

EXPLORE WELLNESS

These Three Little Words Are a Gratitude Game-Changer¹

Go from grumpy to grateful in five seconds. Just replace the words 'I have to,' with 'I get to!' It will improve your mood instantly!

"The majority of American conversations are characterized by a complaint," says Scott Bea, Psy. D., a psychologist at the Cleveland Clinic.

It makes sense. Human brains have what's called a negative bias. "We tend to notice things that are threatening in our condition," says Bea. It goes back to our ancestors' time when being able to spot threats was crucial to survival.

And before you say that you really try not to complain—you meditate, you think positive, you always try to find the good—you're likely more guilty than you think. After all, when was the last time you said that you had to do something? Maybe you had to go grocery shopping. Or you had to work out. Maybe you had to go to your in-laws after work. Or had to walk the dog?



Negativity is an easy trap we all fall into from time-to-time—but it's one that cannot only make our perspectives on life a little more blue, but also likely negatively impact brain chemistry, notes Bea.

Fortunately, a tiny language tweak can help: Instead of saying "I have to," say, "I get to." It's something that companies like Life Is Good, which sends positive messages through all kinds of apparel and goods, encourage their employees and customers to do. *Gratitude is a gift we give ourselves.*

During the month of October, every time you catch yourself saying 'I have to,' switch it up to, 'I get to,' instead.

Invite a co-worker to join you in the challenge.

Here's why it works: "I have to' sounds like a burden, while 'I get to' is an opportunity," says Bea. " And our brain responds very powerfully to the way we use language when we talk and the way we use language in our thoughts."

The best part about these simple changes? They're small—and you can start doing them, stat. Plus, they feed off of each other.

After all, while saying you have to do something will likely help you do it (you'll make it to that spin class, for example), framing the behavior as something you get to do helps you lean into it with a bit more enthusiasm (and help you appreciate the fact that you're able to work out in the first place), says Bea. "It brings a sense of opportunity—and a welcoming of the experience, which has a positive benefit for us. It's the difference between a threat and a challenge," he says. "Very few people are up for a good threat and most of us are up for a good challenge or opportunity."



Even more: Emerging psychotherapies, including something called acceptance and commitment therapy, focus on small language tweaks like this to help people beat tough times, he notes. So while positive thinking (and all the perks that come with it) is about positive thoughts, it's also about positive attitudes, which can, in turn, cultivate gratitude and appreciation, encouraging even more positive behaviors and, yep, thoughts, too.

Who **GETS** to walk the dog tonight?

Complaints on the other hand? They can leave us feeling more vulnerable and threatened in the world, furthering a cycle of negativity and fear.

The best part about this simple change? It is small — and you can start doing it, stat.*

*STAT is a common medical abbreviation for urgent or rush. From the Latin word *statum*, meaning 'immediately.'



¹Shortsleeve, C. July 26, 2018. Retrieved and modified from: <https://www.shape.com/lifestyle/mind-and-body/common-phrase-you-say-making-you-more-negative?>