We hate to burst your bubble, but you’re biologically hardwired to notice about seven times as many unappealing things as you are pleasant things. While early humans needed this trait – a radar alerting them to danger was crucial to their survival – in the modern world, a persistent glass-half-empty attitude isn’t merely unhelpful, it can be downright depressing.

“Forty thousand years ago, we did much better if we were looking out for sabre tooth tigers than admiring the rainbows. We’ve got this hardware wiring that keeps finding problems,” explains Dr Richard Chambers, a mindfulness expert and co-creator of Smiling Mind, a program designed to build mindful mental health competencies. “But neuroscience and positive psychology literature is finding that by consciously paying attention to things that are pleasant, it’s normal to feel sad and angry; these are normal human emotions. Just let them be there. They’re not such a problem. If we’re not reacting to them, try to stop and resist or get rid of them. Judgement of the worrying – that’s where we get into anxiety,” says Dr Chambers. “There’s a different relationship that mindfulness can help us bring to our emotions where we can name, stay present in the body, not get carried away with stories and judgements – all of that is what causes problems.”

Once you get into a pattern of judging less, a beautiful thing happens. It’s called self-compassion, and Dr Chambers believes it’ll be the next big thing amid the building evidence in support of mindfulness.

“Often when we’re suffering or going through some difficulty, or we’ve failed at something, we tend to get really tough on ourselves,” he explains. “But students who are self-compassionate in the face of failing a test are much more able to go back and look at reasons for failing and their performance improves. Whereas students who say ‘I’m bad and get caught up in that layer of judgement never go back and look at what happened there.’

“Although medical science has always recognised this important connection, it’s only recently that we are starting to realise the communication actually goes both ways,” says Dr Chambers, founder of the Mindful Foundation (mindful.org).

“Given how closely the two interact, it’s easy to understand why you may feel nauseated before a big game or feel intestinal pain during times of stress.” Heartburn, abdominal cramps or loose stools can indicate stress, but problems beginning in the gut can also manifest as a range of physical symptoms including:

- Stiff or tense muscles
- Headaches
- Sleep problems
- Weight loss or gain
- Restlessness
- Changes in your behaviour including procrastination, gridding teeth, increased alcohol consumption, or difficulty concentrating.

“Strengthening your gut flora will require similar care to growing flowers in your garden,” says Emberson’s. “Time, patience and plenty of TLC are critical to re-establish good bacteria. Fertilise your gut flora with essential nutrients to assist in ongoing repair and maintenance; zinc, omega-3 fish oils, vitamin A, C and E are essential for gut healing.”

If you think food is affecting your mood, remove sugar from your diet and keep a journal documenting reactions after eating to identify whether certain foods are a problem for your gut. Adopting strategies for handling stress – such as a regular mindfulness practise – can help to ease digestive discomfort but it may be necessary to repair and rebalance your gut in order to re-establish a healthy gut mind connection.

Dietary enzymes and bile acids assist digestion, and probiotics and high-fibre foods can help to re-establish optimal gut flora. But be patient.

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