



You're Getting Sleepy By Lisa Egan

After eating a huge Thanksgiving dinner, you curl up on the couch ready to take a short snooze. "It's all that turkey you ate!" your mother laughingly shouts from the next room. You mumble a response as you are already drifting into dreamland.

Everyone has heard the old adage that turkey makes a person sleepy. Specifically, the claim was that turkey contains tryptophan, an uncommon amino acid, which was believed to have a short-term, inhibitory effect on an individual's mood, memory, and sociability. In other words, individuals have argued, after consuming the tryptophan-filled turkey at your Thanksgiving dinner, all you want to do is withdraw from the rest of the party and take a nap.

Tryptophan is the key ingredient in producing serotonin, which is an important brain chemical involved in regulating mood. Tryptophan is essential, researchers point out, because without it, no serotonin would ever be produced. According to Erik Strand in his article, "Tryptophan: What Does it Do?," serotonin is important because it "...promotes feelings of calm, relaxation, and sleepiness." Lack of serotonin, on the other hand, has been linked to depression.

Since the body cannot produce tryptophan by itself, it is important that individuals eat a protein-rich diet, as protein is filled with this essential amino acid.

Okay, you may be thinking, it sounds as though the old adage is true. Tryptophan, which is found in turkey, helps produce serotonin, which makes me feel calm, relaxed, and sleepy. Al-



though this is true, researchers have now disproved the belief that eating turkey at Thanksgiving makes a person feel sleepy. This is because turkey contains no more tryptophan than any other protein source. Therefore, eating turkey should not make a person feel any more tired than they feel after eating pork chops or hamburgers.

Why then, you may ask, do I feel more tired after I eat my Thanksgiving dinner than I do after I eat any other meal? Researchers explain that eating any large meal has a sedative effect. Considering

that Thanksgiving is usually analogous to stuffing oneself, it makes sense that a person would feel much more tired after eating a Thanksgiving dinner than eating a normal, everyday meal.

Actually, the only guaranteed way for an individual to increase the amount of tryptophan that reaches the brain is to take dietary supplements specifically for this. Taking a dietary supplement of tryptophan has a much different effect on the body than when it is obtained through a food source. When an individual takes a dietary supplement of this amino acid, much more tryptophan is pushed into the brain than usual.

Research has suggested that increasing tryptophan levels in the brain may have some unexpected benefits. According to Strand, "taking tryptophan can affect human social behavior, decreasing aggression, irritability and quarrelsomeness."

So if you are sitting at your Thanksgiving gathering looking for a conversation starter, or you simply want to prove to your mom and dad that the hard-earned cash they put towards college is gaining you knowledge, think of debunking this common turkey myth for them.

Source: Strand, E. (2003). Tryptophan: What does it do. *Psychology Today*.

<http://www.psychologytoday.com/articles/pto-20031006-000001.html>

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Meet the Newsletter Staff:

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- **Julie Mechler, Writer**
- **Natalie Thompson, Writer**
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Thanksgiving is for Being Thankful!

By Emily Trapp

Often when Thanksgiving comes around people think of a home cooked meal with turkey, pumpkin pie, and stuffing, or the Thanksgiving Day Parade, or football, but rarely are people actually focused on being thankful. In the past decade the field of positive psychology has rapidly developed, concentrating on aspects of human life, such as thankfulness and gratitude. Psychologists have defined gratitude as a feeling developed from the experience of positive outcomes and in finding oneself as the recipient of another's generosity. It has been thought that gratitude is a result of two different facets, the first being that people realize they have obtained a positive result, creating happiness. The second step is that a person attributes that happiness to an external source, acknowledging that someone's intentional actions put them in this position. Simply stated, gratitude is a special branch of the feeling of happiness.

Researchers have found that gratitude can be an affective trait, which means that it is a stable part of a person's disposition, a mood, or an emotion. Much of the current research is based on having a grateful disposition defined by a tendency to recognize and respond with grateful emotion to the roles of other people's compassion in the positive experiences and outcomes that one obtains. To determine if a person holds a grateful disposition, McCullough et al., 2002, developed the following measure, which you can try yourself:

Use the following scale to respond to each question:

1 = strongly disagree 2 = disagree

3 = slightly disagree 4 = neutral

5 = slightly agree 6 = agree

7 = strongly agree

- ___ 1. I have so much in life to be thankful for.
- ___ 2. If I had to list everything that I felt grateful for, it would be a very long list.
- ___ 3. When I look at the world, I don't see much to be grateful for.
- ___ 4. I am grateful to a wide variety of people.
- ___ 5. As I get older I find myself more able to appreciate the people, events, and situations that have been part of my life history.
- ___ 6. Long amounts of time can go by before I feel grateful to something or someone.

Reverse the numbers you gave in response to items 3 and 6 (i.e., 1 = 7, 2 = 6, 3 = 5, 4 = 4, 5 = 3, 6 = 2, and 7 = 1), then add up the numbers for all six statements. Scores range from 6 to 42, with higher scores suggesting a more grateful disposition.

When McCullough assessed a sample group of undergraduate psychology students using this measure he found the mean score to be about 35.

Being a highly grateful person has effects on many elements of a person's life. First off those with a grateful disposition tend to have more positive emotions. Additionally gratitude tends to foster empathetic feelings, such as sensitivity and concern towards others, as well as the willingness to forgive,

offer help and support. On the flip side grateful people appear to be less prone to express negative emotions such as resentment and disdain or even depression and anxiety. Gratitude also seems to improve a person's mood, in a health and happiness survey, 90% of participants stated that expressing gratitude helped them feel happy.

Possessing a grateful disposition has also been proved by several correlation studies to improve the quality of a person's life. People with highly grateful dispositions have been found to have an overall greater life satisfaction. This may be explained as followed, when a person interprets an event as something to be grateful about, they often transform that gratefulness into feelings of being valued. With this realization that others have care for him or her, there is an increase in self-esteem, as well as the confirmation of having social support. Furthermore grateful people tend to have a more positive outlook on life, treating all components of their life as an actual gift, indicating that they do not take things for granted. Studies found that even people that suffered from painful physical disabilities that had a grateful disposition had increased feelings of well-being.

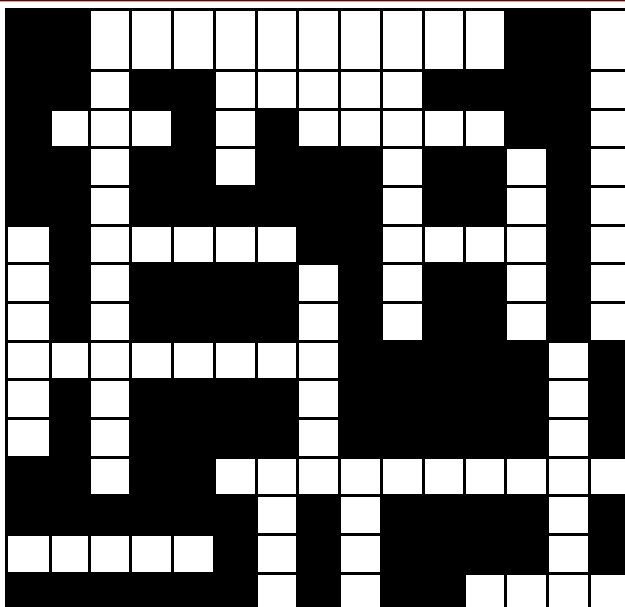
Overall it has been proven that how a person perceives his or her life, such as with a grateful outlook, actually has a stronger effect on his or her well-being than the situations life brings. So maybe this Thanksgiving it is really is worth your while to take the time to be thankful, and if nothing else your gratefulness will make you feel a little bit happier.

Sources:

Bolt, Martin. (2004). *Pursuing human strengths*. New York: Worth Publishers.

Emmons, R. A., & McCullough, M. E. (2003). Counting blessings versus burdens: An experimental investigation of gratitude and subjective well-being in daily life. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 84, 377-389.

McCullough, M. E., Emmons, R. A., & Tsang, J. (2002). The grateful disposition: A conceptual and empirical topography. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 82, 112-127.



Try your hand at a **CROSSWORD!** Use what you have read in this newsletter as well as your knowledge about Thanksgiving to guide you!

ACROSS

1. Doesn't make you sleepy.
2. Day after yesterday.
3. We want to take one after eating.
4. _____ Murphy
5. Nightly activity.
6. Opposite of take.
7. This month.
8. Science of the mind or of mental states and processes.
9. Part of a parade; can be made with roses
10. A possible side dish at a major meal.

DOWN

1. You have this at Thanksgiving.
2. Major holiday this month.
3. Some experience this after traumatic events.
4. "Hello _____ you."
5. A must before Christmas.
6. Poem intended to be sung.
7. Bird that goes "Gobble Gobble".
8. What a frog sits on.
9. The weather outside.
10. Element one.
11. Founder of Psychoanalysis.
12. Founder of America
13. Sport we watch on Thanksgiving.

*Note: When answering the across column, work top to bottom. For the down column, work left to right.

Are you in Heaven or Someplace More Sinister?

By Natalie Thompson

Sleep is like being in heaven to some people. It is a time when all worries cease to exist and all your hopes and dreams come alive. However, for some people, sleep is tortuous. Having trouble sleeping may indicate outside psychological problems. A disturbed sleeping pattern, nightmares, and anxiety-filled dreams are some symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). People with this disorder tend to use techniques to delay going to sleep or avoid talking about their traumatic experiences because they fear it will stir up bad dreams.

Psychologist Herma Reeskamp and colleagues did a recent novel experiment working with patients who experience PTSD. She set up a workshop that was intended to help patients change the haunting themes of their nightmares and anxiety-filled dreams. A month before the workshop, the experimenters asked the patients to record their sleep patterns and write down their dreams in a daily journal. After collecting these journals each week, the therapist read and categorized the recorded dreams into three categories. The first was for anxiety-filled dreams and nightmares; the second categorized dreams that seemed to rework other themes and events not specifically trauma related; and, the third was for dreams that contained special symbols.

The first workshop was offered to patients on a voluntary basis and was part of a

special Christmas program. After reviewing all of the patients' journal entries from the preceding four weeks, the therapist decided to give the workshop the structure of a dream-psychodrama group. One therapist carried out warming-up exercises with the patients and another directed the dream scenes that were brought in by different patients. For each play, patients acted, witnessed, and experienced, but no interpretations on a cognitive level were given. Patients discussed their experiences during the dream workshop in the regular therapy sessions and the dream plays were used as actual themes in the regular therapies.

The second workshop was 3 months later. In group psychotherapeutic sessions, the therapists started with a short relaxation exercise. This consisted of sitting in a chair, concentrating on breathing, and releasing tensions in different parts of the body. After the exercises, patients could submit a dream to the group. To reduce the tension for very anxious participants, the patients were told they could just listen and take part as they would in regular group psychotherapy. After one patient would relate a dream to the group, other group members could ask questions to get a clear picture of the dream scenes, person, and circumstances. In the second step, group members could give their personal associations with the dream. In the psychodynamic part of the

session, little pieces of interpretation began to occur, and the group grew toward an understanding as connections between group member's contributions are sensed. In the third step, the therapist joined in and summarized what had been said, adding associations or meanings without giving a final interpretation. The workshop model was shown to be a valuable tool in the psychotherapeutic treatment of recurrent nightmares because it appeals to the curiosity, hope, and creativity of the patients. The ability to be playful in the associative part of the session was helpful because this freed patients from their tendency to have a controlled and limited way of reacting. It was also helpful for both the patients and the therapists to take a fresh look at versions of stories that seemed to repeat themselves.

While this experiment just dealt with people who had PTSD, it can also be beneficial to anyone who has trouble sleeping. Believe it or not, many people throughout the world have trouble for some reason. If you are one of these people, it may be beneficial to see a therapist or have medication prescribed to make nights much more restful. Everyone knows that it is important to get enough sleep or else one's quality of life decreases. Nobody wants that to happen! Remember, having trouble sleeping is very common and you are not alone.

Source: Reeskamp, H. (2006). *American Journal of Psychotherapy*, 60(1), 23-36

Procrastination...I'll do it later.

By Julia Mechler

Every time a big project is due, we look at our schedules and think "Oh, I still have three months. I can do it later... Oh, I still have three weeks. I still have time... Oh, I still have three days. I can start it tomorrow..." In the end, we wait until the day before it is due and stay up all night in order to finish the project by the deadline. We have all fallen into the trap called procrastination.

Procrastination has been found to increase your stress level, thereby weakening your immune system, and decrease your general enjoyment of life. Then why do so many people procrastinate? There can be many reasons for procrastination: fear of success, fear of failure, wanting to be perfect, lack of motivation, anxiety, guilt, or any combination of these. Despite these reasons, starting early is always better than procrastinating. Getting an early start is good for your health because it prevents stress, which will in turn help to prevent illness or insomnia, such as those pesky flu

viruses that always go around this time of year.

One area, other than studying, that people tend to procrastinate on is shopping for gifts. Christmas is next month already! If you have not started shopping for Christmas yet, you had better start soon before you get too busy with your finals in December.



Listed below are some tips that will help you from procrastinating when you do your Christmas shopping:

Tip 1: Set mini goals. Start to buy gifts for the people who are most difficult to buy for, e.g., grandparents, parents, your new boyfriend or girl friend, etc.

Tip 2: Purchase items early, especially if you need to send them to people who are living in a different city or country.

Tip 3: Do not obsess about buying the "perfect gift."

Tip 4: Realize that procrastinating often leads to tension with the people around you.

Tip 5: Remember that procrastinators can have depressed immune systems. So you might get sick just from shopping for gifts!

Keep these tips in mind as you plan for Christmas and buy a great gift for your loved ones. Have a great holiday season!

Source: Staff. (2005). Why We Procrastinate. *Psychology Today*. <http://www.psychologytoday.com/articles/pto-20050727-000006.html>

New Academic Advisor Selection Process!

Psychology students are assigned to academic advisors based upon faculty availability and a matching of interests. To request an academic advisor in the Psychology Department, simply complete the following steps:

Retrieve a Change of Advisor card from Academic Advising on the appropriate campus. Complete this form, but leave blank the new advisor name and signature sections.

Attach this card to a completed Psychology Department Academic Advisor Request Form (blue form) available in the Psychology Department at either campus (PENGL 123 at SJU and Richarda P 33½ at CSB).

Leave this either in the appropriately labeled box in the Psychology Department at either campus or return this to the Psychology Department Coordinator.

You will receive notification of your new academic advisor via e-mail.

If you have any questions about selecting an academic advisor please contact the Psychology Department Coordinator at: x3314 at SJU or x5484 at CSB.

CSB/SJU

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We are working on making this newsletter more about what you like. Please give us your input at:

psychstud@csbsju.edu

Make the Subject read "Newsletter"

Black Friday

By Nikki Foerster

The day after Thanksgiving is known for one thing: shopping. "Black Friday" is the day known to bring retailers out of the red and is also marked as the start of holiday shopping. Attracting many shoppers are numerous sales put on by retailers. Sales are one way to get customers in the store but retailers also know sales can get shoppers to buy more and stay longer. Retailers know that a consumer's main goal from their car to the mall is to get inside and start shopping. When shoppers first reach the merchandise they are not in shopping mode just yet. This is why retailers put a "bumper" just inside the door. The bumpers are there to slow the shopper down and get their mind focused on shopping. The bumpers can consist of anything from a table, sign, or even a greeter. Retailers have also found that after a shopper leaves the bumper they usually turn right and this is where they put their high-profit merchandise, such as shoes or cosmetics.

Cosmetics are usually bought on impulse; this is why retailers place the make-up counters near the entrance of the mall, or store, and near the shoes. As shoppers are walking in or out of the store they will pass the make-up, and while waiting for a size of shoe, this is when many shop-



pers glance at the make-up. If you also notice, it is not men's shoes that are near the cosmetics, it is the women's shoes, and the seduction of the cosmetic models draws many women into purchasing their products.

Did you ever wonder why stores aimed at teens and young adults are louder, darker, and messier than department stores? Research says that salespeople are now trained to leave tables with a few items unfolded to encourage shoppers to look and touch. Research also shows that spotlighting items increases sales, and loud music and music videos attract teenage girls, who have a tendency to splurge on items.

This holiday season as you head to the malls remember that girls and women who shop in packs tend to buy more than those who shop alone, and that family members smother the urge to impulse buy.

Source: Bryner, M. (2005). The Urge to Splurge. *Psychology Today*.