

Gratitude is good medicine for organ recipients

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After immunosuppressants, the best medicine for organ transplant patients may be gratitude.

In a study of organ recipients, researchers from UC Davis and the Mississippi University for Women found that patients who keep “gratitude journals” score better on measures of mental health, general health and vitality than those who keep only routine notes about their days.

“We found that increased feelings of gratitude can cause people’s well-being and quality of life to improve,” said Robert Emmons, a UC Davis professor who specializes in the study of gratitude.

Emmons conducted the study with Stefanie Greiner and Stephanie Ivie of the Mississippi University for Women. Titled “Gratitude and Quality of Life in Transplant Recipients,” the study will be presented as a poster at the annual meeting of the American Psychological Association.

The study included four male and 12 female transplant recipients recruited via transplant e-mail groups and Web sites for transplant recipients.

After completing initial questionnaires about their health and wellbeing, the subjects were randomly assigned to one of two groups. One group kept routine daily notes about medication side-effects, how they felt about life overall, how connected they were to others and how they felt

about the upcoming day. Patients in the other group answered the same questions but were also asked to list five things or people they were grateful for each day and why they were grateful for them. They were asked to reflect on what they wrote as well.

After 21 days, mental health and general wellbeing scores had risen for patients in the gratitude group but declined for those in the control group. Patients in the control group also reported a loss of vitality, while the grateful patients experienced no change.

“It’s likely that health and vitality scores declined in the control group because, unlike the experimental group, they did not benefit from the protective effect of gratitude,” Emmons said. “Having a chronic medical condition puts one at risk for deteriorating mental health, and a reduction in one’s sense of general health and vitality is an indicator of this. Gratitude may serve as a buffer against these risks.”

Emmons is a leading contributor to the positive psychology movement and the author of the recently released book “Thanks! How the New Science of Gratitude Can Make You Happier.”

Source: University of California - Davis

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