‘Tis the season for thankfulness; it would be a better world if the season were year round.

Did you know that truly feeling grateful can improve your physical and emotional health? DHEA (dehydroepiandrosterone) is also called the “Vitality hormone.” You can increase its production and reduce the cortisol (Fight/Flight or Freeze) hormone by focusing on something you are grateful for and feeling that emotion. This reduces the stress on your internal organs and calms and relaxes the brain.

The moment you shift from a mindset of negativity or judgment to one of appreciation: your brain function becomes more balanced, harmonized and supple; your heart begins to pump in a more coherent rhythm; and biochemical changes trigger healthful responses throughout the body.

The next time you feel a rush of anger or stress: stop, take a deep breath, and recall something that creates the feeling of gratitude. You might feel warm and a smile could spread across your face. Continue thinking about this for a few moments and breathing deeply. This can be done in the car, at work, at home, anywhere you are!

Researchers have discovered that feeling grateful can actually make us feel happy. And sharing that gratitude with others can even increase our happiness. In addition, research by Gottman Institute found successful marriages have at least 5 expressions of gratitude or appreciation for every one negative interaction.

HOW TO EXPERIENCE GRATITUDE:

Bring into mind someone you are grateful for. This could be a friend, a partner, or a parent. This could be someone you have never met: someone whose art or courage has inspired you. Consider the preciousness of what they’ve given you, whether it’s encouragement, wisdom, or love. As the feelings of gratitude grow stronger allow yourself to smile. Feel it deep within your body. This activates our hippocampus (the center of our learning memory.) Now extend this feeling and these thoughts to someone else. Tell someone-call them, write to them, send the warm feelings to others. This sparks the social intelligence area of the brain. Next write it down or record it for yourself. This encourages and establishes long-term memory and helps establish positive beliefs.

IF GRATITUDE IS SUCH A WONDERFUL THING WHY AREN’T WE PRACTICING IT?

It seems so simple- is it really that easy? Could we be afraid of putting ourselves out there, of being vulnerable? Do we make assumptions that people already know? Are we taking that for granted?
A few weeks ago on a beautiful sunny fall day I took my 100-year-old Grandmother to the Mt. Crawford Creamery. I thought she would like the experience since she and my late Grandfather were dairy farmers. We were so fortunate to see Frank Will, one of the owners, when we were driving in. I went to high school with Frank and he came up to the car to say hello. I asked if he would say hello to my grandmother, Olive Roop. He was happy to meet her. They spent several minutes talking about life on a dairy farm and how things have changed. We also bought some wonderful non-homogenized milk. Grandmother and I went back to her apartment and shared a cold glass of milk and more of her reminiscing. She called me the next day and said how grateful she was for the whole day, but especially the chance to visit the farm. It brought back many wonderful memories for her. I, too, was grateful for so many things: the chance to spend time with her, to be able to hear more of her memories, to share the delicious milk that means so much to her… I could go on.

There are so many little things that we could be grateful for in each day. I encourage you to look through the lens of appreciation today and everyday!