

Ep #8: Analysis Paralysis



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With Your Host

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When we don't manage our minds, our minds manage us. When we don't get clear on what we want first and foremost for ourselves, everything looks like a golden ticket, a great opportunity. Our vision is clouded and our health can suffer. In contrast, when you plan what you're going to think ahead of time, you decide how you're going to feel.

Then you can take action based on the thoughts and plan you chose ahead of time before there was pizza or sugar or booze in front of you, before you heard the siren song of the couch and that new show on Hulu while you've got a ton of deadlines looming. And deciding what you want to do with your time and energy and committing to doing it is how you get things done without spinning in indecision.

Instead, you can act in the service of your own joy and wellness, rather than acting from a place of anxiety, fear, lack, and worry. By constraining your thoughts and not falling prey to analysis paralysis, you too can live the life of your dreams.

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.

Hello, hello, my kittens. I hope that you are doing oh so well today. I want to share something vulnerable with you. I got into quite the brain spin about recording this podcast. So, I've been in the health and wellness space for 20 years and I'm so excited about this podcast that I want to share all the things with you, all of them, all at once.

And that means it's hard to pick a thing. Should I share about the perfect poop and how to get it or vaginal health or codependence first? Should I

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talk about the CBT self-coaching model I use or, oh resentment, that's a good one? What about thyroid health?

This list went on and on in my head and I was caught in a spin, like a mental tornado threatening to pull me up into its cloud of dust and doom. Instead, I took a deep breath and I asked myself what I felt most passionate about sharing today with you. And I chose to focus on my own current issue; what was happening in that moment when my brain was spinning in a million different directions about this here podcast.

And the issue is analysis paralysis and the solution is constraint of thought. And here's the kind of really silly thing; I put all of my podcast ideas on a calendar and I have a clear idea – generally speaking, I am a human who plans my work and works my plan. But in this moment of spinning out about what to record, I let my brain manage me.

I got caught up in my own story and my subsequent feelings of being overwhelmed. I started spinning in analysis paralysis. All of the options sounded amazing and that made it hard to pick just one. When we tell an overwhelm story to our brain, our brain takes that as a sign of imminent doom.

Let's pause and remember the science here; when we get worked up about whatever it is, our adrenaline spikes. And that's followed by cortisol. And our brains start to think that we're about to be eaten by a lion and our minds get all cluttered, like the before-closet Marie Kondo show. And it's hard to figure out what to do.

When 57 things come to mind, what can happen is you get caught up in trying to find the most perfect thing. The story that perfect even exists can keep us from doing anything. Until I paused long enough to coach myself, my brain was right there spinning around trying to find the most perfect

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thing to talk to you about today, which is a particularly silly thing for me to be spinning in because perfectionism isn't a thing I even believe in.

But I know myself to have this very old thought habit of perfectionism that I coach myself around most days, but still creeps up upon me here and there. Luckily, this time I caught myself. I recognized what my brain was doing. I paused, checked in with my body, took some long slow deep breaths.

What was really happening was that I was tired from travel and, frankly, I wanted to be back in Mexico on the beach with my amazing partner, Ash. So, I meditated. I took a hot shower, I did some deep breathing, and I took some space to remember to go back to my plan. I had planned my work, but my downfall was in not working my plan.

Luckily, it's an easy ship to right, it just takes being your own watcher and bringing your awareness to what's going on in your mind and body so you can manage yourself. I see this issue of analysis paralysis all the time in clinic, and it gets in the way of folks meeting their health goals.

Patients want to make changes to their nutrition or exercise or want to meditate, reduce stress and they put barriers up in their minds to these changes that they know will help them feel better. I had a patient the other day who said she wanted to meditate every day but couldn't. When we looked at why, she started in on this super common story that I hear pretty often that she'd pull out her phone in the morning to find a meditation app and she'd get overwhelmed by the choices. There were like 10 different options on her phone.

Then, when she finally picked an app, she opened it and saw like 20 different meditations and she couldn't figure out, in that moment, which one to choose. A clear case of analysis paralysis.

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I had another patient who explained that she had used the hour she had planned to spend working out searching online for the perfect yoga class. Here's a little secret, my loves; the perfect meditation and the perfect yoga don't exist. And your focus on finding the very best one keeps you from starting and on meeting your own goals.

Perfect is forever the enemy of just frigging done, my loves. And I want to invite you to release any story that you may be carrying around about doing these self-care practices in some perfect way if those stories are keeping you from getting started.

Another place where analysis paralysis can creep up on you is in future tripping, which is worrying and spending your time and energy, right now in this only moment that you're guaranteed, worrying about tomorrow, which studies show is a thing you cannot change.

So, I'm working with a client right now who is concerned that the organization where she works might be folding. She panicked when she heard about this and reached out to like half a dozen people about finding a new job. The offers started coming in and she began to spin out on the details of each one.

What would the hours be? How well did it pay? Would she even like the work? She even started to worry about her new commute for a job she hadn't even applied for while, in fact, her current job was still hers. No pink slip had sullied her doorway.

Her brain, which was operating from a place of fear and scarcity had escaped into future dread, focusing not on the task or issue at hand, but worrying about the future and creating a story of overwhelm in her mind. Overwhelm stories are so bad for your health. Beyond the spiking of adrenaline and cortisol, these stories steal your power and you send up

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spinning instead of taking what may be very small doable steps to improve your health.

Given a thousand options or faced with the task you need to do, like meditating or exercising, but kind of don't want to do, your brain may scream, "This is the moment to watch all of the Netflix or scroll the social medias endlessly until the alarm goes off and you're about to be late for work and have to run out of the door in a frantic state." Or at least, that's what my brain loves to scream at me when I need to do something I don't fully want to do; something I'm not fully deeply invested in.

When we're telling a negative story about a task, an I-don't-want-to-do-it story, a tantrum story, a complaining story, your brain thinks you're under attack. So of course, your brain isn't going to let you do that thing that you're telling yourself you don't want to do, or kind of want to do, or that thing that feels scary or weird because it's new and brains don't like new things.

And these chemical reactions happen because your brain is worried that that thing, be it meditating, exercising, doing your taxes, whatever, is something you're going to fail at. And that failure is likely to kill you. Our brains are very happy hanging out in analysis paralysis, over facing the thing we don't want to face. This is where our solution comes in; constraint of thought.

Almost every patient I saw this week has had a constraint of thought problem. They were letting too many inputs flood their brain and they weren't committing to a thought or an action, like recording their podcast when they said they would...

Let's remember that your lizard brain, the oldest part of the human mind, is constantly scanning the horizon for that next thing that will kill you; lion, tiger, bear, you know the rest. Luckily, my love, you have a prefrontal

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cortex. What's that, you ask? It's the most recent addition to our thinking apparatus in the front-most part of the head.

Its job is what's called executive function, to help you plan complex cognitive behavior, personality expression, decision-making, and to help you moderate social behavior, meaning the prefrontal cortex keeps you from screaming out loud like a toddler when you want that cupcake at the bakery, although you may scream all about it in your head.

The prefrontal cortex makes sure your thoughts and actions are in line with your internal goals, helps you figure out conflicts, whether things are good or bad, better, or the most bestest, to predict outcomes, and to make a choice when you have conflicting thoughts or information. My favorite job of the prefrontal cortex, it's where we think about thinking, the meta-practice that's key to everything I teach, that you don't have to believe your own thoughts.

You can learn to be their watcher and can learn to choose different thoughts if the old ones don't lead you to feel, act, and have the results you want in your one perfect life. The back part of the brain, in contrast to the front, holds the places where automatic thoughts live; the things we don't have to consciously think about, we just do, like walking or putting on shoes.

We just do these things because we learn them and now they're ingrained in us; left foot in shoe, right foot in shoe, tie them up, start walking. Many of our thoughts can be this way too, like we start to feel tension in our bodies. We interpret that as anxiety and start telling the story that we're overwhelmed and need to not record our podcast right now, or that we can put off doing that work assignment or making that call that we're dreading.

We sit in indecision about which meditation to do when we're telling a story about overwhelm and get paralyzed by over analyzing the options. Or we

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take the pizza or cake we're offered, even though we know it will make us feel terrible, because brains love quick sugars and efficiency and cake provides that fuel you need to run right now when you see a saber-toothed tiger, even if you feel terrible for three days after eating it.

The issue here is tapping into that slow-moving, thoughtful executive function in your prefrontal cortex and stepping out of those automatic hind-brain thought habits so you can make the daily choices that will get you to your goals of feeling marvelous. And the key to it all is constraint of thought.

And what I mean by this is to decide ahead of time what you are going to think, feel, and therefore do in a given moment, not while you're all stirred up and spinning. Plan for your future self and her success. Make a commitment to yourself. Make the choice as easy and as simple as possible and don't indulge in urges, whims, spinning in indecision and your desires to do something other than what you committed to.

This, my love, is how you heal, by building trust in yourself that you will do what you promised yourself you'd do. Sure, eating food that feels good, meditating, yoga-ing – is that a word? That can't possibly be a word. That's a word now. Yoga-ing is vital for healing, no doubt. And I deeply believe that one of the most powerful parts of these practices is doing them because you said you would, instilling trust in yourself for yourself.

On the simple daily, I remember back to when I was a kid. My mom, Carmen – what's up, Carmen – did all these really simple things to make our mornings so much easier. Like, she made my sister and I pick out our clothes for the next day before bed because she knew, if you pick your clothes out at 7am, it's going to be a cluster. So don't try to change your outfit when the sun is barely up. Just put on your dungarees – oh my god, okay, wait, dungarees. Why did that work pop into my brain? That is such a great word.

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Put on your dungarees and go. Make an easy meal, take it to work and eat it. Record the podcast even though the couch is singing your name. Don't spin about that term-paper, that article, that spreadsheet. Tell yourself when you're going to do them and do them. Get up and go to the gym or do your two-minute meditation. Any meditation will do, seriously. And do it because you told you you would.

What feels more amazing than being rigorously honest with yourself and following through with your own goals? Few things, my sweet love, few things.

So, what about my client who was spinning out with the job offers? We talked it out and what she needed to do was decide ahead of time. As these job offers come in, I'm going to sit back and see what comes and what happens with my current job. When I have all the information I need, then and only then, I will begin to evaluate my options.

Stressing and spinning about this possible layoff and which job to choose next brings me no joy and all the stress. I don't need to think about it until I need to think about it, so I shan't. From that place of calm neutrality, she has been able to manage her mind and make better choices than when she's operating out of fear.

The same goes for all of you who are trying to make nutrition changes and find yourself freaking out about what and how you'll eat, dialing through a million different options while the clock keeps ticking and you grow hungrier and hungrier until your blood sugar is so completely effed that you finally say, forget about it, so what I was trying to eat gluten free, and you have a pizza, which frankly is a reasonable thing to do if it's the only thing around, and you've let yourself go so far off the rails you're about to melt or hangrily rip someone's head off.

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But if pizza makes you feel as bad as it makes me feel, all heartburny, headachey, depressed and anxious the next day, or whatever, then spinning in indecision, in analysis paralysis, at 11am, at noon, at one, at two, until you're so hungry you're not in your highest thinking about your choices does you 0.0% good and leads to you making decisions that do not serve you.

This is when we constrain our thinking and plan ahead of time. For example, on Sunday, maybe y'all get a rotisserie chicken and some frozen veggies and some salad greens. I'll make enough for three days of lunches, and then Wednesday night, I'll make some organic sausages, more frozen veggies, depending on the time of year and how busy I am, and a whole bunch of salad greens for lunch for the rest of the week.

I plan all of these little things ahead of time so I don't waste my limited energy on the daily BS. I have a plan I can follow, a set of rituals and routines that keep me on track. If you feel mired in the question of, what should I eat, keep it simple and get it done. Do some menu planning and some food prep.

Make those choices ahead of time so you aren't making them when you're stressed out and hungry. Make life easier on yourself instead of risking a spinning thought tornado on the daily. It can also help to work on setting aside perfectionism and recognizing that there is, in fact, no perfect choice. Everything has its plusses and everything in life is an opportunity to learn the next lesson you need to learn, including not working out, not meditating, and eating food that makes you feel yucky, because you get to pause and look at what was going on before you made those choices.

What is the barrier there to you making the next right choice, noting, of course, that the next right choice is never a choice made from a place of fear or worry? That's when our minds are managing us. Instead, we need to step back and create and hold space for our intuition and in our

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guidance, to let us know what the next right thing is, to listen to our bodies and not the old cassette tapes in our minds.

And also, remember that you can always do something, just one small thing as a commitment to yourself and your own best wellness, whatever that means to you. So, you missed the yoga class. What are you going to do? It's over. Take the stairs instead of the elevator. Stretch in your office for five minutes. Get off the subway a stop early and walk.

Do the little things that helps your brain know it can trust you. And don't let your quest for perfect be the enemy of good. And for goodness sake, don't beat yourself up for getting into a mental tornado. It happens to all of us and beating you up about it does no good, and it certainly won't get you to the gym or get that deadline met. It will just create more fear in your brain that if you don't manage to achieve perfection, there's a consequence that hits deep, which is you being mean to you.

I want your daily self-care, your meditation, nutrition, supplements, medication, journaling. You're sticking to the schedule you made yourself to be non-negotiables; not things to check off a list each day, but rather to be the things you do because you just do them.

Let's go back to shoes. So it's your automatic mind that knows how to put shoes on, and you wouldn't leave the house without putting shoes on if you live in a city, but you likely don't think about it. You just do it. It's a habit, not a daily decision, not a thing to contemplate and get into paralysis around. Probably very few of us are like, well I could go out into New York City barefoot, or I could put on my scuba slipper thingies, or I could wear stilts today. I mean, it's Wednesday, it seems like a good day for stilts.

Why roll around in all that decision and indecision? Decide what you're going to do for yourself and make these things your lifestyle; what you just do without even thinking about it. I wear shoes outside in New York City,

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and after years of practice and dedication, I have a morning routine that works for me.

I wake up, connect with higher power, drink my sole water with diluted apple cider vinegar, meditate and journal, put on my 27 sports bras, because come on, who needs two black eyes at the gym, am I right? And go to the gym or for a run or a walk or yoga, depending on what day of the week it is. I don't even think about these things anymore. I just do them. And no matter what my brain says, I don't indulge in thoughts of hitting snooze or lying on the couch looking at the 'Gram, or just opening my work email just for a minute.

I know that doing these few simple things on the daily is the key to maintaining the digestive and mental health that I have worked so damn hard to secure in my life. And the tradeoff is just not worth it. Skipping exercise, eating processed foods, not meditating or journaling, not trusting myself to do what I said I would, it's a slippery slope back into feeling like broiled garbage. And I'm just not here for that.

So, I plan my life and I live that plan, and it works. And I get shit done. When I take time in the morning to meditate, exercise, et cetera, I'm not taking away from my work time, I'm adding into my work capacity for the day, for the week, for the month, and for my life. I show up for myself and I show up for you each week.

When I started spinning in indecision about this recording, I took a moment to check in with myself, to recognize, name, and own my own spin, and to remind myself of just how good it feels to do what I told myself I would. And thus, you're listening to this podcast, despite my brain's deep desire to spin in indecision and daydreams of a cold coconut in Tulum.

And you can do this too, my loves. You can set and meet remarkable goals. You can leave your nine to five and build the career of your dreams.

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You can take your medication or supplements every day on schedule. You can get that raise. You can exercise. You can meditate, and you can make rumination, indecision, chronic pain, fatigue, digestive, or mental health issues, and not trusting yourself a thing of the past by making the next right choice for your wellness one small action and one day at a time.

Your homework for this week, my love, is to pick one little thing, not all of the things, and commit to it this week. Put it on your calendar, schedule it, and just do it, no matter what your brain may say. Two minutes of meditation, two flights of stairs, whatever it is. Remember, it doesn't really matter. The work here is learning to trust yourself deeply, so set it, do it, and learn to believe in you.

Are you worried because you don't believe in yourself yet? That's cool. I know that you can do anything you set your mind to, and you can borrow my faith in you until you've proven yourself to yourself to yourself. I've got faith enough to go around.

Thank you for listening to the *Feminist Wellness* podcast. I hope this information was useful. And the next time you see yourself starting to spin into analysis paralysis, you can pause, take a deep breath, and do that next right thing for you.

If you could also take a moment right now to go to the iTunes to subscribe, rate, and review the show, it's super vital for helping this podcast appear in the search function so that humans worldwide can find this show and can get this free healing resource for their wellness. To show my endless gratitude for you putting me on your to-do list, I have a special gift; my own handcrafted organic essential oil rollers that I'm completely obsessed with.

They're really fabulous adjuvants to your health and they smell good. So I'll be sharing the gift of two rollers, one an enlivening blend for the morning or

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any time you're feeling a little low in energy, and a stress-reducing one that I use in the evening to help calm me down and to help with sleep.

So, I'll be sharing this gift with five beautiful mammals that review the show and send me a copy of their review. There's a lot more detail on the giveaway, how to review the show, et cetera at victoriaalbina.com/itunes. Thanks in advance for your help, my wonderful love. I am grateful for you. I hope you have a beautiful week. Please, take gentle loving care of yourself. And remember, when one of us heals, we help heal the world. Be well.

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.