Gratitude is the One Pill Everyone Should be Prescribed

By Angela Lunde,

Editor’s note: Angela Lunde is a dementia education specialist at Mayo Clinic’s Alzheimer’s Disease Research Center in Rochester, Minnesota. We are grateful to Angela for permission to reprint this essay from her informative and insightful Alzheimer’s blog. To view the blog, see: http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/alzheimers-disease/DS00161/TAB=expertblog

A new pill is available that’s likely to improve your energy and resiliency, enhance your immunity, lift your mood, offer you greater feelings of joy, and improve compassion toward self and others. And it has no side effects. Will you take it?

In a posting on our blog a couple of weeks ago, Raymond offered thanks to his wife for attending our conference and shared how it fed her spirit, and as a result his, as well. He spoke of the love he and his wife still have for one another and the acceptance that resonates in their home. Raymond said he has a memory problem and now depends on his wife. However, gratitude was Raymond’s prevailing message. Gratitude is that pill.

Many of us probably don’t think about gratitude all that often in our day-to-day lives. Although most of us will habitually focus on what’s going wrong - the feelings of rejection, the losses, hurts, our imperfections. It’s easy to draw our attention away from what we have and into that dark place of what we don’t have, or think we need.

Being grateful doesn’t mean we deny what’s wrong or difficult or unfair in our life. Robert Emmons, professor of psychology at the University of California-Davis, and one of the foremost authorities on the topic of gratitude, says, ”To say we feel grateful is not to say that everything in our lives is necessarily great. It just means we are aware of our blessings.”

Gratitude shifts our focus from what our life lacks to the abundance that’s already present. The truth is that each of us has something good in our life that millions of others don’t. And when we are regularly mindful of what we have to be grateful for, we can be happier, more resilient, our relationships strengthen, and our burdens often lift. Gratitude enriches human life, no matter what our situation.

Today, research is charting evidence that
Gratitude
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gratitude opens the heart and activates positive emotion centers in the brain. When we focus our attention on the things for which we're grateful - the blessings in our life - we can actually change the way neurons in our brain are wired. Ultimately, this means that with practice, we can cultivate positive states of mind. Sarah Ban Breathnach, author on the topic of gratitude, writes, "Real life isn't always going to be perfect or go our way, but the recurring acknowledgement of what is working in our lives can help us not only to survive but surmount our difficulties." Dr. Amit Sood, director of research and practice and complementary integrative therapies at Mayo Clinic says, "Without gratitude, happiness is not accessible."

No doubt though, gratitude doesn't seem to come as easily as grumbling, so it really does take practice. There are many methods to develop the practice of gratitude. A gratitude journal is one way. It consists of writing down a few things each day for which you are grateful. Some days it may be the basics - your home, a friend, the flowers you bought yourself to brighten the room, your health, your pet, a comfortable bed to wake up in. Breathnach's book "Simple Abundance Journal of Gratitude" is one such tool.

Now back to Raymond. He's not denying he has memory problems or that he is becoming more dependent on his wife, yet this is not what he chooses to focus on. Raymond chooses gratitude. He is grateful for what he has - the capacity to love and feel love, grateful for the ways in which his wife lifts her spirit and his, and grateful for the bond they continue to share. Clearly, Raymond chooses the gratitude pill.

"Gratitude unlocks the fullness of life. It turns what we have into enough, and more. It turns denial into acceptance, chaos to order, confusion to clarity. It can turn a meal into a feast, a house into a home, a stranger into a friend. Gratitude makes sense of our past, brings peace for today, and creates a vision for tomorrow."
- Melody Beattie

Editor's note:
How would you answer the following questions?

What are you grateful for?
Who are you grateful for?
How do you express your gratitude?
When will you find time each day to think about the importance of gratitude and to acknowledge all that you are grateful for?

Think about these questions and try to discuss your answers with loved ones or friends. Feelings of gratitude can spread good will and a sense of hope when they are shared with others.
YOU ARE NOT ALONE

The Poetry of Lon Cole

Lon Cole was born in the San Francisco Bay Area, California. He served in the Navy as a combat medic in the Vietnam War where he was decorated as a war hero for gallantry and distinguished service to his fellow soldiers. This determination to help others is reflected in the diverse career paths he has experienced, including surgical technician, police officer, private security, and a business owner and entrepreneur.

Four years ago at the age of 61, Lon was diagnosed with early onset Alzheimer’s. This challenge has motivated him to write, and the poetry has flowed freely as he puts his efforts to lift others into his poems. He currently resides in Puyallup, Washington surrounded by his family.

Where Am I Going

Where am I going?
Will I ever get there?
Will somebody know me?
Does it all seem fair?

I’m sure there is someone
who feels what I feel
But has trouble expressing
the pain that is real.

But I must keep going
and steer from the past
For each day is hopeful,
and nothing is cast.

I’ll look for tomorrow
and live for today
And hold to the good
as it passes my way.

I’m strong to the challenge
and must be sincere
For life is a gift
so precious and dear.

A Great Journey

Dementia is a great journey
Where too many have to go
You can't try to run from it
No matter how much you know.

Some say denial is the way
To avoid the pain you endure
Others decide to face it straight on
They hope there might be a cure.

It doesn’t matter if you’re rich or poor
Or have several degrees on the wall
What matters the most is your attitude
Getting up each time that you fall.

You can’t be afraid of what you might face
The road could feel lonely or cold
Though you are only one of
the human race
This is the time to be bold.

Celebrate survival the best way you can
Remember all the good times you had
So when the dark days
come into your path
You won’t waste your time feeling sad.

The third edition of Lon’s published poems can be found on sale on Amazon.com and createspace.com. The author donates half of all royalties to the Alzheimer’s Association. For bulk sales, contact Brown and Sons Publishers at 720-436-6397 or email them at: BSP@salesperson.net.
BE PREPARED
How to Make the Most of an Office Visit with Your Neurologist
By Orly Avitzur, MD, MBA

Editor's note: If you have Alzheimer’s or a related disorder, it is very helpful to be under the care of a neurologist. These doctors specialize in the human nervous system, which includes the brain. Neurologists have special expertise in brain disorders that can cause memory loss or dementia (a general term for over 70 different causes for decline in thinking and functioning). This essay has been revised and reprinted with permission from Neurology Now, the American Academy of Neurology’s magazine for patients and caregivers. To subscribe, go to http://bit.ly/guAWLR.

As a neurologist in private practice, I often wish I had more time to spend with each of my patients. But in addition to spending time on their care, I have to make sure that I document the visit accurately in their electronic health record, meet new governmental requirements for record-keeping, and complete a variety of other administrative tasks. I make a big effort not to leave patients feeling neglected, but every once in a while, I fear that I have failed.

In addition to the shrinking face-to-face time available during the office visit, we are experiencing a growing shortage of neurologists in many parts of the United States. Since you may have to wait longer these days to get seen for a shorter period of time, making the most of your office visit is critical. That means arriving prepared to your first visit so that office staff won’t waste time searching for results or reschedule you because vital information is missing or needs to be tracked down.

MAKE A LIST OF YOUR KEY CONCERNS TO TALK ABOUT
One of my patients has a habit of voicing new and often worrisome symptoms just as he is leaving my office. Recently he confessed, “Oh by the way, I’ve been passing out behind the wheel of my car....See you in a few months.”

It’s important to plan what you want to tell your doctor. If possible, let you physician know at the start of the office visit (or even before the visit, such as by phone) about changes in your health. Make a list of the top three things you want your neurologist to know and bring it with you to your visit. If you feel that not enough time has been spent covering all your health issues, ask your doctor if it would be best to schedule another appointment to discuss your additional concerns.

MAKE A DIARY OF YOUR SYMPTOMS
One of the most effective measures you can take to assist your neurologist in the evaluation of your condition is to record a symptom diary prior to your visit. Diaries completed before follow-up visits offer valuable information to determine if medications or other interventions have been effective.

BRING A FRIEND OF RELATIVE
It’s easy to get flustered when seeing a doctor, especially if the news is worrisome or the instructions are complex. If you bring a friend or relative with a pen and paper, you’ll have another set of eyes and ears to confirm what the doctor said about your condition, how to take your medication, what side-effects may occur, and

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BE PREPARED
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which tests need to be scheduled before you return. That person can also ask questions to help carry through the doctor’s orders. What’s more, a friend or relative can help the doctor take a better history.

FIND OUT ABOUT TEST RESULTS

It’s wise to bring copies of any test results or laboratory work ordered by other physicians involved in your care. Unless you receive care at a multispecialty group in which all of your doctors are networked through a common electronic records system, your doctor may not have easy access to test results. If your doctor doesn’t have a test result, essential treatment may be delayed or overlooked. Moreover, unless you track your tests, you may risk unnecessary duplication of procedures.

MEDICATION LIST

One of my patients, a 95 year-old gentleman, brings a computerized print-out of all his medications to every visit. It never fails to bring a smile to my face. An updated record of medications likely tops your physician’s wish list of the most valuable information you can bring to the office. “An updated record of medications likely tops your physician’s wish list of the most valuable information you can bring to the office.”

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Bringing a complete list of medications – as well as a record of allergies and previously poorly tolerated medications – will help your doctor avoid duplicating your medication or prescribing a drug that caused side-effects in the past.

PREVIOUS MEDICAL RECORDS

I ask patients to request that their records be faxed to me but also to follow up with a call asking my staff if they received the information. Your involvement in your own care will help ensure that your doctors have access to your health information and help them provide you with the best care possible.

INSURANCE INFORMATION

Make sure you know what insurance information you should bring to your appointment. Bring up financial concerns prior to your appointment, before you incur any fees. Most practices are willing to discuss payment plans if the patient is unable to meet the fees.

LIST OF OTHER HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS

If your medical care is not coordinated under one health care system with access to your health records, bring a list of all of your physicians, along with their contact information, to your office visits.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information on preparing for an office visit, see the American Academy of Neurology’s (AAN) informative website at: http://patients.aan.com/

Click on the heading “Working with Your Doctor” where you will find information on preparing for an office visit, patient rights, and finding a neurologist in your community.
HELPFUL RESOURCE

Talking with Your Doctor—
A Guide for Older People

Constructive and caring communication between a doctor and patient is an essential part of good healthcare. It is important to take an active role in your health maintenance and medical treatment, and to feel that you and your doctor can work as a team.

The National Institute on Aging (NIA) has an informative and practical booklet on how to talk with your doctors. Contents include:

> Choosing a doctor you can talk to
> Preparing for an appointment
> Giving the doctor information
> Asking questions and receiving information
> Making decisions with your doctor
> Discussing sensitive topics
> Involving your family or friends in medical communication

This 44-page booklet is only available online and can be read or downloaded free of charge on the NIA website at:


Question and Answer

Q I have been diagnosed with Mild Cognitive Impairment, but my doctor says it could shift to Alzheimer’s disease in the future. How will I know if I start to develop Alzheimer’s?

A Mild Cognitive Impairment (MCI) is diagnosed when changes in thinking (usually a decline in memory) are greater than expected for one’s age or education, but not so significant to affect one’s ability to function independently in daily activities. For example, you may have memory loss that requires that you develop better methods for managing medications, keeping track of appointments, finding your way in unfamiliar places, organizing finances, or doing routine cooking. You may need some prompting or reminders, but once on track, you can manage independently.

MCI moves into early-stage Alzheimer’s when problems with thinking affect more than just memory AND these problems impact on your ability to do daily tasks or activities on your own. For example, changes in language, problem-solving, or judgment can combine with memory loss to make routine tasks or hobbies more difficult. You may make financial mistakes, miss important appointments, or no longer be able to figure out how to repair something. Often these changes are gradual and the boundary between MCI and early-stage Alzheimer’s or a related disorder can be blurry. Regardless of whether a diagnosis is MCI or AD, it is important to focus on your abilities, and ask for or accept a little help, when needed.
RESEARCH UPDATES

UPCOMING CLINICAL TRIALS for PARTICIPANTS with MEMORY LOSS and THOSE at RISK

SNIF – The Study of Nasal Insulin to Fight Forgetfulness

The purpose of the upcoming SNIF study is to find out whether a type of insulin, when given as a nasal spray, improves memory in adults with a mild memory impairment or Alzheimer’s disease (AD). The rationale behind the study is growing evidence that insulin carries out multiple functions in the brain and that poor regulation of insulin may contribute to the development of AD.

In this study participants will be given a nasal spray device with either insulin or placebo. Participants will be randomly assigned to the treatment or the placebo group for 12 months followed by 6 months in which all participants will receive insulin. During the first 12 months, neither study participants nor study staff will know who is receiving active treatment and who is receiving placebo.

When the study begins in late 2013, researchers will be looking for 250 adults diagnosed with amnesiac mild cognitive impairment (aMCI) or early AD who would like to participate. The study will take place at about 30 research clinics nationwide. Participants must be fluent in English or Spanish. Persons who take medications for diabetes are excluded from this trial. For more information, contact Jeffree Ittrich at 858-246-1317 or jitrich@ucsd.edu

A4 – Anti-Amyloid Treatment in Asymptomatic Alzheimer’s Disease

Scientists believe that Alzheimer’s disease (AD) changes in the brain may begin 10-20 years before outward signs of memory loss or other changes in thinking or functioning become apparent. Using markers derived from spinal fluid, genetic testing, and sophisticated brain imaging (PET scan) researchers are now able to suggest who may be more at risk of developing AD in the future. This has led to a new body of research that aims to prevent or postpone the onset of AD by providing experimental treatment prior to symptom onset to those at highest risk of developing the disease.

Early next year, a new study will begin enrolling 1000 participants whose PET scan reveals amyloid protein deposits in their brains (a hallmark of AD) but they do not have any symptoms of memory loss. Half the participants will be given a placebo and half, a drug called Solanezumab. This drug has been shown to clear away amyloid plaques in the brains of individuals with AD, but clinical trials did not show resulting improvement in thinking or functioning in persons already living with AD symptoms. It is thought that the drug may need to be given earlier before too much damage from the plaques has occurred. By administering the drug well before outward symptoms begin, the prevention of amyloid plaque build-up may also lead to the prevention of developing AD.

For more information on this trial visit the Alzheimer’s Disease Cooperative Study at: http://www.adcs.org/Studies/A4.aspx
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