

Ep #90: Overthinking Doesn't Make You More Prepared



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With Your Host

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Have you ever stayed up late at night thinking about something that happens the next day because you feared you weren't prepared enough for it? Rolling around and thinking and overthinking and worrying. Maybe it was a test, a work presentation, an event you planned, a conversation you need to have.

Have you ever agonized over posting on Instagram out of fear of what people will think of you? Have you replayed a convo where you said something you now find cringey over and over again in your mind? If so, you're not alone, my darling. This is a dear old pal of mine, overthinking. And it can be synonymous with self-doubt and pairs naturally with codependent, perfectionist, and people-pleasing thinking.

Thinking circles around something you're afraid of not being prepared for can be exhausting. It can hinder the joy in your life, disrupt your sleep pattern, even suppress your immune system and play strange games with the adrenals. You can overcome these old perfectionist and codependent stories and can get unstuck from overthinking thought cycles.

Ready to learn more about what overthinking is and why we do it? Keep listening my love, it's going to be a good one.

You're listening to Feminist Wellness, the only podcast that combines functional medicine, life coaching, and feminism to teach smart women how to reclaim their power and restore their health! Here's your host, Nurse Practitioner, Functional Medicine Expert, Herbalist and Life Coach, Victoria Albina.

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Hello, hello my love. I hope this finds you doing so well. So I found myself lying in bed the other night thinking about something I had to do the next day. And it was a new thing, there were stories about how it was vulnerable making. And I don't know why, but on this particular night for whatever reason, the stars must have aligned.

I was able to be my own watcher in this new way and was really able to step back and see my brain really trying to urge me to overthink, which is something I've done a ton of work on in the last few years to really begin to believe that when I know that I'm prepared, I can really trust that, and that overthinking doesn't serve me.

We'll get into details about all of that, but I noticed in that moment just how many tools and resources I now have to support myself when my brain offers me the opportunity to overthink something. And I am so excited to share all about this thought habit, why we think it's useful, why it's not, and of course, some remedies with you here today.

So as always, my beautiful nerd, let's start by normalizing. We all overthink at times. And it's normal, natural, human. And of course, we will get all science-y on it because that is how we do, my nerds. Thinking something through, getting prepared, evaluating your response in a moment post facto to lovingly see where you could improve.

None of these things are problems. In fact, they're smart. They're good things to do for your life. The challenge comes when you lose touch with your capacity to stop thinking about something over and over and step into the anxiety-riddled world of chronic overthinking. Spending an abundance of time and energy ruminating and adding pressure to yourself that your

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body will interpret as stress and will have that knock-on effect throughout your physiology that we've talked about so many times here.

Impacting everything from thyroid to digestion to cognitive capacity to mood to sleep to immunity. To be clear here, the type of overthinking I'm talking about is not the overthinking of actually diagnosed obsessive compulsive disorder, OCD, or the rumination common in true clinical depression, PTSD, CPTSD, or other diagnoses.

While the remedies to come may certainly be helpful in those cases, there is more to it when one of these diagnoses is part of your life and a trained and licensed therapist is the one to help you set up a plan for interrupting truly intrusive or obsessive thoughts.

So to cut right to it, my beauty, you overthink because you believe it will change something and that's a thought error. Overthinking is a perfectionist brain's super-duper fave because it keeps up that story that you need to be "perfect," or you're the worst.

And it can look a lot like trying to predict the future, future tripping, have trouble making decisions, self-doubt, trying to read people's minds so you can stay one step ahead, which is a codependent classic, and feeling anxious about every small detail and that making you think you're less prepared than you likely are.

When we overthink things, we what if and should all over ourselves, rolling around in the past as though we could change it, or worrying about tomorrow versus pausing and planning, evaluating, seeing where we're actually prepared and when we're actually not.

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And using our brain's amazing prefrontal cortex to do our best and to actively decide that it's okay to do just that, and eventually, that it's more than okay to fail, which we talked all about in episodes 39 and 40. Recognizing that failing never means you're a failure, but rather that you tried and learned more about what works and what doesn't.

So my love, overthinking not only doesn't feel good and never does good, and doesn't move your life forward to ruminate, to make endless pro-con lists and to think over and over and over again about how you make a mistake that one time, and that's the thought error here.

Believing that if you think and think and think the same thoughts, you'll gain control. You'll feel different in some way by continuing to replay when you had acute onset foot in mouth syndrome on that date last night, or when you got called in or out for saying something problematic, or when you have something in the future you're worried about being prepared for.

So instead of spending your time and energy either preparing or relaxing, you replay the same worry thoughts. And my love, nothing could be less helpful than allowing your brain to spin and spin, attempting to create a different outcome.

And particularly when the story is that you are not prepared for something forthcoming, replaying that thought, like oh my god, I'm not prepared, oh my god, I'm not prepared, that's about - let's get science-y on it. That's about, I'd say, 0.0% likely to help you actually get prepared because your brain is spinning on the not prepared. How on earth could that help you, my beauty?

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We also may believe that if we overthink something enough, we'll somehow change our relationship to that thing. Like if you repeat the worry, at some point you'll have an epiphany that'll change your relationship to the circumstance. But that won't happen when you're thinking the same thought over and over.

Furthermore, when we judge everything we've done or might get wrong, we aren't coming to our lives from a place of self-love, a place that honors our inner children and the safety they want for us. Overthinking can also lead to self-flagellating guilt and shame, which we've talked about here pretty recently in the episode about guilt. And those are dead-end feelings. Ones that keep you from doing your best. Not ones that move you forward.

Our human brains will try to mask overthinking as problem-solving. The classic false cognition of the perfectionist mind. Our sweet inner children want to keep us safe and they think that preemptively solving any problem that could present itself is the way to do it.

And that's what your brain is trying to do. It's trying to problem solve because brains are built to do that. But when you're ruminating, you're not actually solving a problem. You're creating one. And if you're always trying to make sure problems that aren't problems get solved, you don't allow yourself to feel done, to feel that energy of completion, to trust yourself that you've done your best, or to enjoy the moment, or even embrace failures that will bring you more clarity and wisdom.

So my magnificent darling, when you find yourself in a loop of overthinking, lying awake before a big presentation, thinking of everything that could go wrong, I'll invite you to ask yourself this question, what if that isn't a

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problem? What if all the what ifs came true and they weren't actually a problem at all? Just more information.

I know, I know. Your brain is likely screaming, "Vic, you are bananas. Flubbing in front of my boss or the board, that is a huge problem." And that's where your brain gets it twisted, in thinking that, for example, flubbing a presentation at work is a problem and means something about you as a human, about your worth.

When those are the stakes, of course you create anxiety about it. That makes sense. And so you work yourself up. You turn it into a thing instead of something normal and natural that has and will happen to all of us because humans flub things, make mistakes, and fail forward.

When you tie anything to your worth, anxiety is the natural outcome. And when you're lying awake at night before a big presentation, convincing yourself that everything is on the line here, well nerd alert, you are encouraging your body to get all jacked up on adrenaline, norepinephrine, and eventually cortisol to go into sympathetic activation, fight or flight around this thing.

To give it so much weight and pressure that you're unlikely to sleep well or deeply, and no one works well when they're exhausted and sauced up on internal freakout chemicals because science. It's just not how brains and bodies work.

And all the time you're spending telling yourself that anything less than a perfectionist thought fantasy level amazing performance is proof that you,

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at your human core are a failure, puts the kind of pressure on you that makes it so much more likely you're going to F up.

Versus going in there having practiced thinking, "If I F this up, it's not a problem. It's a chance to learn and it doesn't mean a darn thing about me and my worth as a human. It just signals a place where I need to learn, to grow, to do things differently."

And the latter strengthens the thoughts that lead you to feel calm, centered, grounded, self-confident, and self-assured. Not self-doubting and beating yourself up ahead of time. So feel into the difference there, my love. When I posit those two options, it just resonates so differently in my body.

So instead of dreading what could happen, you get to be an active participant in your life in this new way. You can complete the work that's on your plate now without overthinking about something in the future, without future tripping, trusting that present you and future you will have your back, no matter the outcome, by recognizing that the outcome doesn't have to be a problem. It truly can just be a lesson.

And let's pause as we do to recognize that capitalism has conditioned us to believe that we are the sum of our production, and white supremacist conditioning has made overworking a cultural norm and perfection something to strive for always. And those stories are just stories.

The truth is and always will be that you are enough just as you are, my love, and you never have to prove it to yourself or anyone else. And overthinking and stressing about the future don't actually serve to prove a darn thing. They just keep you miserable.

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And the amazing news is this; chronic overthinking and worrying are not permanent conditions. They're thought habits, my beauty. And you can change your mind and create thought patterns that serve you and reclaim your power.

You may have noticed during a time where you're trying to pull yourself out of a cycle of overthinking that telling yourself to not think a thought doesn't do the trick. To replace that thought or to stop your mind from swirling around on the original thought, it's just not how brains work.

It's like that experiment where they told folks to not think about pink elephants, and of course, it was all they could think about after getting that prompt. In this case, you can't avoid thinking that swirly thought by focusing your mind on not thinking it.

If you tell yourself not to worry about your big presentation tomorrow, you'll likely only think about and worry about, you guessed it, that very presentation. In this work of getting to know your own mind, recognizing your own thoughts and feelings, that's the most vital first step for change. And it only works in my opinion and experience when it's based in loving yourself first and foremost and accepting yourself and your brain just how they are.

As always, you have the power to observe your thoughts and decide if you want to keep them, if they serve you. Because your amazing brain thinks literally tens of thousands of thoughts a day and we are wired as humans to notice things, to assess for safety and danger, to suss things up and come to a quick conclusion lest we get eaten by a rogue lion, in our society that

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as evolved into sensing danger in our own overthinking cycles that are being fed by our lizard brains.

And it makes sense. Because you're focusing on the worry and the ruminating and the beating yourself up, your brain believes you that the danger is a real danger or why would you be thinking about it so much? Makes sense, right?

And we've discussed the old lizard brain together here before. It's a way to refer to our most primitive mind, evolutionarily speaking, that part of our brain that doesn't want to get snacked on by a lion posing as a presentation, where anything and everything could go wrong and all of a sudden it seems like an immediate threat.

Calling those thoughts, I will fail, that means I'm a failure, and if I think about it over and over again, I can somehow control the situation and will it to be different. A set of facts and believing them, continuing to give those thoughts your energy keeps you stuck in the cycles you're in now. Painful thoughts, painful feelings, painful action, painful outcome because neuroscience.

And because science, we understand that once you attune yourself to seeing your thoughts and can thus create a little space from them, you can begin to detach yourself from those thoughts. And that's when you can deeply impact your own brain to engage your neuroplasticity and to make lasting change in your habitual thought patterns.

This is very different from simply telling yourself to not overthink. When you can break the links between you and believing that these thoughts are facts

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and you can recognize that they're just a brain habit, then you can begin to decide if those thoughts serve you, if they move your life forward in a positive way.

So step one is to believe that you have a lizard in your brain stem, or if monkey mind resonates for you, that Buddhist concept, then monkeys writing sentences in your mind or whatever analogy works for you. And you can understand that these thoughts are generally subconscious and you can begin to believe and know that you can bring conscious awareness to them, loving attention to them.

The second step is to do it, to bring your awareness to the fact that you are not your thoughts and that you can observe, analyze, contemplate, and change your own programmed habitual historical thinking. You can do this and it's vital if you want to change the text that those lizards and monkeys are putting into your consciousness.

For more on this, do listen next to episode two, Be Your Own Watcher. Finally, having sussed out which thoughts serve you and which don't, you get to decide if you want to keep thinking the same old thoughts you've always thoughts, understanding that our thoughts create our feelings and we take action based on those feelings and have an inevitable result or outcome in our lives based on the action we take.

And therein, you get to pause to bring in a new thought. So here's the differentiation. It's not yelling at your brain to stop doing what it's doing to attempt to keep you safe. It's recognizing your brain wants to do that because it loves you, because it thinks then you're in control and you'll be safe and everything will be okay, and it's not true.

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And you get to invite your brain to think something else. Something new. Something that feels self-loving and can shift the energy in your body. And part of doing this for me is to get in touch with grounding supportive resources in my life.

My community, pets, animals, loved ones, nature, your own breath. I remind myself and I'll invite you to remind yourself that you are perfect, loved, and lovable, that you are safe in this one moment and that whatever you produce for work in your business and your life, it's not. There is no direct correlate to your worth as an animal.

And in beginning to disarticulate those two things, you get breathing space. If you haven't downloaded the free meditations I share on my website, head over to victoriaalbina.com right there on the homepage, you can download these meditations within there.

It's a practice for the nervous system called orienting and it can help you to reconnect with the world around you and it's one of the top things that I do when I find my brain rolling around in overthinking. Orient the space, get present in your environment, remind your brain that another thought is possible.

I'll also add that ritual can be really helpful here. So once you've prepared, written the webinar, studied for the test, decided you're done, I invite you to create a ritual to mark the time. To let yourself know that you're done thinking about it. Ring a bell, light a candle, go for a walk, take a slow breath, take a shower, tell yourself out loud that you're deciding to trust yourself to not overthink this.

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Maybe write the thought down. Whatever works for you to let your mind-body-spirit know it's done and dusted. Baby, overthinking and worry are more exhausting than the outcome you think you will face from effing something up.

I know, I know, the outcome seems massive. But what overthinking does to our sense of self-love and self-trust, remember my love, thoughts are not facts. They're habits written by lizards, driven by electrical impulses, socialization, survival mechanisms, and you don't have to believe them.

You are not safer for overthinking. You are no more in control of other people's reactions to you because you thought the same thought a dozen or a thousand times over. You are most in control of the only thing you can control, which is you.

When you find that self-trust and can pause, get realistic with just how prepared you actually are and can trust that and release the story that making yourself anxious and stressed out about anything does you or anyone else any good, makes you any more lovable. You can look at your own thoughts and can choose purposefully for your own good which thoughts you want to believe and which you don't, and that is a massive act of self-care and self-love in action.

If all this is resonating and you're excited to work on it, but you're worried that you'll start and stop, you'll have some success and some failure, I want to remind you that that's normal. Take a moment when you finish this show to listen to episode 80, Healing Isn't Linear, as well as episode 78, Minimum Baseline Thinking.

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It's one of my favorite ways to begin to slowly build self-trust. Alright my beauties, that's it for today. I hope this was helpful. If you're loving this show, I'd be so grateful if you could head on over to Apple Podcasts or wherever you get your shows and subscribe, rate, and review.

It helps others to find the show more easily, which is my goal in putting out this free resource every single week. And if you've already done that, thank you so much. I'd be grateful if you could share it on the social media and tag me @victoriaalbinawellness so I can share it on my story and send you a big thank you and my free meditations if you don't already have them.

Finally, my masterclass starts again in January 2021. So if you're interested, head on over to victoriaalbina.com/masterclass to get on the list to have a conversation with me. It's already starting to fill up, which is so exciting. And I'd love to have you join us. Take good care of yourself, my sweet, sweet love.

Let's take a nice slow breath in and out. And remember, you are safe, you are held, you are loved. And when one of us heals, we help heal the world. Be well, my darling. I'll talk to you soon.

Thank you for listening to this week's episode of *Feminist Wellness*. If you like what you've heard, head to VictoriaAlbina.com to learn more.