

Ep #320: What's Wrong with "Wellness"



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

BÉa Victoria Albina, NP, MPH

Ep #320: What's Wrong with "Wellness"

This is *Feminist Wellness*, and I'm your host, Nurse Practitioner, Functional Medicine expert, and life coach Béa 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. Listen, we gotta talk about it. Wellness has been hijacked. What once meant reclaiming health, presence, and wholeness through community care and interdependence has been flattened into a commodified, whitewashed industry of detox teas, yoga retreats priced at three months' rent, and the ever-elusive high-vibration state that you can only achieve if you buy the right white-labeled supplements, stick to the right diet, and inexplicably put coffee where coffee should never go.

And my loves, I cannot stress this enough. This is deeply dangerous, especially in the middle of outbreaks of both tuberculosis and measles across the US. My darling, mainstream wellness isn't neutral. It's a profitable commodity co-opted by white capitalist individualism. This wellness systematically excludes marginalized people, ignores race, class, disability, colonialism, all of the social determinants of health and actual wellness, and pretends to be apolitical.

But wellness, in reality, is never apolitical. If your approach to wellness ignores who has access to rest, care, healthy food, clean air, somewhere safe to live, bodily autonomy, protection from state violence, then it's not wellness. It's complicity. And that is why *Feminist Wellness* exists. Wellness is not a luxury good. It's your birthright.

Meanwhile, the wellness industry loves to talk about balance. But balance for whom? Wellness influencers prescribe endless self-care rituals and hours-long morning routine while ignoring the systems that perpetually exhaust marginalized bodies. They tell us to meditate away our rage without acknowledging rage as a perfectly understandable, intelligent, appropriate response to profound injustice. To optimize our focus while questioning why our worth is tied to productivity. That exhaustion regulation

Ep #320: What's Wrong with "Wellness"

are personal failures rather than consequences of living under white supremacy, patriarchy, and late-stage capitalism.

This approach makes suffering personal instead of structural. We believe our pain, our fatigue, our suffering is a personal failure rather than the logical result of living under systems that oppress us all. This is victim-blaming wrapped in a cashmere-weighted blanket.

Listen, I get why people are frustrated with Western medicine. I've seen its failures first-hand from both sides of the desk. As a holistic nurse practitioner, functional medicine clinician on the science side, not the snake oil side, and as a clinical herbalist, I've held space for people dismissed, ignored, and gaslit by a system designed for profit more than healing.

When I worked at a Medicare Medicaid clinic, I had just 15-minute patient intake appointments. 15 minutes. Not by choice, but because insurance-led medicine prioritizes shareholder profits over patient care. Within this system, marginalized people—women, BIPOC, queer, trans, fat, disabled folks—are systematically erased and denied adequate care.

It's clear from the research, women and BIPOC patients get less effective pain management than white men, even with identical conditions. Women's pain is often dismissed as anxiety or stress. Clinical trials overwhelmingly center white men, leaving other populations dangerously underserved. Fat phobia in medicine leads to worse outcomes and delayed diagnoses.

And when it comes to women's health, the neglect is staggering. Endometriosis, PCOS, adenomyosis, conditions that can be debilitating, are brushed off for years while women are told to just take an ibuprofen or that their pain is stress-related. Endometriosis alone affects one in 10 women, yet it takes an average of seven to 10 years to diagnose because doctors routinely dismiss pain as normal period cramps, effectively just telling you to buck up.

Autoimmune diseases, which disproportionately affect women, are under-researched, under-diagnosed, and often misattributed as solely anxiety.

Ep #320: What's Wrong with "Wellness"

Even life-threatening pregnancy complications like preeclampsia are ignored more often when reported by Black women, contributing to staggering maternal mortality disparities.

Women's pain is so systematically ignored that there's a documented gender pay gap. Doctors take longer to prescribe pain relief for women in emergency rooms compared to men with the exact same symptoms.

Now let's talk about PMDD, premenstrual dysphoric disorder. So many women experience severe mood shifts before their periods are dismissed as hysterical or thrown on psychiatric meds without anyone investigating the underlying cause. Histamine intolerance, mast cell activation, and hormonal dysregulation can be at the root cause for countless cases of PMDD, yet instead of looking at the nervous system and inflammatory pathways, women are misdiagnosed with bipolar disorder or psychosis and can be involuntarily admitted on a 5150 hold.

The fact that so many of these cases are just histamine issues that could be managed with proper care? Infuriated. Personally, I've navigated my own painful journey through severe digestive issues since I can remember. Specialist after specialist dismissed my symptoms, telling me it was in my head or suggesting absolutely absurd dietary restrictions. One guy told me to only eat beige food, that if I only ate potatoes, rice, white bread, I wouldn't have any symptoms. Are you freaking kidding me?

Western medicine left me desperate for real answers, which eventually led me towards science-based integrative medicine that honored the complexity of my symptoms and my humanity in a way those white coat guys weren't. Before medicine, I studied herbalism and plant medicine in the wise woman tradition. My first shot at trying to figure out what the heck was going on in my body, trying to heal myself because nobody else was.

What I love about herbal medicine, the way I studied it, the way I was taught, is it's a practice based not on purity, perfection, obedience, but rather on deep listening to our body, the land, the seasons, and ancestral

Ep #320: What's Wrong with "Wellness"

wisdom. What I learned from herbalism was simple. Healing takes time. The body speaks and whispers before it screams, so listen up. Health is relational, cyclical, and deeply tied to our environment and our connections with others and self. And that when the infection is severe, oh my god, get thee to the ER. Herbs are awesome, but they're not built for that.

Modern wellness appropriates ancient healing traditions like herbalism, stripping them from their cultural roots and repackaging them as pricey fads. True healing was never about buying your way into perfect health. It's relational, environmental, cyclical, deeply intuitive.

Likewise, the white wellness world has become a culture vulture, extracting spiritual practice like smudge sticks, sage, sacred cacao, stripping them of reverence and community, repackaging them for profit without acknowledgment or accountability.

And in studying herbal medicine and later functional medicine, my privilege was having the scientific and clinical training to distinguish evidence-based practices based in real, actual science, corroborated and corroboratable science from pseudoscience. Many others don't have this advantage. And this is exactly where the wellness industry preys. It's why they're trying to get us all to doubt scientists. The story that scientists go in it for the money? Beyond laughable.

And yet, when people feel abandoned by doctors, gaslit about their symptoms as so many of us have been, left to suffer without answers, we will look elsewhere. And who's waiting with open arms? An entire industry built on demonizing clinicians, medical clinicians. An entire industry built on the promise that they have the answers that medicine refuses to give you. An industry that says, we, as opposed to them, believe you, we will heal you if you do exactly as we say, no matter what your intuition is screaming at you. An industry that markets hope had a very steep cost.

In fact, the US wellness market is, per my Googling, a \$2 trillion industry. More than education, social services, or essential public health, yet we're

Ep #320: What's Wrong with "Wellness"

sicker, lonelier, and more burnt out than ever. That, it has manipulated people into rejecting actual science while swallowing the most absurd pseudoscience whole.

People die when wellness influencers convince them that cancer can be cured by raw food or butt coffee alone, that severe infections can be treated with garlic alone, or autoimmune diseases reversed solely with celery juice. The people buying this? They aren't stupid. They aren't careless. They're desperate. And they have been manipulated by an industry that profits off of their fear.

The wellness industry cruelly shames people away from life-saving medications like antidepressants, telling them to heal their trauma naturally, dangerously ignoring real suffering and evidence-based care that includes using medications thoughtfully at the lowest effective dose for the shortest duration necessary.

And I think that's the point, right? The point is not to say that all Western medicine is great and perfect and amazing. No! God, in my years as a primary care provider and in functional medicine, I'd have patients who'd been left on antihistamines for 20 years, antidepressants for decades and decades, and no one had talked about using the lowest effective dose for the shortest duration necessary. Right? People were on proton pump inhibitors without being put on B12. Right? Like, the science was not being followed in the Western setting either.

And I'm also not saying to ditch holistic or alternative medicine. Not at all. I'm saying to use Western medicine for what it's amazing at. I mean, come on. Gunshot wounds? Car accidents? Strokes? Antibiotics for raging of infections and vaccines to literally keep you alive and be a loving part of your community who protects people who are immunocompromised, babies who can't get immunized, people on chemo.

I'm saying to use modern innovations like fire to cook your meat instead of dying of wild bacterial infections, and to balance that with holistic practices.

Ep #320: What's Wrong with "Wellness"

Get out in the sun every day. Get sunshine on your skin, but don't roast yourself crispy. Move your body, eat nutrients-dense food, and reach for that red raspberry leaf tea or cramp bark tincture for your period pain. It's not an either/or. It's about discernment, integration, learning the science, and honoring the wisdom of both in their place.

And let me tell you, as someone who actually had a nasty lab-documented DNA-PCR-validated for real parasite, *Blastocystis hominis*, it's a particularly nasty little spirochete, that took nearly a decade to murder using both herbs and many rounds of potent antibiotics. Let me tell you what, your fad parasite cleanse that you're using for a parasite diagnosed under the full moon by some charlatan on social media? Baby, you're just flushing money and not parasites down the toilet.

My darling, they want you obsessing over seed oils instead of asking why ultra-processed food is all that millions can afford. They want you panicked about skin care toxins, and while it's important to think about the endocrine mimickers and the things we put on our skin, they want you panicked and obsessing about skin care toxins instead of questioning why corporations can legally poison the water supply.

They want you up in arms around red dye while millions of children and elders go hungry every single day in the U S of A. Why? Because fear sells, and once they've hooked you, they can manipulate what and who you trust. There's no profit in addressing systemic injustice, so they'd rather sell you chlorophyll drops for detoxing than confront the fact that billion-dollar corporations are dumping carcinogens into the water supply. And you know what? Don't worry about that anyway. They've got an essential oil for that.

White wellness capitalism profits from cultural appropriation. It co-opts Black, Indigenous, and Asian traditions, erases their histories, and sells them back at inflated prices. Yoga, herbal medicine, meditation, plant medicine—traditions rooted in resistance, liberation, community care—are sanitized, made an individual experience, and marketed for wealthy white audiences stripped of political and social-cultural context.

Ep #320: What's Wrong with "Wellness"

My beauty, colonialism never ended. It just rebranded as Goop. Which, full disclosure, I totally spoke at their events back in 2018 before they went fully off the deepest raw milk end. Gotta own that one. What are you gonna do? Just don't do it again, right?

So modern wellness preys on ancient healing traditions, turning them into pricey fads while erasing their relational, environmental, and communal roots. It extracts spiritual practices like smudge sticks and sacred cacao ceremonies, repackaging them for profit without reverence, accountability, or paying retribution to the communities those experiences and ceremonies were taken from. And it doesn't just erase, it actively fuels systemic oppression.

This sanitized wellness world tells you that health is entirely within your control, willfully ignoring lack of housing, food insecurity, racism, generational trauma, and systemic violence. Meanwhile, what maybe started as an earnest desire to feel better after your rushed, exhausted primary care doctor told you they had no answers quickly becomes a slippery slope.

Mainstream wellness lures folks into a conspiracy theory pipeline that takes holistic into holy-what-now territory. We've witnessed wellness influencers dismiss COVID as something to manifest away through positivity and privilege, ignoring the disabled, immunocompromised, and chronically ill who cannot vibe-check their way out of systemic abandonment. We've seen holistic spaces co-opt by anti-vax rhetoric, wellness influencers seduced by AI-Anon, and natural health used to promote eugenics-level ableism.

The alternative wellness space operates exactly like a cult. It isolates people, it uses fear to control them, and convinces them to reject decades of scientific evidence in favor of what some random guy on the internet said. Ignoring politics and reality doesn't make you more spiritual. It just makes you untethered from the world you actually live in.

Ep #320: What's Wrong with "Wellness"

Spirituality that demands attachment from injustice isn't enlightenment. It's privilege in disguise. True feminist wellness acknowledges that healing is inherently political and collective. It says clearly: your suffering isn't because of low vibrations. Your trauma? Not a thought error. Spiritual gaslighting that tells you that your illness or trauma is your fault is just abuse dressed up as empowerment.

Healing isn't about individual optimization, it's about survival, resistance, and collective liberation. Feminist wellness, intersectional feminist wellness to be specific, rejects spiritual bypassing, depoliticizes nervous system practices, perfectionism, individualism, and disembodied self-improvement narrative.

It instead centers somatic intelligence as a tool of resistance and liberation, a generative tool that supports us to imagine new beginning. It centers community care, mutual aid, and collective healing. Reckoning with grief, rage, injustice, and not love and light escapism.

As Audre Lorde famously said, caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it's self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare. Real self-care fuels our capacity for systemic resistance, not personal optimization. Because if we're all hyper-focused on fixing ourselves, we're too exhausted to fight the systems that are actually making us sick. If your wellness practice traps you in shame, guilt, and self-blame, that's not wellness. That's oppression disguised.

Feminist wellness isn't about achieving some unattainable state of perfect health. It's about creating resilience in your body, mind, community, and relationships to withstand and challenge oppressive systems. It isn't about shaming yourself for what you haven't done yet, haven't healed yet, or haven't bought yet. It's rooted in honoring your body's inherent intelligence and needs without judgment or perfectionism.

My version of wellness embraces simplicity, accessibility, and integration. It's about understanding the strengths and limits of various healing

Ep #320: What's Wrong with "Wellness"

methods. Embracing herbal medicine and traditional wisdom alongside evidence-based medical care, rather than rejecting one for the other. Recognizing somatic intelligence as essential for healing not just trauma and not as another life hack for productivity, but as a vital part of healing our digestion, our thyroid, our mood.

Using medications thoughtfully at the lowest effective dose for the shortest necessary duration and doing the same with supplements? You don't need to be on fistfuls of supplements for the rest of your life. What is the smallest number of supplements you can take at the smallest dose? And how can we pair thoughtful, science-based medication use with holistic tools to support sustained healing and all of that based in the science?

So yeah, if the medication depletes a nutrient, let's replete that nutrient. That kind of thinking is what we need. My version of wellness also understands wellness as inherently political, collective, and relational, rather than individualistic and isolated. Ultimately, feminist wellness seeks to restore power, dignity, and agency to people who've been systematically denied them. It asks you not just how you'll heal yourself, but how your healing can support collective liberation.

When I name my podcast *Feminist Wellness*, I intentionally reclaimed the word wellness as a statement. Wellness must acknowledge oppression, injustice, and collective liberation. Wellness is relational and political, not individualistic. My beauty, I won't abandon this term. And if reclaiming wellness disrupts the whitewashed wellness industrial complex, then good. It was never built for us anyway.

So, thank you for joining me. I'm so glad you're here. Let's do what we do. Gentle hand on your heart should you feel so moved. 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 beauty. Take good care of you. I'll talk to you soon. Ciao.

Ep #320: What's Wrong with "Wellness"

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 BeatrizAlbina.com/somaticswebinar for a free webinar all about it. Have a beautiful day, my darling, and I'll see you next week. Ciao.