Gut Feelings:
How Negative Thoughts Can Fuel the GI Symptom Cycle

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Gastrointestinal (GI) symptoms and sensations can understandably bring up different emotions. The thought patterns that surround these emotions can positively or negatively influence how we feel and react. Often these thinking patterns are automatic or occur in the background of our mind without permission. When a person consistently falls into automatic *negative* thinking patterns, it can increase anxiety, which can worsen GI symptoms, and further increase the intensity of emotions and so on. This can create a self-perpetuating cycle.

We present **10 common types of unhelpful thinking styles** related to GI symptoms. As you read through them, you may notice that some sound familiar. Recognizing these patterns is an important step in changing unhelpful thoughts.

1) **Mental Filter**: focusing on a single negative detail, such that it misrepresents the entire experience.
   Example: "When my stomach rumbled so loudly during my date, it ruined the entire night."

2) **Jumping to Conclusions**: making a negative conclusion without definite evidence to support that conclusion.
   a. **Mind Reading**: assuming what someone else thinks
      Example: "If I tell my friend Morgan about my irritable bowel syndrome, she will feel disgusted and think I am gross."
   b. **Fortune Telling**: predicting the future based on limited current information
      Example: "If I go to the movies with my friends, I will inevitably have multiple bathroom emergencies during the movie and disrupt the whole viewing. I can't go."

3) **Personalization**: seeing yourself as the cause of a negative external event, when you were not actually responsible; blaming yourself unnecessarily.
   Example: "My friends had a bad time at the party because I had an accident. Everyone would have had more fun if I had not been there."

4) **Catastrophizing**: perceiving a situation in an exaggerated and negative light; blowing things out of proportion.
   Example: "I looked so bloated in my outfit at the wedding; I probably ruined the wedding party photos!"

5) **Black and White Thinking**: seeing only one extreme or the other, also called "all-or-nothing" thinking; if you fall short of perfection, then it is a failure.
   - Associated with phrases like "Always", "Never", "everyone", "no one", etc.

   Example: "Everyone else can eat whatever they want and they feel fine. I never can. If I eat even one wrong food I have intense heartburn for hours. I always have such horrible symptoms."

6) **Should-ing / Must-ing**: putting unreasonable demands or pressure on yourself or others.
   - When you don't meet your own standards, you feel guilty or ashamed.
   - When you place unrealistic expectations on others, you feel angry or resentful.

   Example: "I should be able to get through a single work shift without having to take a break for my nausea. I should be able to push through. I must push through."

7) **Overgeneralization**: seeing a single event as part of a larger unavoidable pattern; taking a past event and imposing it on all future situations.
   Example: "I got sick after I ate pizza on Friday. I will never be able to eat pizza again. Soon I won't be able to eat anything other than chicken and rice."

8) **Labelling**: a form of overgeneralization, making sweeping statements about your own or others personal characteristics based on specific situations.
   - Instead of describing an error as a singular event, you label yourself a "failure", or a "screw up".
     Example: "I can't believe I let Jamie order out for dinner even though I knew it would give me symptoms. I am stupid for eating the food."

9) **Emotional Reasoning**: assuming that your negative emotions reflect the true reality of the situation.
   Example: "I feel sad today. I didn't sleep well last night. I don't have GI symptoms yet, but I am sure they will come. When it rains it pours."

10) **Magnification and Minimization**: magnifying the positive attributes of others and minimizing your own positive attributes; or magnifying your own GI symptoms while minimizing other's imperfections.
    Example: "Yes, Alex also has GI symptoms but theirs are so mild, they never have issues. Meanwhile, I am running to the bathroom every five minutes, and everyone is thinking negatively of me!"

References.

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