

Ep #269: Support Your Nervous System During Worrying Times



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

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This is *Feminist Wellness*, and I'm your host, Nurse Practitioner, Functional Medicine expert, and life coach, Victoria Albina. I'll show you how to get unstuck, drop the anxiety, perfectionism, and codependency so you can live from your beautiful heart. Welcome, my love, let's get started.

Hello, hello, my love. I hope this finds you doing so well. When you are hearing this episode live, the new cohort of Anchored will have started. The group filled up, sold out, as always. It has always sold out 100% of the time since I started offering it, which is just so exciting.

What really thrills me is that there are so many people who are so excited to make change. To stop living in emotional outsourcing. To reconnect with their capacity to meet those essential human needs that we all have, that when they go unmet lead us into those emotional outsourcing waters. And those, of course, are our needs to feel worthy, belonging, and connection and safety on all planes.

And so, that's the work we do in Anchored. It's beautiful work. We do thought work, we do breath work, we do somatic or body-based practices, we dance, we sing, we laugh, we have so much fun. And if you missed your chance to join us this year, or this round, no need for FOMO. There's another opportunity to work with me, which is the Somatic Studio. That is starting up very soon.

If you head on over to [VictoriaAlbina.com/the Somatic Studio](https://VictoriaAlbina.com/the-Somatic-Studio)... I know, keeping it complicated over here... you can learn more and get on the waitlist for when we start the group again very, very soon. So, it will be so fun to have you join us. The Somatic Studio is three months long, and it's not a coaching program.

The Somatic Studio is a somatics and nervous system education-focused program. It is live and has some fun recordings as bonuses. We talk all about you, your nervous system, how to map it, and we go into really great

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detail about it. We do a ton of live somatic practice. It's really a blast. It really is super-duper special.

I may not be doing it live again, maybe ever, or maybe not for a while. So, if you're interested, join us. I mean, it's a blast. We had so much fun when I last offered it, so I'd love to have you check that out.

So, shifting gears. This week, I was thinking about... Every week, when I write the podcast or share a previous episode, what I'm always thinking is, "What's the zeitgeist? What's going on? What are people thinking about?" I do this show to be of support, and so what do folks need right now?

And what I've really been noticing in the Anchored community, with the folks I DM with, you all, on Instagram, my community, my family, my friends, there's a lot of worry going around. I get it. There are a lot of things we could tell worry stories around, and our nervous systems jump to worry because they're here to protect us. They're here to keep us safe. So, it makes sense they jump to worry, and...

I've been saying this since I first started practicing medicine, what feels like a bajillion years ago, worry never accomplishes anything; taking action does. And of course, we need to work with our nervous system in order to get there. That is what we are going to talk about in this week's episode.

It's about worry, and your nervous system. It is an oldie but a goodie. And I'm really excited to share it with you. So, if you enjoy it, let me know. Share it in your community. I hope you enjoy.

Hello, hello, my love. I hope this finds you doing so well. It's so funny the way life works. When I was a primary care provider all those years, we'd have themes for the day that our patients would bring to us. Like, on Wednesday, everyone had a UTI. On Thursday, everyone had a sore throat. It's like it would be *the thing* for the day.

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And what's funny, is that I've been looking a lot at my own habit of worrying and spent some time over the holidays with someone who I love who has a tendency to project into the future, and to spin in anxious worry about things they can't control. And so, I've been doing a ton of thought work about my own worry habit, and I put together this episode for you.

You guessed it, as soon as it was done, I had six, literally, six life coaching clients on the same day who all came to talk to me about their worries. Funny, right? Like the universe was like, "Hey, Vic, this is a really important topic. The people are really worried."

So, I'm excited to talk with you today, and next week, all about worrying and how to release yourself from the sticky grasp of those old habitual worry thoughts. If you've been listening to the show, you've learned that you have the power to change your feelings through two amazing mechanisms:

By attending to your body and your remarkable nervous system. And by raising your awareness of your thoughts. Knowing that they lead to your feelings, upon which you take action and have a result in your life. The think-feel-act cycle I laid out in Episodes 35 to 37.

In Episode 38, we talked about how to take courageous action to live the intentional life of your dreams, which is my greatest dream. That through this show, and the work that we do together, you learn how to live your life on your own terms with intention and awareness.

And so, I'd like to posit that worrying is always optional. You heard that right. It's always a choice to go into worrying. It's not mandatory. Your brain might tell you it is. "He failed at math, so I have to worry. I found a lump, so I have to worry. I'm launching my business and maybe no one will want my offering, so I have to worry." But that's just habit thinking.

That's your monkey mind. Your old, unintentional story. "I have to worry," is not a fact because you never have to worry. In the thought work protocol we use, "Worry about it," is never the circumstance, the C-line. A

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Circumstance is something that we state when we're doing our thought work, which is a fact, something that 100% of people on the planet could agree with as fact.

Meanwhile, worrying is always a choice. It's a thought you're having, and it's an action you're taking. The important thing to recognize is that neuroscience has shown us clearly that human brains can only do one action at a time with full focus. And when you're worrying, that's an action.

Worrying is the action you are currently taking in your life. If you're focused on worrying, you cannot focus on the steps that would make your life better. Getting the kid a math tutor. Getting an ultrasound for that lump. Making offers in your business and providing value ahead of time.

Worry becomes your action. It's all you can do when you're doing it. And if you're taking action; calling the tutor, calling the doctor, putting your blog out there; you get to recognize that in that moment you've stopped worrying. Even if it's just long enough to make a call and get the next right thing moving, that's evidence that you can stop worrying if you choose to stop having worry thoughts. And how amazing is that?

The truth is, there's no situation in this human life that can be solved by worrying, or even improved by worrying about it. If worrying were a solution, we'd have a lot less problems in this world. Worrying solves *nothing*. It simply begets more worry.

And if there's something concerning in your life, and your reaction is to spend your limited time and energy on this planet worrying, you're just upsetting your nervous system more. Giving you something else to worry about, because your nervous system loves you and will respond by shifting into sympathetic activation, more freak-out.

Freak-out begets freak-out, scientifically speaking, of course. Listen, of course this isn't about blaming the victim. I'm not saying you're bad for worrying, quite the opposite. It's about empowerment.

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As I talked about before, in Episode 19, you can't heal hurt with more hurt. Worrying about something challenging just hurts you more, my darling. Instead, you can recognize your worry thoughts and can intervene on your own behalf.

Every time you hear yourself starting that thought, "I'm worried about..." you can recognize that you are making a choice, and you can make a different choice. Listen, I know that can feel really challenging, but that's the challenge, right? The challenge is to learn to intervene for your own best life by bringing your awareness to your thoughts, your feelings, the actions you're taking, and the results you're creating. How amazing is that?

And, to be empowered around your mental health is to start with education. To understand what in the effing-eff is happening in your head when you jump to worry as a thought habit. So we'll start there, my perfect one; profound feminist framework, education first.

As always, it's important to pause and to normalize worrying. So, nerd alert. Evolutionarily, you are wired to evaluate your surroundings for danger. To keep an eye out for things that may eventually kill you. This is the job of your nervous system, and in particular, your sympathetic nervous system, the one that manages fight or flight.

Thousands of years ago, the things that could possibly kill you were really simple to recognize; lion, tiger, bear, fire, flood, blood; so simple. As we have evolved, our bodies have gotten out of alignment with what is danger. We've lost our connection with that deep intuitive knowing of what is immediately dangerous, and our brains can run off to worry about all sorts of things that are completely out of our control.

Bodily symptoms and sensations are the number one thing that people worry and even panic about in my practice. Followed by, someone else's decisions or actions, and conversations they don't want to have, like with a partner or a boss. Those are the top circumstances that lead people down the worry superhighway to Nowheresville, USA, and fast.

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As a healthcare provider, let me say, no one's symptoms have ever improved because they've worried about them; not a one. Taking action, yeah, that could help. But spinning in worry, that's never helped migraine symptoms improve or a broken limb to heal. It never helped a preemie to mature or develop, or a pregnancy to go the way you want, or your Hashimoto's to heal.

Literally, the opposite happens when we stress. When we go into nervous, anxious worry, stress stops healing. Because science, and your perfect amazing sympathetic nervous system, which feels you worrying and thinks the end is neigh.

Of course, it's important to talk about social conditioning. Humans socialized as women are often trained and taught to worry about things like our appearance. Whether we're married and have kids at some appropriate age. If we're being a good parent. So many things. And if we're not meeting social norms, it's easy to globalize and to catastrophize. Catastrophizing is a topic I'll be covering very soon, it's sort of the cousin of worrying.

It's easy to make things like not being thin enough or pretty enough or, gosh, whatever enough, basically mean that we'll die cold and alone on a mountainside, right? No one's consciously thinking that, but your body may be responding as though you are thinking that.

Our culture, society, the patriarchy, capitalism, they give us a lot of invitations to worry. And I, at this point in my life, politely decline them all and invite you to do the same. Many of us were raised by adults who hadn't done their own inner healing work, who hadn't healed their inner children, and who worried as an automatic response.

One of my most beloved humans has this habit of worrying and freaking out. She frets and stresses and worries about things that my brain is like, "Gosh, I didn't even realize that someone could worry about that." Not in a judgment way, but in an earnest, "Wow, that is fascinating," way.

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And this interesting thing happens with worry. It's like we're trying to buffer against the feeling or sensation that's underneath the worry, by making it a cognitive process, by overthinking it. Trust and believe me, overthinking is my own personal favorite buffer, I know all about it. It's one that I'm working to rewire by raising my awareness.

My point is, my darling, we can use thinking as way to not feel. Especially if you have a trauma history and being in your body is too scary right now. Or if, like me, you were raised by serious nerds, and thinking was the most amazing thing you could ever do and feeling wasn't particularly prized.

So, before you start doing your thought work, I want to encourage you to do some nervous system work. Nervous system work is how you set yourself up to have the physiologic safety to do the thought work and to have it get you somewhere.

Imagine that you're in this moment of worrying, panicking, spinning in those thoughts that all is doomed. Just saying, "Oh okay, I'm going to have a new thought," is unlikely to work as well when your nervous system is activated, when you're feeling agitated.

Your sympathetic nervous system, the one that screams when you see a lion coming to eat your face, is all activated and online and running your body, and your parasympathetic, the rest-and-digest part, the calmer part, is offline, not running the ship.

And yes, my nerds, "freeze" is a part of the parasympathetic, but today, we're going to stay really simple here. I'll be diving more into the nervous system in later episodes.

Okay, my darling, when you're in sympathetic enervation... Enervation means those are the nerves that are firing and online, when your sympathetic is all revved up and going... your cognition is slowed for really good reason. You get laser-like focus and blood and energy flow to your brain, lungs, large muscles, and away from digestion, thyroid, thinking, feeling.

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Your brain is in a state where it's preparing because you may have to punch a lion in the nose or run from one, and you should probably be laser-like focused or you're going to be somebody's lunch. And when you're able to calm yourself, physiologically speaking, to get your parasympathetic back online... If you know from polyvagal theory, to move up the ladder... that is when you can focus, think, feel your perfect emotions and sensations, and can do thought work.

And have healthy digestion, healthy periods, good fertility, not have autoimmunity, have healthy mitochondria, not have an imbalanced mood; the list goes on and on. If your nervous system is dysregulated, my love, that gets to be your primary focus. It can be a super complicated process to reset a human nervous system, and getting started can be so simple and easy.

My three favorite ways to do this are: One, orienting. Two, body scan. And, you guessed it, breathwork. Do note that as I move through these three practices, that if what's going on for you in this moment, or what you tend to worry or even obsess about are physical symptoms, a body scan may not be the best place to go. It can actually be more dysregulating. Instead, I would start with orienting and focusing on your breathing.

There are many ways to practice orienting. The goal of this practice is to locate yourself in your body, in time and space, exactly where you are. Because when you're in fight or flight you're not fully aware of your body. You're just aware that there is a threat and you are prepared to react. It's a reactive place, not a responsive place.

Another nervous system option is "freeze", which is generally used when fight or flight aren't working for you. You can go into a panic place and can feel numbed out. It's a place where you sort of play dead, like what possums do. They play dead and the predator will hopefully leave them alone. Again, it's really challenging, and the opposite of your goal, to try and focus on cognition when you're in those fight, flight, and freeze states.

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So, let's give you some tools to get yourself out of that place when your brain starts worrying. "My son is failing math, so I have a lot to worry about. I found a lump and I'm so worried. I'm building this business, will anyone buy from me? I have to worry about that. I'm worried about starting this business."

Instead, you can focus on taking a big deep breath in and out, and begin to orient yourself exactly where you are. Like if you got off a boat on a deserted island and you orient yourself to the island.

So, what you're going to do is breathe deeply. Let's do it again together, in and out. Feel yourself in your body. Maybe even just taking that big deep breath started to calm you. It's a beautiful thing. Breathing in all that oxygen, blowing off all that CO₂, carbon dioxide, physically calms the body.

And, name five things you can see. So, in my office I see the microphone. I see my computer. I see my water glass. I see a plant. I see the door. I'm beginning to take myself out of that place where my brain is racing, worrying, jumping to the next thing, jumping to a future I can't control, and I'm orienting myself. I'm finding myself in this time, in this place, in this present moment. Five things I can see.

Next, I would name three things I can hear. I can hear myself talking. I can hear the humidifier's gentle rumble. And I can hear the neighbor's kids; I hope you can't hear them. But I can hear their sweet little voices. They're actually pretty cute. It sounds like they're singing downstairs. Aww, that's cute. Three things you can hear.

One thing that you can taste. I taste my lip gloss, it's delicious.

One thing minimum, if you smell more than that. One thing you can smell. I can smell the cedarwood I was diffusing before this call.

Five things you can see, three things you can hear, one thing you can smell, one thing you can taste. If you still feel a little agitated as you go through it, go ahead and name, in your mind or out loud, one thing you can physically feel.

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So, I can feel my seat. I can feel my butt in this chair. The chair is hard, but also has a certain give. I can feel my elbow on the table. I'm starting to orient myself in time and space. I am in this room. I am recording a podcast. There is nothing to worry about in this moment.

Another option is to do a body scan. Just to say it, before I forget, I have recorded both of these options for you. If you go to the show notes for this page, VictoriaAlbina.com/43, you can download both of these meditations. You can also go to VictoriaAlbina.com/bodyscan and those meditations will be right there for you to download as MP3s. Put them on your phone. You can do this on the subway, between meetings.

If your boss emails you and you feel yourself starting to worry, excuse yourself to the bathroom, or go to a conference room or step out. Orient yourself to time and space. Remind yourself that worry is always optional, it's not mandatory. It doesn't solve anything. Find yourself where you are. And if it feels safe, it feels like the right thing for you to do, you can also do a body scan.

So, in a body scan we go from the tips of our toes to the tips of our nose, checking in with each part of our body sequentially. Getting really in touch and really aware of what's going on in our bodies. Again, for folks with a trauma history, or folks for whom feeling into your body just feels whoa, overwhelming on that physiologic nervous system level, don't do it, my love.

The number one goal of all of my work is for you to live a profoundly intentional life, in which you are listening to your body, listening to your spirit, listening to your inner child, and are living in alignment with all of these signals, from your mind, body, and spirit. And you're choosing the thoughts and the feelings that serve you, so you can take action and get the results you want.

Pushing through your nervous system's signals, pushing through your limits, my goodness, babies, never a good choice. So, listen in. Take some deep breaths. Ask your body, "Is doing a body scan the right thing for me

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right now?” And if you hear your body say no, don’t do it. Stay with orienting. Really feel into that. Get yourself fully grounded.

And from there, from there, you can do the next right thing. Knowing that panic and worry will keep you from taking the actions you need to actually feel better and to live that intentional life. These simple tools will allow you to begin the project of the long-term calming of your nervous system, the rewiring. Isn’t it incredible that that’s possible?

So, when you start to see those warning signs that you’re approaching a limit, which can feel like tension in your neck, a weird queasy feeling in your belly, whatever it may be for you... I personally get itchy when I’m approaching a limit... you can start to orient your nervous system to this calm place all on your own, which is so amazing.

And, of course, that takes us to breathwork. The breathwork I teach is a three-part Pranayama breathwork, where we breathe deep into the belly, heart center, and out through an open, calm, relaxed mouth. I’ve come to call this breathwork “journey meditation” because it can be quite a psychedelic journey.

That is one kind of breathwork. But I want to say, breathwork is just paying attention to your breath. It doesn’t have to be a particular modality, and not every modality is the right one for you in a given moment.

Because I’ve spent these years really getting my nervous system settled, through the journey breathwork that I do, my body now responds to my going in-in-out with a profound, calming effect. I can literally feel my nervous system getting into better alignment. I just take those two breaths and out, and I feel myself woosh.

It’s this systemic calming. Like those moments right before sleep when your body is almost in this liminal space. It feels amazing. I do it on the subway, in the supermarket, standing in line at the bank. I just do it.

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A breath that might work for you is simply breathing in deeply, and out longer than you breathed in. Or doing the 4-6-8 breathing, where you breathe in, hold, out. Breathe in, hold, out for longer than you breathed in.

What you get to do, my darling love, is to come to understand what the most perfect breathing technique is for you in any given moment. By doing so, and by practicing breathing in alignment with your own body and your own need, you build confidence. You build trust in yourself, which is the most important thing.

And you build your body's capacity to believe you when you remind it that worry never serves you. Worry never gets you anywhere. Worry gets nothing done. Because when you're worrying, it's the action you're taking. Instead, you can do actions like orienting, doing a body scan, breathing deeply fully, in-in-out, or however it works for you.

Worry jacks your nervous system, takes your body out of alignment, and leads you to worry more and more and more.

Your homework, my love, is to bring your attention to those little signs and signals from your body that an emotional or physical limit is approaching. And to honor those signs and signals by orienting, breathing, centering, grounding, doing a body scan if that feels right, lying down and doing breathwork if that feels right, calming your central nervous system, and then reminding yourself of the true role of worry in your life.

It's a distraction that never, ever serves you. It keeps you from taking action, to call the math tutor, to get that scan scheduled, to put yourself out there in your new business.

Okay, my beauty, that's it for now. Practice this. Really work through it. Bring your awareness to it. And next week we're going to dive in on some thought work, it's going to be super-duper great.

Remember, my love, you are safe. You are held. You are loved. And when one of us heals, we help heal the world.

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Thank you for listening to this episode of *Feminist Wellness*. If you want to learn more all about somatics, what the heck that word means, and why it matters for your life, head on over to VictoriaAlbina.com/somaticswebinar for a free webinar all about it. Have a beautiful day my darling, and I'll see you next week. Ciao.