



# GIVE THANKS

Practicing gratitude can help you run better—all year long. // BY EMILY LONG

**W**e've all sat around the Thanksgiving table and shared what we're grateful for. But how many times have we done the same in March or May—or any time in our day-to-day lives?

The importance of gratitude extends beyond the holiday season. Research has shown that expressing gratitude may reduce stress and boost happiness—and for athletes, this practice may also increase life satisfaction and self-esteem.

Thinking about what we're thankful for can help us shift our focus from what we don't have onto what we do, which allows us to feel more self-compassion and appreciation, says Erin Engle, a clinical psychologist in New York City.

Gratitude can be especially valuable for runners, experts say, because running is often physically and mentally challenging, and there are times when we just don't want to do it—especially if we look at a run as a punishment rather than a privilege. Experts say this mindset can impact our ability to enjoy the sport in the long term.

With a gratitude practice, however, runners may be able to go farther and faster, stay positive through an injury or simply find the motivation to lace up their shoes and get out the door.


"We tend to be a lot more optimistic and happier in general, which makes doing everything, including running, easier," says Amanda Stemen, a Los Angeles-based licensed clinical social worker who coaches and

counsels runners. "The mindset and the feelings that you have are just a little bit lighter."

You can express gratitude for your physical abilities, a beautiful route, great weather or the food that fuels your day. Another simple way to feel more thankful is to change the language you use when you talk about running. Instead of "fitting in a run," look at your workout as a choice you get to make about how you spend your time.

"Have gratitude for the time we have for the act itself," Engle says. "Reframe the experience of running itself rather than [seeing it] as a chore or something we have to squeeze in."

To feel the positive impact of gratitude, keep it simple and practice it often—just like running.

"We may think of all the things we have to be grateful for, but that feeling is disconnected from our minds," Stemen says. "It's important to have regular gratitude practices because it's almost like training a muscle." 

## PRACTICE GRATITUDE

### **Keep a gratitude journal.**

Start each day by jotting down three things you're thankful for.

### **Create a gratitude jar.**

Write down what you're grateful for on small slips of paper and place them in an empty jar. When you need a boost, read several entries to remind yourself what you have to appreciate.

**Look around you.** Bring your awareness to what you're grateful for in your immediate environment, such as clear skies, a smooth sidewalk or a scenic trail.

### **Notice your physical body.**

Stop to appreciate the parts of your body that allow you to run, including your legs and your lungs.

### **Share with others.**

Surround yourself with people who have the same positive mindset about gratitude that you wish to develop and who can hold you accountable for your attitude.