

It's official: social media is bad for your health.
Here's how to do it properly in the new year

India Knight

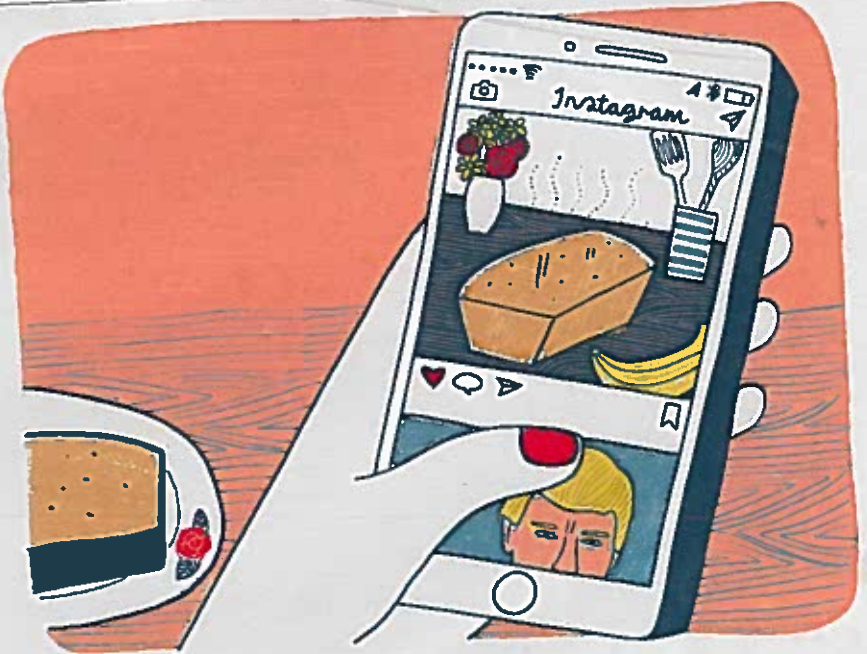


I am determined not to spend 2018 fretting about things over which I have no control, such as Donald Trump, or indeed Kim Jong-un (mildly diverting fact: the latter reportedly hates his ears, and if you look closely at pictures of him, they are often Photoshopped).

Unedited, unfiltered, maybe-true-maybe-not rolling news, of the kind we're accustomed to reading all day long via social media, does atrocious harm to people's mental health. This isn't some wild conjecture: even Facebook now bluntly admits that its site poses a mental-health risk to some users. In a separate interview back in November, Facebook's original president, Sean Parker, said the company had deliberately sought to turn its users into addicts. He expressed regret at the harm it inflicts on children.

We all — social-media platforms and users alike — know it's true that unfiltered news consumption harms us in real ways. At the very best, it induces a sort of low-level state of anxiety and unease. You don't have to be a Brexit obsessive for that to be true, it's enough to read a foul detail pertaining to a court case or to see a picture of something terrible to have your day ruined. No one is immune. I particularly hate how, after seeing the horrible thing, everyone checks in with everyone else on social media to ensure they've seen it too and are suitably upset. We all have a finite amount of energy. This is not a wise way to spend it.

We don't have to be so passive. We can stop this. For example, I am cutting down on the number of US news outlets and commentators I follow on Twitter and replacing them with people who post about books, cooking and nature. I am upping my quota of artists and makers and muting the obsessive political nerds. I find that these commentators fuel anger and despair, but there is nowhere for those feelings to go. They just spin around in your head. Besides, I hardly need reminding that the state of the world makes me angry and anxious. More rage isn't what I'm after.



Next year, I want more joy. And the thing is, there's masses of it about if you only look. I love being reminded of the good small-to-tiny things that people do every day. They are important. This is what many people still don't get — that despite the deluge of depressing dross that exists online, the internet is also populated by people who post a picture of a tree they've just drawn, or a joke they've thought of, or a delicious recipe, and cheer your day right up.

It is so easy to scoff at this stuff. Why would anyone want to see a stranger's boring drawing, or read their stupid joke? If you want a recipe, buy a cookbook, and so on. But that "isn't it all meaningless?" approach to life is dated. The young people I know are so uncynical, they can seem childlike. And

although I blame that conscious naivety for all sorts of things that annoy me, I also quite like it. It gives me hope.

The geopolitical situation is unlikely to rectify itself magically in 2018. But I reckon it's all going to be fine. When the bigger picture is grim, switch to the little picture. We all have people we love and things that interest us. As well as those, strangers are going about their lives, performing tiny, unnoticed acts of kindness, thoughtfulness and creativity all the time. It's going to be fine because, even as we're all out tonight celebrating New Year's Eve (I say "we" — I'll be on the sofa), already spring is unfurling silently beneath our feet. It's like the Sheenagh Pugh poem *Sometimes*, which I found via a friend on Twitter: "Sometimes things don't go, after all, / from bad to worse," it starts. "Sometimes a man aims high, and all goes well." Do look it up — I can't think of a more uplifting thing to read as we see in the new year.

Don't let the bad stuff get you down. Good things happen all the time. We're going to be OK ■
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- Listen** to Patrik O'Brian's *Aubrey and Maturin* series on Audible, brilliantly read by Rio Jerrom
- Drink** kefir from chucklinggoat.co.uk. New year, new gut health
- Plant** bulbs in pots. It's not too late