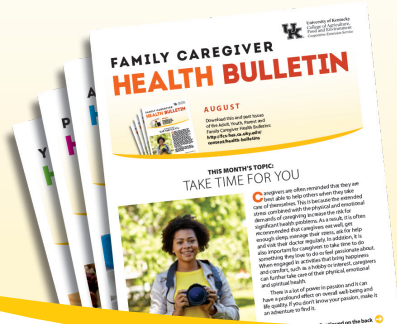




University of Kentucky
College of Agriculture,
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Cooperative Extension Service

FAMILY CAREGIVER HEALTH BULLETIN



NOVEMBER 2021

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THIS MONTH'S TOPIC:

GRATITUDE REDUCES CAREGIVER STRESS



Gratitude, the feeling of appreciation or the state of being thankful (Merriam-Webster, 2021) minimizes stress (Khorrami, 2020). Feeling thankful can be done anytime, anywhere and within a variety of circumstances, including caregiving.

Caregiving is often saddled with negativity as literature and the media highlight “caregiver stress,” even among the most resilient caregivers. We are constantly reminded about warning signs of caregiver burden and the importance of caregiver health and well-being. Being grateful does not discount the physical and emotional stresses associated with caregiving. It is an important reminder that a range of feelings — anger, frustration, anxiety, exhaustion, sadness, and loneliness, are normal (Mayo Clinic, 2020).

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Caregiving will be difficult at times. But finding gratitude allows you to notice and focus on something positive.

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But being grateful does reinforce some of the rewarding aspects of care. Gratitude forces you to examine the positive aspects of being present for someone who needs you (Mayo Clinic, 2020).

Being grateful is good for you

- **Gratitude lowers stress.** When negative stress accumulates it turns into chronic stress. Chronic stress can lead to problems with anxiety, depression, weight loss or gain, headaches, heart disease, digestion, and memory or concentration (Khorrami, 2020). Practicing gratitude is a proven coping mechanism — just like exercise, eating a balanced diet, engaging in meaningful relationships, and practicing self-awareness. Gratitude can lower stress levels in the body, which can help prevent stress-related health problems (Khorrami, 2020).
- **Gratitude promotes optimism.** When your glass is half full, you will have a better overall attitude and outlook on life and on caregiving. Noticing and being grateful for the good things, no matter how big or small, helps train your brain to be more positive (Daily Caregiving, 2021).
- **Gratitude helps you focus on what you DO have.** Perhaps you can no longer go to the theatre or movies with your loved one, but instead, you can sit together and watch TV. Concentrating on the person you care about and the situation you are in and how it can evolve, helps us handle change better (Daily Caregiving, 2021).

Keep tabs on what makes you grateful

Keep a gratitude journal. Make it simple — jot a note, keep a notebook, or use an app on your phone and take a few minutes each day or at least a few times a week to remind yourself of the things that have made you grateful. Periodically review your notes, especially on days when you are feeling down. Be sure to note the big things (I am grateful my aging mother is still in my life) and small things (I am grateful for the sun shining into the nursing home window) (Daily Caregiving, 2021; Khorrami, 2020).



Remember, gratitude is not about ignoring the stresses associated with caregiving. There will be things for which you are not thankful. Caregiving will be difficult at times. But finding gratitude allows you to notice and focus on something positive — even in what seems like darkness. Finding flickers of light helps refocus your perspective and reminds you that things are not terrible 100% of the time (Daily Caregiving, 2021).

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HEALTH BULLETIN**

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