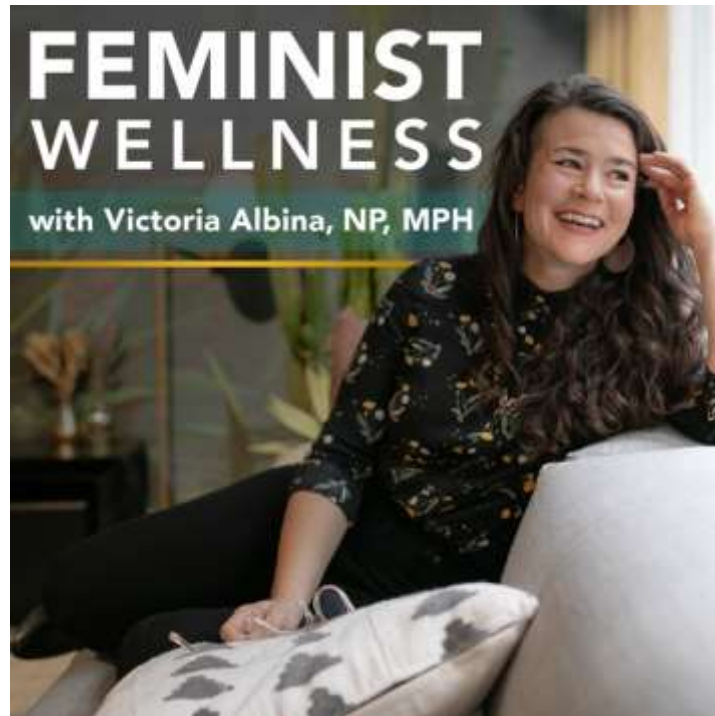


## Ep #36: Feeling



### Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

**Victoria Albina, NP, MPH**

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I've been musing about the concept of self-care and my deep belief that the most powerful self-care we can do is to learn to manage our minds. To think about our thinking and to become aware of the think-feel-act cycle that is happening in the background in our minds and our bodies.

In the background, that is, until we actively turn our thinking to our thinking. Getting meta right off the bat here, darling. This week we'll be diving in to talk about feelings and how vital, grounding, and empowering it is to feel our feelings in our bodies. It's an important topic so keep listening, my love.

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 love. I hope this finds you doing so well. I am traveling so much in the coming weeks. I was just in Dallas recently to give a lecture entitled, "Holistic Approaches to Depression and Anxiety," and I'll be in Philly and Boston in the coming weeks to give that same talk, in San Francisco for a small group coaching event, and in Chattanooga, Tennessee for my dear heart-sister Ayesha's birthday party.

Ayesha is the goddess behind The Girlfriend Manifesto. If you haven't checked it out on the Instagrams, do. She's amazing. And then, oh my gosh, It's Thanksgiving. So much fun travel.

And I've been thinking I should put all thinkings about staying healthy while traveling into one place, so hop on over to my website, [victoriaalbina.com/travel](http://victoriaalbina.com/travel) to grab a blog post on that. And I just put my elderberry syrup recipe up on my website, and if you don't know elderberry syrup, it's amazing. It's a super time-honored way to help boost our

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immune systems to keep ourselves from getting winter colds and flus and can actually reduce the duration of cold and flus once we've gotten one.

So it's also delicious, which is, as you can imagine, one of my top priorities. I love things that are delicious. So I'll put a link in the show notes so you can go online to [victoriaalbina.com](http://victoriaalbina.com) and grab that elderberry syrup recipe. It's super amazing and yeah, yummy.

So my darling, let's do a quick recap on the last episodes before I dive in once more. In our conversation about self-care, we've been talking about my beloved think-feel-act cycle, and how vital it is to get in touch with and then get some distance from our own thoughts, so we can evaluate and understand them, knowing that you are not your thoughts.

They are just sentences in your mind, written by your past self, by your monkey mind. And if you want to write a different present, a different now, a different tomorrow into existence, if you want to truly care for yourself in a deep way, to get unstuck, to build your own confidence, to build your sense of worth, value, self-esteem in this beautiful world, one beautiful way is to learn how to step into the role of being your own watcher. So you can understand that you are not your thoughts, or your feelings, and you can begin to do the thought work protocol that has been so life-changing for me.

So last week, we went deep on the thoughts part of the think-feel-act cycle in episode 35. And today we'll be diving deep on feelings or emotions, words I'll be using interchangeably today.

If you want to understand why you feel stuck in your life, why you're not taking action to change your world, or are taking actions that don't move you towards your goals, towards healing your relationship with yourself and the world, if you want to feel more confident, more wildly in love with you every day, and you want to do the self-care things that help you feel

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wonderful from a truly self-loving place, not just as another way to beat yourself up or value yourself based on your productivity, then it's vital to understand this cycle so you can put this tool in your healing toolbox and can thus change your whole world.

So, feelings. A feeling is an emotional state, a reaction. In the thought work protocol, we use - we recognize that our thoughts create our feelings, and we work with each feeling as a single word. Bored, angry, frustrated, happy, calm, peaceful, annoyed, joyful. And for most of us, feelings like these; I'm disappointed, I'm sad, I'm angry. These are the easy ones to point to, to recognize.

An important philosophical point for me is that I do not believe that emotions are positive or negative. They're just more information, and that's a fantastic thing to have. We can totally say that we would prefer not to spend our lives predominantly rolling around in anger or sadness.

Sure, those feelings may not be pleasant to find yourself in often, but calling them bad, negative, my love, that doesn't serve you. What you label as negative, you likely push away, and I think all feelings are worth exploring because they are teachers. There's something behind it each and every time.

And I'll also say, and yes, I'm taking a page from the book of the stoic philosophers here, that life is a solid 50% joy and 50% suffering. It's only by experiencing the "negative" that we have a barometer for the "positive." That is, how would you know that you are happy if you have never known sadness, if there is nothing to compare it to? It's like, how would you know that there's light in a room if you've never experienced darkness?

So as we move through this work, I want you to remember that your negative thoughts, just like your positive thoughts - and I'm doing little bunny air quotes with my fingers right now as though you could somehow

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see my mittens moving. Anyway, things that we are often labeling positive and negative, we can just drop all that.

There's no need to judge it. You simply get to explore it, feel it, and ask what it has to teach you. If you want to build deep self-love, to engage in meaningful self-care, which is the theme that brought us together here today, it behooves you to understand and get in touch with your emotions so you can understand your actions in this world, which we'll be talking all about next week.

If you want to build more confidence, more self-love, this is a necessary process. And the process we use is the three A's. Awareness, acceptance, action. Before you can take thoughtful intentional action in this world, you need to know what you're feeling, to be aware of your feelings in your body and the thoughts creating them.

And to do the often challenging and important work of accepting your thoughts and feelings. What you resist persists, so I encourage you to do the work of getting deeply in touch with your own feelings, so you can harness them for your highest good.

So recently I was working with a gal named Jen, and she came to me with a long history of anxiety, low self-confidence, and I really identified with her because I lived with so much anxiety, so much thinking that in a deep sort of subconscious place that I wasn't worthy, that I wasn't of enough value. And I'm so grateful for both thought work and breath work because it's helped me to turn the beat around on that.

So Jen often felt anxious in new situations and found herself avoiding going out, meeting new people, buffering with food, alcohol, or my personal favorite, overthinking. And I will call myself out here. Oh my god, I buffer by overthinking so often. Thank goodness I have a system that I know to pause, to write down my thoughts, to take a look at them. Can I overthink.

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So when Jen did venture out to a conference, a party, a meet up, she didn't feel good about herself and she had a lot of self-defeating thoughts, which kept her feeling more anxious. So Jen had a new job, and was having a ton of anxious thoughts about starting work. She was anxious thinking about how anxious she would be, which again, I so relate to. Like that future tripping on the anxiety that may come makes us so much more anxious in this moment.

So we started by talking about the thoughts she was having about starting work and she said that she was worried that people would judge her. Jen talked about how much she hated that she still had these thoughts, that she was still doubting herself. She was judging herself for judging herself, judging herself for doubting herself, and all of that anxious, doubting, thinking was keeping her feeling stressed and anxious.

Jen's train of thought here is such a good example of what we discussed last week, that we often have thoughts that we believe to be true, that are not objective, not something based in actual fact. And yet are thoughts we continue to believe because we're so used to just thinking it, believing it.

For Jen, those troubling thoughts were that she would show up for her new job in an industry she knew very well, had tons of experience in, lots of fancy degrees in, and the fear, the troubling thought was that everyone would realize she was an imposter. That while they read her CV, interviewed her, called all her references, gave her the job, made a little plaque for her desk, she was having the thought that she was so unqualified for this job.

Clearly a fraud. And this felt true to her. Totally true. And these thoughts that she Wouldn't fit in, people wouldn't like her, they would realize she was a fraud were creating her anxious feeling. Now, let's pause and look at this. The new job here is completely neutral. It's a job. It's not good, it's not bad,

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it's not actually fraught in any way. You show up, you do the work, you exchange money for goods and services. it's a job.

And they hired her. They marked her qualification by hiring her. And the job itself, it can't make Jen feel anything at all. It's a noun. A person, place, or thing. It just is. When I asked Jen to think about the existence of jobs in the world and to check in with her body to see how she felt, she felt nothing. Neutral. Blank.

The fact of jobs existing didn't make her feel a darn thing. It was once she started thinking all the thoughts we just visited about herself and this new job, that she started to feel anxiety in her body again. Her thoughts created her feelings about this situation. The situation itself didn't make her feel a darn thing, because it can't. It's just a job.

And when I asked her again about how these thoughts that we just wrote down made her feel, Jen started telling me again, how she thinks they'd all hate her, that she wouldn't make friends, how they'll find out she's an imposter, not capable of doing this job. Not a feeling word in the bunch.

Just a ton more thoughts in lieu of checking in and identifying a feeling. And this is so common. We aren't taught to identify our feelings, particularly when they're attached to long-held stories about ourselves. We believe our thoughts about a situation are true and real and objective and fact, and we think our thoughts are our feelings. We conflate them. We confuse them. We make them one in the same, that the monkey-mind thoughts that habitually race through your mind are your feelings.

And common though this is, when we are working to be our own watcher, to observe our brains in action, to be able to see our thoughts, to detach from them, to understand that they are just habits and don't define us, this is the vital first step in mind management.

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And the goal of thought work is to do this on the daily so we can see the thoughts that create our feelings. And it's so vital to be able to know and name what we're feelings without judgment or adjectives, to learn how to say, I'm feeling angry, I'm feeling anxious, disappointed, joyful, frustrated, calm, sad.

So my darling, how do you know when you're having an emotion? The answer lies in your perfect human body. This is the awareness part of our work. Awareness, acceptance, action. Every feeling or emotion provokes or creates a physical experience of that feeling state, mediated by the vagus nerve - I forgot to give a nerd alert.

So vagus nerve. Every feeling, every emotion leads to changes in heart rate, breathing pattern, and can be marked by different sensations in your body. When I feel nervous about speaking up, my throat feels tight, right in the throat chakra. And if I breathe into it, get really present with it, I can see and feel that it's blue. The energy is heavy and vibrating at a low, steady hum.

Before I give a lecture or do a webinar I get that feeling that most of us will recognize. Butterflies in my tummy. A buzzing sensation of energy in my belly that is light and fluttery and sometimes a little queasy-making. When I'm sad or disappointed, I feel it behind my eyes.

Take a moment, right now, my darling, to breathe into your own body, feel into where you feel these things. Speaking up energy, nervous energy, sad, disappointed energy, calm, peaceful, joyful energy. Connect in with where you feel these feels in your body. This is both science and sacred. Neurochemistry interacting with your body and the movement of your own energy, divinity, great spirit, whatever you call the energy of creation, of life, moving through you to let you know what's up.



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The studies are clear and there's so much written on this. Our emotional state changes our biochemistry, changes our neurochemistry, our physiology. Our emotions create a physiologic state.

And this movement of biochemicals and energy can be so subtle that we can move right through it, not even pause to notice them, or can get acclimated to it if they're really common for us. Like the hum of low-grade anxiety always in the background.

You might find yourself biting your nails to the quick without even realising you're doing it, without noticing that you're feeling anxiety and you're channeling it into this subtle self-harm. So very common, my love.

Often when we feel an emotion, we bypass the body because that's what we've been taught. To give the brain primacy and to focus on cognition, on thoughts. And yes, I talk endlessly about the power and importance of our thoughts, but the bodily experience of emotions is not to be ignored if you want to grow, to heal, to make different decisions in the world.

And we've all had the experience of ignoring a feeling only to have it come out sideways. Like when you're angry about something that happened at work and suddenly you're snapping at your beloved dog, partner or partners - I see you, my poly babies.

Let's face it, those folks had nothing to do with your feeling pissed at your boss, feeling aggravated that you're in this same old job you just don't want to be in, or that they're so disorganized you always have to pick up the slack, and all of a sudden, it comes out in ways that you may not be proud of or may have to make amends for.

Have to. I never want to focus on have to. You get to. You get to make amends. But might it not serve you more to learn to pause, to not bypass your perfect body, to feel the feels, and learn to process them through

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before doing the thing you may need to make amends for? Always a work in progress, my darlings. I'm not perfect at it. I'm working on it each and every day.

So, a feeling. A feeling is not a thought. It's an experience. It's mediated by your history, your trauma, old stories, what you were taught growing up, how you've learned to cope. And a feeling lives in your body. Your feelings may feel automatic, and let's get clear here, nerd alert once more, sometimes the first feeling that floods your body is automatic.

Mediated by your vagus nerve in response to an old story, trauma, stressor, experience, and that shift can happen in milliseconds. From totally okay to panicked or angry or worried or what-have-you and that's okay. That's natural, normal, just perfect. That first automatic vagus nerve mediated feeling is not a problem. It's your body literally doing what it's evolutionarily programmed to do to attempt to help you to survive.

It becomes a problem when you react and make it a problem in your mind. Instead, I'll invite you to take a deep breath and to realize that it may take a while before you can stop that first flash of feeling in response to an event, which is often called a trigger in both common and psychological parlance, and to learn to know, to believe and trust that through neural retraining, reprogramming of our mind and body, our vagus nerve can learn to react less to triggers. To have a new response instead of that old freak out reaction.

Thought work is a vital part of that work. Showing yourself that you can show up for you when a trigger happens. And where you have power is in your next choice. The thought you think in response to that split-second feelings flood. That's where you can take back your power to create the life you want, my love.

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It's okay if you can't interrupt that flood of vagally-mediated feelings. Totally okay. If you were bit by a dog when you were a kid and you see a dog without a leash, without a human, roaming the street, flood of feelings in your body. That's okay. What you get to do is show up for those feelings, feel them, breathe into them, and know that you can pause and choose your response, that next thought.

And having these automatic vagal reactions, this is nothing to have shame or guilt around, even if it looks like anger, beating yourself up, being mean to someone else, panicking, fleeing, flooding. No shame, no guilt, my darling. It's what's happening and it's perfect because it's what's happening.

Perfect, not meaning that you have to love it, but just meaning the you get to bring your awareness to it, accept that it's happening, and then take the action of breathing into you so you can make your next choice. This takes a lot of practice, self-love, and self-compassion. What a beautiful thing.

So let's go back to Jen. Remember Jen, who was having all these thoughts about her new job and was feeling anxious as a result? I lovingly shared with Jen during our coaching session that when I asked her what she was feeling, she told me a string of thoughts. So I asked her what anxiety feels like in her body, and she stared at me blankly and told me she didn't know what anxiety felt like in her body. She just sort of knows when she's feeling it.

So I started to guide her to use her breath as a way in, to close her beautiful eyes, to breathe slowly and deeply, to feel into her body. And then from that grounded place, to bring up the thoughts that were leading to an anxious feeling. Through this work, she was able to identify the effects of her sympathetic nervous system on her body. Her increased heart rate, feeling her breathing like all up at the top of her lungs, kind of shallow, and a sensation of tightness and tension throughout her body.

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We breathed into it for a while until breathing into it led it to dissipate. And through that process, Jen was able to accept that she was having these feeling responses to her thoughts about the situation because she was able to go from feeling calm and completely neutral to invoking the sympathetic response by thinking her anxious thoughts again.

This is pure science. Cause and effect. Think the thought, have the feeling. Understand therein that that is where your locus of control is. Awareness. I'm having feelings in my body. Acceptance. I'm safe. It's okay. They're just sensations.

The magic here comes when you can recognize this is a thought and this is the feeling in my body that comes from that thought. When you can get some cognitive distance, as we discussed last week, you can start to see when your thoughts are automatic, written in your mind by your past thinking, past experience, beliefs, by your family, culture, the patriarchy, society at large.

Your body holds the wisdom of how you will react to your thoughts. A physiologic experiencing of that thought made real in your body. And when you can see it all happening, which happens when you pause, breathe, and write it down on paper, then you can process the challenging emotion, can really feel it all the way through versus pushing it aside.

And can thus release its grip on you, and can say, I feel anxious right now because I'm having the thought that no one will like me, the thought that they'll know I'm a fraud, an imposter. And you can begin to shift the story that you are overwhelmed by this emotion into an understanding that you're the boss of your mind and body, and that is so liberating and empowering, my darling.

And remember, not all thoughts are bad. Your thinking creates your pleasant, happy, joyful thoughts too. You see a tiny puppy and think, oh my

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goodness, how cute, and you feel joy. You think, how lovely that she did that task without anyone asking her, and you can feel joy, you can feel gratitude.

It's not all gloom and doom here in think-feel-act-land, my love. And the beauty is that when you can manage your mind, you can choose your responses in all of the ways. Cute puppy or new job. What a gift.

Let's pause and make sure we're framing this within awareness, acceptance, action. So a therapist of mine taught me this exercise that I'm about to share with you about 473 years ago, I think she taught me this. So it's a grounding technique I've talked about before here on the show. A way of moving towards our challenging emotions versus pushing them away.

It's a technique that I teach each of my life coaching clients as a way to give your cognition, your brain, something to focus on, something to do, a task. And evolutionary biology teaches us, my beautiful nerds, that brains will spin and spin in overwhelm and confusion and in worry as a way to keep you from getting eaten by lions, or will focus on a task if you give your brain one.

So give your smart brain something to do. And I recommend the meta work of thinking about your thinking and feeling. That is, a grounding exercise. And I'll record this separately for you, my sweet one, so you can head on over to my website, [victoriaalbina.com](http://victoriaalbina.com), to download it for yourself, to have with you whenever you need.

And when you focus on your body, or what you're experiencing physically, you take your attention away from your thoughts, away from I'm anxious, and you actively ground yourself in your body. I feel tingling in my hands, pressure in my chest, etcetera. You feel into it. You experience it, and through that, take your power back.

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Because you are thus no longer subject to your brain. You're centering yourself in your bodily energy and you can give yourself something else to focus on other than your old thought, I'm anxious, which your brain is likely to play on repeat and may then spiral out into more and more anxiety and even panic as your brain repeats the same old story with nothing new being offered to think about.

As you contemplate that old thought, your anxiety or whatever emotion you're having will just grow and grow as you think it again and again, and soon enough, you'll start looking for a buffer. Something to do to distract you, like eating something, watching TV, or even engaging in something you're calling self-care, but is really a cover-up job.

I like to think about when my dog Frank was a baby. And if I found her chewing on a shoe of mine - oh Frank - instead of just yelling at the pup, which is if Frank hears your brain and you find her chewing on something, an old thought that doesn't work for you, you yell at her. You're like, damn it, Frank, damn it brain, release that cute red high heel.

She's just going to look at you and be like, I'm a puppy, this is what I do. Instead of just ripping the shoe out of her mouth, you pet her little head and give her a chew toy. Give her something that's appropriate, that you want her to chew on, that you want her to roll around in. And for us, that chew toy is feeling into our feelings so that we can thus give our brain a new thought from a grounded place.

Because when you breathe into it, when you breathe into your feelings and connect with your perfect body, and hold space to feel your feels, and can use your brain to name them versus judge them, when you give yourself some loving compassion and care, in that process, you can create some distance from them. The sensations will lose their intensity.

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You can say, I am feeling flutters in my belly before this lecture. Okay. Those are just flutters. I'm safe, I'm okay. Nothing has gone wrong here. You may say, okay, I'm feeling my heart rate, my breathing speed up now that the subway is stopped underground, it's minute three. Okay, that's happening. I'm safe, I'm okay. Nothing has gone wrong here. These are just physical symptoms, experiences, nothing to turn into a crisis or a problem. It's just what's happening.

This process takes the drama and intensity out of it. Trust me, I lived with depression, anxiety, irritable bowel, chronic heartburn for most of my life. I am no stranger to split-second acute and chronic symptoms. Taking the drama out of the story about our symptoms does just that. It takes the drama out so you don't need to judge it, you don't need to freak out.

Taking the drama out returns you to the place of being your own watcher, the one in charge, and that's a powerful place to be versus spinning in the stories about your experience. And once you've gotten some distance, you can then think about the cause of your symptom.

Let's stick with anxiety, which is your thoughts about it. This is true root cause medicine. Understanding that your thoughts are part and parcel of your symptom experience feeling of anxiety. So your thought may be, oh my god, I'm so anxious, and you can recognize in that moment, when you breathe, that you are not anxiety. You are not anxious as a person, a state, it doesn't define you. You are a person with a bodily experience that you are labeling as anxiety.

And in creating that distance from it, feeling it in your body and choosing to see it as what is, choosing to shift through awareness; I'm having feelings in my body, acceptance; I'm safe. It's okay. There's no drama or problem here. They're just sensations. You can then take action and ask yourself what thought is creating these feelings.

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And that is such a powerful place to be in. I know, I live this each and every day. So my love, your homework is this; when you feel an emotion you habitually label as negative, pause, breathe into it. Get present with your feelings versus fighting them, trying to push them away.

What you resist persists. Label the sensations in your body. I'm feeling this and that and the other thing in my body, sensations are happening. No judgment words, no adjectives like I'm feeling this crushing anxiety, but rather okay, I'm feeling tingling in my arms and legs, which is what I usually feel when I'm having the thought that I'm anxious.

And as always, this may feel weird and awkward and hard and uncomfortable and challenging at first, and that's okay. Remember that feeling anxiety, feeling like an imposter, doubting yourself, questioning your worth, those things feel comfortable because you're used to them. But ask yourself, are they really any more comfortable than pausing to do this new thing of labeling sensations and getting present to them?

Keep practicing, keep breathing into it. Like your brain got used to freaking out about sensations, emotions, feelings, soon, it'll get used to experiencing these things in a brand-new beautiful way. This work will help you to start to tease out what part is a thought and what part is a feeling in your body. Awareness, acceptance, and soon enough, action.

Alright, that's it, my darling. I want you to invite you to not get mad at your feelings, not push them away, just feel into them. You have thoughts that create your feelings. When you get in touch with your feelings, really feel them without judging them, you can begin to process them through your body, which gives you the space, by not struggling against them or pushing away from them to see them as just what's happening.

How beautiful. This is thought work in action. And I know not only that you can do this, but that it can change your life. So darlings, don't forget to go



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to my website, [victoriaalbina.com](http://victoriaalbina.com). I've promised you 473 free things this week. My travel tips, which I'll put in the blog, my elderberry syrup recipe, which is super simple, delicious, gorgeous, yum.

I genuinely look forward to drinking it. It's one of the things, it's like, the air is crisp, I get to have elderberry syrup soon. And I'll also record that grounding exercise for you and I'll put that up on the website as well so you can download that and breathe into it.

Speaking of breathing, I have a beautiful online breathwork course. It's a four-part four-week course. You get weekly journaling exercises, a sort of - I don't want to call it a lecture, but you get a video of me musing on a theme. How's that? And then a full at-home virtual breathwork session for you to do in your own time at your own pace in the comfort of your own home, which is so lovely. And that's also on my website, [victoriaalbina.com](http://victoriaalbina.com).

And if you follow me on the Insta, I've been posting all about it so go check that out. A lot of really cool stuff. I love giving you all things for free. I love building these offerings for you. So exciting.

Alright my darlings, go gently. Be kind to your perfect self. You're learning a new way of thinking about feeling and it can be a lot. So be loving with yourself and remember my love, you are safe, you are held, you are loved. And when we heal ourselves, we help heal the world. Be well, my darling, and 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](http://VictoriaAlbina.com) to learn more.