

## Being grateful can help keep your heart healthy

February is American Heart Month, making now the perfect time to find ways to keep your heart as healthy as possible.

Making smart lifestyle choices, like eating healthy, being physically active and not smoking, definitely help. Managing your stress level is also important. Since chronic stress, anger and anxiety can raise your chances of developing heart disease and stroke, try meditation, yoga, or slow, deep breathing to help keep you calm and relaxed.

However, did you know that how you feel emotionally can also help keep your ticker in good shape? Science tells us that emotion impacts not only our mental health but also our physical well-being, especially that of the heart.

Gratitude is a strong emotion linked to happiness. Expressing gratitude can trigger the release of hormones that promote positive feelings, including happiness and pleasure. To help make your heart strong and healthy, add some of these ideas into your daily routine:

- **Smile more.** While feelings of sadness and depression can weaken our immune system, happiness can boost our resiliency. Research has shown that smiling can be contagious. The simple act of turning up the corners of your mouth can make challenging tasks seem less difficult and increase feelings of well-being. That's because some of the brain's natural feel-good chemicals (e.g., endorphins, serotonin and dopamine) are released when we smile. Smiling even if you don't particularly feel like it may help boost your mood, similar to spontaneous, happy smiles. So, the next time you are trying to push past a tough time or are feeling down, try putting a smile on your face.
- **Give thanks.** According to multiple studies, recognizing and giving thanks may result in better mood, better sleep, less fatigue and even lower levels of inflammation, which can impact cardiac health. Little gestures like sending a thank you note or calling a loved one can make a difference – not only for you, but to the recipient as well.
- **Write in a gratitude journal.** This is an easy way to note all of the things in your life you are blessed with.
- **Go to bed happy.** Those who lead a happy, grateful life tend to get better quality sleep, which in turn is great for your heart and emotional health. Before you lay your head down each night, think about the things you are grateful for or a positive event that you experienced in your life. Ending your day with a positive mindset can help you sleep better and wake up with that same positivity.

Make sure you show your heart some love this month by being more grateful and feeling great!