year in a positive and resilient way.

Consider this week's ReFresh as an invitation to remember the value and healing effects of gratitude. Gratitude elicits warm, positive emotions that include happiness, love, and joy. This is thanks, in part, to the release of 'feel-good' hormones like dopamine and serotonin, oxytocin (the bonding and love hormone), and endorphins (natural hormones that alleviate pain and lower stress).

The Power of Gratitude

Placing a regular focus on the positive parts of your life can be a powerful health habit. According to [this article](#) from UCLA, practicing gratitude for 15 minutes a day, five days a week, for at least six weeks can enhance mental wellness and possibly result in a lasting perspective shift. It is through a regular gratitude practice that a positive perspective will become habitual and form a more 'regular' routine in your thought processes.

Researchers have determined that gratitude has a positive impact on both our physical and mental health. Those with a grateful mindset:

- Report higher life satisfaction, stronger social relations, and greater self-esteem

- Demonstrate increased optimism
- Have improved emotional regulation
- Report lower levels of depression
- Cope better with anxiety by combating negative thinking patterns and being thoughtful in the present
- Help return their body to a state of 'rest and digest', from a state of 'fight or flight', by pausing for a moment to be thankful; this lowers blood pressure, heart rate, and breathing to promote relaxation
- Tend to exercise more, eat well, and enjoy better quality sleep
- Have better immune systems

Get Out of the Starting Gate Today!

Practicing gratitude can start this minute – like, right now! With a little intent and effort, you can start to enjoy the benefits of gratitude both for yourself and for those around you.

Here are some ways to practice gratitude:

Take time to notice what is around you: Practice mindfulness to tune in to the present moment. The more you connect with your own awareness, the greater the chance you will notice all the good around you.

Daily gratitude reflection: Each day, take five to ten minutes to reflect on three things for which you are grateful. Remember to consider the little things, as well as the big things!

Start a gratitude journal: Some folks find value in writing down why they are grateful in a journal.

Express thanks weekly: Consciously express gratitude to someone different each week.

Gratitude meditation: Listen to a guided meditation focused on gratitude.

Focus on others' intentions: When receiving a gift, focus on the giver's positive intentions. Visualizing their willingness to bring happiness or support may deepen your gratitude and your interpersonal connections.

Acts of kindness: Show gratitude through actions.

Gratitude letter: Take time to write a heartfelt appreciation letter to someone who has positively impacted your life.

Mindful and grateful eating: Practice gratitude during meals.

Volunteer or donate: Giving back in your community, or to a cause you care about, is a powerful way to express gratitude for the privileges and resources you have.

Express gratitude in the moment: Do not always wait until the end of the day to reflect on your gratitude. When something positive happens, acknowledge – and even express – your gratitude immediately.

Hitting pause: We often reflexively say, “thank-you”. Next time, stop and pinpoint precisely what you are thankful for.

Use social media to spread gratitude: Create a more positive online atmosphere and experience.

For more, check out this fun five-minute video for kids (and adults!) on [How to Develop the Attitude of Gratitude](#)

Also, check out the [full article](#) in the BCPVPA information series ***The Learning Brain*** called “*Glowing with Gratitude*”.

In the Winner’s Circle

Gratitude builds over time and has long-lasting effects on our mood, self-esteem, and behaviour. We may experience positive changes to the physiology of our brain, as gratitude has been shown to increase activity in our prefrontal cortex, the area of our brain associated with learning and decision-making. The simple act of being grateful with intent, and regularly pausing to notice that which is positive around us, can result in many health benefits, relationship benefits, and overall improvements to our quality of life. Gratitude turns what we have into enough, and even more.

Sources:

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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. Morandini', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Rochelle Morandini

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If you would like to contribute or have ideas about what you would like to see in the ReFresh series, we would love to hear from you: contact rochelle@bcpvpa.bc.ca.