

# Psychological benefit of gratitude around the holidays

December 20 2016, by Jason Kornwitz

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Credit: Northeastern University

Attention all last-minute holiday shoppers: If you want to alleviate stress while saving some hard-earned money in the process, then learn to cultivate a sense of gratitude.

Northeastern University psychology professor David DeSteno, who studies emotion, decision-making, and [social behavior](#), has found that cultivating [gratitude](#) for everyday occurrences leads to greater patience and more self-control.

"Gratitude allows us to value the future more," says DeSteno. "It makes us realize that life is not all about doing what we can in the moment to maximize enjoyment for ourselves and others."

According to DeSteno, the thankful holiday shopper is less impulsive, less consumeristic. He makes wiser decisions with his money, with a focus on his longterm financial health. As DeSteno puts it, "When you practice gratitude, the impulse you feel to spend calms down."

Cultivating gratitude is easy. DeSteno suggests a daily exercise in which you reflect on the small things in your life for which you are grateful. Focus on the gratitude you feel for the fellow mall shopper who picked up the package you dropped or the man on the T who gave you his seat.

"It's like taking a daily vaccine or vitamin that increases the probability that you will have better impulse control," he explains.

Practicing gratitude can also come in handy if you celebrate the holidays with your extended family, especially those uncles, aunts, and cousins who oppose your social, political, and religions viewpoints. As DeSteno explains, gratitude makes us more willing to cooperate with and have empathy for those around us, especially if we're looking to building long-lasting relationships.

"When we cultivate gratitude, we're less likely to scream at each other over political differences," he says, by way of example. "We're enter the conversation with a mindset of building relationships."

Gratitude can also be good for your overall health. It has the ability to combat anxiety and loneliness, says DeSteno, and has proven to be a particularly good antidote to stress. As he puts it, "It takes the edge off stress' response in the body."

Provided by Northeastern University

Citation: Psychological benefit of gratitude around the holidays (2016, December 20) retrieved 28 December 2022 from

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