

# Words of Wellness



November 2021

## Enhancing Immune Health

A collaboration between staff from Collaborative Support Programs of New Jersey, Inc. and researchers at the University of Illinois at Chicago Center on Mental Health Services Research and Policy led to the development of an *Enhancing Immune Health* manual. We've designed this material specifically to educate people who wish to understand and enhance their immune health. This manual will become part of the UIC Solutions Suite, and its modules can be used alone or together to teach a five-week class on improving immunity. The modules are:

- What is Immune Health?
- Vaccination & Health Screening for Improved Immunity
- Adequate Sleep for Immune Health
- Managing Stress for Stronger Immunity
- Functional Foods, Immunity Aids, & Finding Credible Health Information

Each module is written using an “Explain, Evaluate, and Engage” framework:

We **explain** the key information to know in each area.

Using exploration and activities, we then **evaluate** what the participant(s) already know about immune health. This is followed by additional explanations.

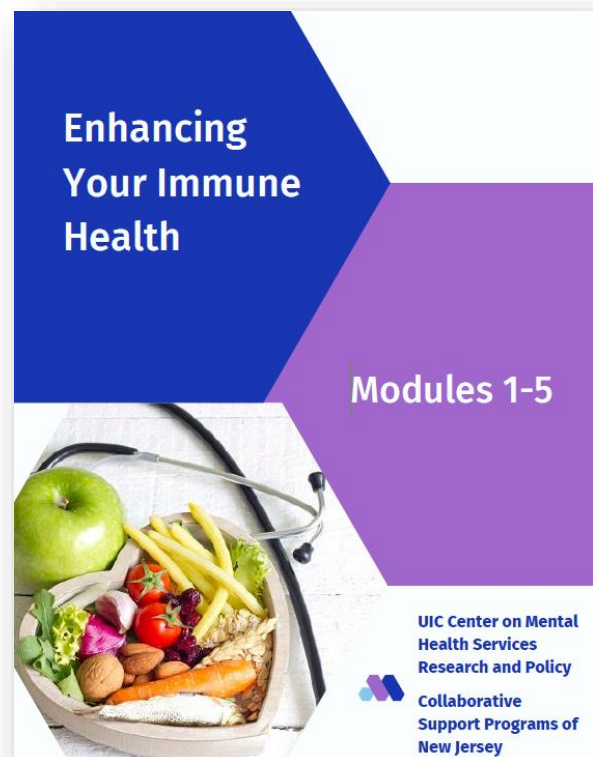
Each module encourages **engaging** in activities to work on improving immunity and health.

Some feedback we have received so far:

- Somehow, what is quite complex is labeled in a way that is not cluttered, and still is giving clear delineation.
- Practical, useable, and helpful!
- The Explain, Evaluate, Engage is sharp.
- The manual really engages the reader. Even the color blocking catches the eye on the page... and as the layout stays in the same pattern throughout, people are unwittingly drawn to each segment because the flow is so natural.

The materials on *Enhancing Immune Health* are a product of the UIC Health & Recovery Solutions Suite. Download the manual: <https://bit.ly/3E6GVUr>.

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## Gratitude

Gratitude is a state of mind that arises when you affirm a good thing in your life that comes from outside yourself, or when you notice and relish little pleasures. For decades, we have known that gratitude practices contribute to a sense of peace and well-being. Practicing gratitude may positively affect relationships and health.

Gratitude can be cultivated as a regular practice that helps people with anxiety, depression, and substance use challenges. Gratitude is strongly linked to mental health and life satisfaction, leading to a sense of joy, energy, and a firm belief or faith that goodness exists, even during challenging times.

Gratitude may help us deal with intense emotions like jealousy and bitterness. People who practice gratitude tend to be optimistic and have healthy habits such as exercising, eating well, and accessing needed medical care and screenings.

These habits, in turn, help us recover more quickly from illness and strengthen our physical health, including lower blood pressure and improved immune function.

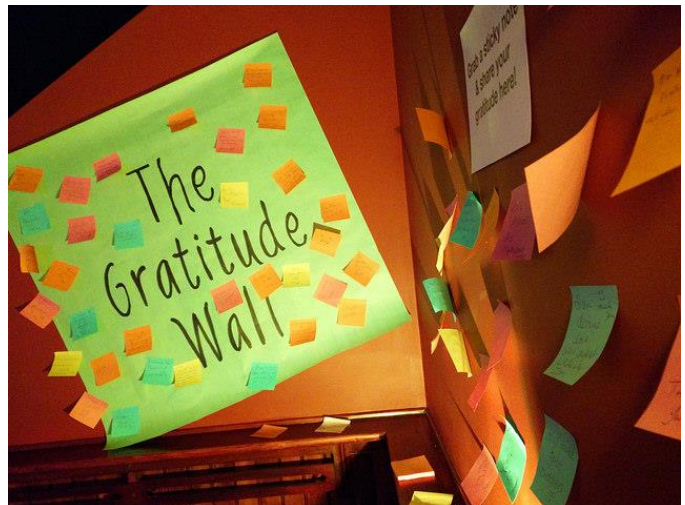
## Gratitude Practice

One way to begin the practice of gratitude is writing about it in a journal or in a letter. It often helps to see all that we have on paper, bringing us to the realize that life is not all bad. Shifting our focusing from what we *don't* have to what we *do* have in our lives can provide a sense of well-being.

Another idea is to create a gratitude bulletin board posting things you are grateful for, such as letters, cards, pictures, and expressions of love from family and friends. A gratitude wall can be great at an event, school, or workplace.

Gratitude is believed to contribute to health and well-being and may impact youth positively. The Youth Gratitude Project (YGP) aims to enhance gratitude for young people through four aims:

- Create gratitude scales for children and teens, and for parents to rate children's level of gratefulness.
- Study factors that contribute to gratitude during adolescence, including self-control, social support, self-efficacy, community involvement, health behaviors, religiosity or spirituality, and participation in extra-curricular activities.
- Examine links between specific parenting practices and gratitude in children and adolescents, such as parents' modeling, valuing, and reinforcement of gratitude expression and the roles of parent-child attachment, self-competence, and friendship quality.
- Research a school-based curriculum that teaches children how to think gratefully. Pilot studies show that students who participated in a gratitude class showed increases in grateful thinking, gratitude, and positive emotions up to five months later.



## World Kindness Day: Nov. 13

World Kindness Day is a global event that promotes the importance of being kind to each other, to yourself, and to the world. This day, celebrated on November 13 of each year, has the purpose is to help everyone understand that compassion for others may binds us together. This understanding has the power to bridge the gap between nations.

Commit a Random Act of Kindness today and see what magic follows!

- Give compliments
- Smile at strangers
- Hold a door open
- Give up your seat on a crowded train

For more: <https://www.randomactsofkindness.org/>

### References and resources for this issue

The materials on *Enhancing Immune Health* were developed by Jessica A. Jonikas, MA; Margaret Swarbrick, PhD, FAOTA; Kelsey Arnold, MA, MPH; George H. Brice, Jr., MSW, Judith A. Cook, PhD; and Patricia B. Nemec, PsyD, CRC, CPRP. The authors thank Charles Santos, MD, for his expert review and contributions to the contents of these modules. Developed under a grant with funding from the National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research (NIDILRR; grant number #90RTHF0004).

The information on gratitude is supported by these references:

- Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence at [ei.yale.edu](http://ei.yale.edu)
- <https://positivepsychology.com/gratitude-research/>
- See the work of Robert Emmons at <https://emmons.faculty.ucdavis.edu/>
- [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/gratitude-tips\\_b\\_4084278](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/gratitude-tips_b_4084278)
- Greater Good Science Center at UC Berkeley which launched the Youth Gratitude Project (YGP), [https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/how\\_to\\_teach\\_gratitude\\_to\\_tweens\\_and\\_teens](https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/how_to_teach_gratitude_to_tweens_and_teens)

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