

Ep #44: How to Stop Worrying for Good



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Victoria Albina, NP, MPH

[Feminist Wellness](#) with Victoria Albina, NP, MPH

Ep #44: How to Stop Worrying for Good

Few things are as ubiquitous as worry. We all say it. We all do it. And it steals your joy, my darling. Worry takes you out of the present moment and keeps you from taking action to make your life the intentional thoughtful life you dream of living.

Today, I'll be detailing the steps you can take to stop worrying for good. Keep listening, my love, it's going to be a good one.

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

Hello, hello, my love. I hope this finds you doing so well. This is our last episode together before the winter holidays, so happy solstice, happy Kwanza, happy Hanukkah, merry Christmas to you, my darling. And if there's a holiday in there I've missed, my apologies. I hope it's a delight.

So, last week, we talked about worrying, which is a very common thing for folks to do. And we talked about the evolutionary underpinnings of that worry habit and how so many of us are taught by our families and our communities and our cultures to use worry as the driver for our actions.

Folks worry about their symptoms, about dating, about their aging parents, their business, global warming, politics. And this time of year, it's so common to worry, often in advance, about what will happen at family gatherings. Which uncle will get drunk first? Who will say what ridiculous and potentially heartbreaking thing? Or whether you'll get drunk and act in a way that you won't love the next morning. Whether the presents you give will be well received, what your in-laws may do or say, if you'll find yourself triggered by family or friends, or being back with your family of origin.

Ep #44: How to Stop Worrying for Good

So many things to potentially worry about, and I'm here to say it once more; worrying is always optional. It solves nothing, never, ever. And, more importantly, worrying is an action. It's an action you take, to spin in worry, concern, future-tripping instead of taking action to create an intentional life and to get things done to take care of the things you're worried about that are within your control and to accept the things you're worried about that are out of your control.

Worrying keeps you from living your best life on all levels; mind, body, and spirit. And it keeps you spinning and assuming that things are negative, assigning adjectives willy-nilly to the nouns of this world; foreshadowing, my darling. Keep listening, I'm going to explain exactly what I mean.

So, like we talked about last time, because you know brains love a quick refresher, when worrying is the thing that you're doing when you're doing it, that means you can't possibly be doing anything to make your life better while you're actively worrying. It's taking up all of your brain space, my darling, all of your energy, all of you.

Think about that. That's not how I want to live, with worrying as my primary action. You can't do the next right thing. You can't take courageous action. You can't take action for your life when the action you're doing is worrying. That's intense, right?

Back when I had a busy functional medicine practice where I was getting a ton of labs and doing that whole thing, one of the first things patients would say when they walked in my office is, "Is there anything in my labs I need to worry about?" And I would always answer, 100% of the time, "No, there's never anything at all to worry about on your labs, never, ever, ever. I might have some evidence that maybe you have cancer, so let's get you into an oncologist. I might have some evidence of serious anemia, so let's get you into hematology for an iron infusion. I might have some evidence of

Ep #44: How to Stop Worrying for Good

autoimmunity, so let's talk about cutting gluten and sugar and supporting your nervous system. But worry about labs, about a diagnosis? No, never.

It's a waste of time and energy. Instead, my love, let's take action. Let's do the things we get to do to make your life better. But nah, no way, never shall we spin in worry in this family, nope.

Beyond the practicality of worry as an action that prevents other actions from getting done, and to get all Buddhist on it, when you're in worry, you can't enjoy the moment and you can't be present to yourself or others. When you're worrying about some possible future, you're wasting this one precious moment, this moment, the literal only one that you're promised. And the only moment you can really control is the one right now, not that possible future you fear or that past that you're rolling around and questioning.

To put it simply, you can obsess about what might happen, what may have happened in the past, or you can enjoy the beautiful gift of being alive today. I mean, it's a quality of life issue really. Worrying is borrowing trouble.

The other thing to make note of here is that, when you're worrying, you're assuming that the object of your worry is a bad and negative thing, and in fact, life is full of neutral things; nouns and such, facts. And you get to recognize that facts are neutral.

I know, I know, it's an intense thing to say and I've struggled with it myself and still do sometimes because my brain, like yours, wants to categorize and judge things and put them in little columns like, "Cancer, bad – winning lotto, good." But that isn't always how those things shake out.

Ep #44: How to Stop Worrying for Good

Ask some folks who've had cancer, or any other serious diagnosis, and have had it be the thing that helps them break out of a life they don't love into a magnificent new reality with priorities that feel amazing. Ask someone who won the lotto and had everything they loved crumble around them, as family and friends start seeing them as a piggy bank.

Not everything is so cut and dry, so black and white. Facts happen and you get to choose how you want to react to those facts. You get to choose to worry or to accept a fact as what it is, simply a fact. And you get to recognize that when you add adjectives to the circumstance of your life, then you create a thought about it. That thought leads to a feeling, which is a vibration of energy in your body, and based on that feeling, you take action. And every action leads to an outcome, you guessed it, because physics, that can keep you stuck and spinning in a hot mess of what-ifs.

Worry says, "I don't know if this plan will work. What if it fails?" And your higher self reminds you, "Well, it can't work if you don't start it." And you can't start it by sitting in your living room worrying about it, spending all your emotional and physical energy demonizing the thing that's happening, calling it bad or terrible and projecting your fears out into the future.

The alternative is to accept this fact as a fact and to take the next right action, do the next right thing, from a place of calm, from the thought, "I'm focused on doing what I need to do to solve this because I love myself." And when you put action off because you're worried about the possible outcome, you keep yourself from failing enough to reach your goals, whatever that goal may be; to start a successful business, to deal with your lab results, to get that degree, whatever it is.

Worry is the cause of more dreams delayed than anything ever because it keeps you from getting started. And you're not going to build that amazing coaching business, stop being anemic, or be able to call yourself Captain Fancy Pants PhD by sitting on your couch worrying.

[Feminist Wellness](#) with Victoria Albina, NP, MPH

Ep #44: How to Stop Worrying for Good

I will continue to encourage you, my darling, to fail, fail again, and fail better. And when you stop fearing failure, all of this becomes so much easier. There's so much less to worry about when failure isn't this terrible horrible thing that's coming to ruin your life. When you remember that failure, which we talked all about in episodes 39 and 40, failure is your best friend ever.

Let's pause, my darling nerds, for a quick reminder of the science. When you worry, you send your body into sympathetic activation, the part of your nervous system that manages your fight or flight, it goes online, takes control of your body, and literally shuts down your smarts. Worrying can lead to nervous system panic.

So when you're feeling all stirred up, agitated, activated in all your worry, start by taking some slow deep breaths in and out with a sigh, by attending to your body, your nervous system, with practices like orienting, a body scan, focusing on your breathing, or doing the breathwork practice that I teach. All simple accessible easy ways to ground yourself and to center your nervous system, which I recommend doing first when you're overcome with worry.

And because I love you, I've recorded both an orienting exercise and a body scan meditation for you, and those are currently available for free on my website. So head on over to victoriaalbina.com/44, that's 44, this is episode 44 to download those freebies right to your phone so you can use them anytime you find yourself starting to tell an, "I'm worried" story, a, "What if" story.

So, starting from there, assuming you've taken a moment to calm your nervous system, step out of that panicky energy and back into the parasympathetic place, that ventral vagal place where my polyvagal nerds, that rest and digest place, also called the safe and social place, once we

Ep #44: How to Stop Worrying for Good

are there, we can get into some actionable things to do to stop worrying for good.

So, in a moment where you're not worried, you're not taking the action of worrying or having the feeling of worrying, maybe as part of your morning meditation, your morning journaling practice, maybe when you're doing your future self journaling, which I talked all about in episode nine, you can start by lovingly asking yourself, "How much of my time do I spend worrying versus taking courageous action, versus attempting, trying it out, and seeing if I can fail gloriously and magnificently and can learn something important?"

Ask yourself, "What is worrying costing me in action I'm not taking to make my life better? What am I not getting done by sitting here worrying about the past or the future?" Don't just think about all these questions, my angel, grab a pen and some paper and write it out, "When do I worry?"

Next, I'll invite you to take a broader look at your brain and your thought habits and to ask yourself, "When do I worry and about what? And what failure is that worry pretending to protect me from?" Recognize that worrying can be a buffer action, which I talked about in detail in episode 14.

So ask yourself "What feeling is the act of worrying seeking to cover up? For me, it's usually fear; fear of an outcome that feels outside of my control, fear of feeling a feeling I don't want to feel, like disappointment, or even failure, which I have worked to become BFFs with, but I'm a human. I have my moments of fearing failure too."

Breathe into it. Get really real and honest with yourself. It's so vital for your healing. Ask yourself what feeling is worrying attempting to cover up. And the concrete steps to take – and I recommend writing these out and having these questions maybe in a journal or on your phone, wherever you could get to them quickly when you find yourself worrying.

[Feminist Wellness](#) with Victoria Albina, NP, MPH

Ep #44: How to Stop Worrying for Good

The questions I want you to invite you to ask yourself are, one, “What am I worried about?” Have it stop being vague and make it concrete. Vague things keep us confused. Concrete things, we can work with. So, what am I worried about? Do a full thought download on it, meaning you sit and free-write for about two to five minutes.

Put a timer on to remind your brain that taking the time to do this is not another thing to worry about. It's just two minutes. You've probably spent way longer than two minutes mindlessly scrolling the internet today, you B-average human.

Don't judge what you're writing when you do your thought download, just get it out. No grammar or spelling checks, just write, ramble, blather, get it out of your mind and onto paper. For example, “I am worried because I found a lump. Oh my god, it's a lump, it's cancer. This is terrible. I'm going to lose all my hair and I'm going to suffer and then I'm going to die.”

Another example may be, “What if this business doesn't work out? I'll be so unhappy, so disappointed. I just want to watch Netflix, like, all the time these days, but I keep worrying, eve with my favorite sitcom on.” Or, “we had such a great date. He didn't call me back and it's been three days and he didn't answer my text and he was so perfect and what's wrong with me that he's ghosting me. Why does dating never work out? I'm going to be the only single one at reunion. I'm never going to get married. I'm not going to have kids and my mother's never going to stop pestering me about when she'll get grandkids and I'm going to die cold and alone on a mountaintop.”

See how quickly your brain can spin out into all sorts of worry. And worry can really spin and spin and get out of hand. What an amazing defense mechanism for a brain, right? Wow, I say that with love, not as a judgment. It is amazing what our brains will do to attempt to protect us from feeling things that feel scary. God, nervous systems are amazing.

Ep #44: How to Stop Worrying for Good

Okay, so step one was to write out what's worrying you, get it out of your brain onto paper where you can see it. Two, I want to invite you to ask yourself what is the worst-case scenario here. Get really specific and take it out to the most ridiculous degree.

Remember, this worry lives within you and it's in your subconscious mind, spinning around in there, until you uncover it. So, bring it to the light. I mean, every six-year-old knows that monsters under the bed are so scary. I mean, they're really, really scary. And that they're only scary until you scream for a parent or a caregiver and that person comes into your room and turns the light on and then, poof, no more scary monster.

My love, it is the same thing with our thoughts. So turn the lights on. What is the worst thing that can happen? Well, maybe the lump is cancer, and that will bring along all that that brings and that will suck, and yeah, maybe I'll die. Or, maybe I'll launch my business, I'll put all this time and effort into it and it will fail and it will be a waste of my energy and I'll be so disappointed and I don't know what I'll do then. Or maybe I'll never get married and I'll be so sad and feel like a failure and so disappointed. I guess I would need to learn to be okay with that.

And often, when I do this live one on one or with my group coaching clients, what we keep coming down to as the worst thing ever is so often feeling a feeling, like disappointment, sadness, failure, anger, loneliness. Let's pause on that.

If the worst thing ever is feeling a feeling, is that really something you want to spend your time worrying about? Truly, ask yourself that. Studies show that feelings can't kill you. They're just energy moving through your body and you can choose your emotions, right? So, maybe there's no problem here if the worst-case scenario that you're so worried about is feeling a feeling, right?

Ep #44: How to Stop Worrying for Good

The third thing we do is to remember that most of what we worry about is already happening and it's our adjectives that bring the pain, the stress, the worry. We worry that we'll be unhappy, that we'll waste time, that we'll be rejected, that we'll die.

And the truth is that all of this is already happening when you're worrying. In that moment when worrying is your feeling and your action, you're likely unhappy. You're definitely wasting your time. You're rejecting yourself and your own possibility, and in an attempt to stop yourself from feeling a feeling like disappointment, which you're likely calling a bad thing if you're worrying about it, you're stopping yourself from feeling all the feels other than worry because that's how it works for brains.

And on the death tip, well, unless you're a vampire – and mad respect if you are – then you're currently dying, my angel. Perhaps slowly, perhaps a little faster than some other people, but you're dying because science. We all are. And you get to choose how you want to spend the time you have here on Earth. You get to choose what to think and how to feel about the reality of what is happening.

And listen, you find the lump and it's cancer, then of course it's totally normal to have a ton of emotion, to feel sad, angry, frustrated, maybe eventually to feel grateful, but not at first, my darling. Let's not rush things. And let's remember that worrying about what this diagnosis will bring doesn't help you take action.

Remember, the lump is just a noun until you put adjectives on it. It's not scary or bad or terrible or anything other than a ball of cells in this moment. There is no gravitas to a ball of cells until you give it gravitas, until you make it mean something.

And I want to pause and say that I've known cancer and other serious diagnoses close up and personal. Like I said last week, on many, many

[Feminist Wellness](#) with Victoria Albina, NP, MPH

Ep #44: How to Stop Worrying for Good

occasions, I've been the one to tell folks that they have cancer, HIV, or Chron's, or lupus, or a host of other serious concerns. And I've been a hospice nurse. I've told patients and their families when the time is drawing close so they can prepare.

And beyond all that professional connection, I've lost some very dear and beloved friends to cancer. And I'd love to say, what's up, Vee Kingsley? How you doing, Bruno? ¿Que tal, Abuelo Toto? I like to think that my beloved dead are major podcast fans listening in weekly from the great beyond. And you now that they are subscribed and have rated and reviewed on iTunes.

Ah, only the hospice nurse laughing about the deaths of people, like, I really, really, really love. Like Vee and Bruno and my abuelo and I miss those great wonderful people.

But all kidding aside, this cancer thing is very personal for me right now. Someone I love so much, like so, so, so much literally just found a lump, like this week. And it's big. And in the midst of all of this, I feel sad, and I feel angry, for sure, and they do too.

We feel angry at all the systems, all the chemicals in our air, our water, our food, all the everything that leads to illnesses like cancer being rampant. But you know what neither one of us is doing? We're not worrying because there's nothing to worry about here.

It's a rather large mass and it's still just a mass of cells doing their whole S1 S2 replication thing, being cancer cells. And luckily, we live in 2019 in New York City and have health insurance, which means the nice surgeons will remove it, and then we'll see what's next, and what's next, and what's next, one day at a time, one step at a time.

Ep #44: How to Stop Worrying for Good

Nothing to worry about here. Lots of plans to make, appointments to go to, powers of attorney to draft, lots to do, but not a darn thing at all to worry about. Let me say this once again so clearly. You can have all the feels about whatever is happening in your life, and I highly recommend that you do have them, that you allow all of them. Feel them. Cry, scream, have a fit about it, but don't worry about it.

Worrying is future-focused or past-focused in a way that steals your life from you. It's that borrowing of trouble and you get to decide not to do it, to have all the feels about the thing but not to worry. And one of the things that helps me so much in doing that is number four, boil it down to the facts.

Write it down, no adjectives, no drama, just math, facts, thank you very much, court-admissible facts everyone can agree on. "I found a lump. I don't know if my business will succeed. He didn't call after that date." This again is a chance to look at the meaning we are adding via adjectives. If you can get peaceful with these facts as neutral, then you can make peace with your life and do the next right thing.

My beauty, you don't know if that lump is cancer, or if that cancer will be easily removed surgically, or if it will kill you. You don't know if the business will succeed. You don't know why he didn't call or if he will, but you know he didn't.

These are future things that you can't control, things that so many of us worry about. We also worry about things from the past. The thing is, you can't control what happened in the past. You can't control what will. And what you can affect is right now. And every time your brain goes back to worry, you can take these simple steps, get factual, ask yourself what the worst-case scenario is and then fact it out, taking stock of the adjectives you're using about this factual neutral event.

Ep #44: How to Stop Worrying for Good

This simple work is the opposite of trying to shove those monsters under your bed because when you're doing that ignoring the monsters, that is, you're just keeping them around. That is to say, by attempting to ignore your worry, you're not managing it or processing it at all. And it's still alive and well in your mind and body.

Ignoring the thing you're worrying about does nothing but keep you stuck in it, and that's what worrying is, in a way. It's a false cognition, a false thought that you're doing something to make your life better, but you're not, my beautiful love. You're just worrying about it.

Worrying about the past doesn't change it. Worrying about the future doesn't do anything to change it either. Worry is something that can feel necessary and can feel like it helps, but it never does. Taking action, now that really can help. So turn the lights on, look under the bed, get factual and clear. Drop the adjectives.

When you worry about the worst-case scenario and let it rule your mind, you'll never take enough action, and thus you'll never risk failing enough to do the next right thing, to make that doctor's appointment, to text that dude back, to post about your business on Instagram. You'll never risk failing enough to achieve anything. And you'll never do what's needed to keep your life from looking like that worst-case scenario.

You have everything you need to be thoughtful, safe, smart, and to take appropriate action for your life without worrying. And you can do all this from a place of self-love, letting worry stop burning up your energy.

Oh, and one last tip, if the thing you're worrying about is a medical question, I want to encourage you not to Google it. Day after day, I've had people walk into my office who've said, "I Googled this rash for like 15 hours last night and I stirred myself up and got so worried. Do you think it's leprosy?"

Ep #44: How to Stop Worrying for Good

I've had folks make themselves so bonkers by Googling and Googling and Googling. Please, if you have a medical concern, go to a trusted clinician. And if yours doesn't listen or help you, fire them and get a new one, if you have the privilege and access to do so. But please, don't ask Dr. Google. His medical training sucks, like for real.

Okay, my loves, that's all from me. Remember that worry is optional and pretends to be useful. It's all a lie. It is no solution and it keeps your nervous system freaked out. It keeps you from doing useful things. So please, give your brain the love and support it needs from you. Reparent yourself by showing up with logical support, to help keep yourself from worrying for good.

You've got this, my darling. I know it. And I have lots and lots of amazing offerings coming up in 2020, and as always, more and more freebies for you. So if you want your own copy of my body scan, orienting, and stress-release meditations, they are all yours for the downloading. So, go grab those, my love. They're on victoriaalbina.com. And the price is right on those.

And, baby, get on my email list. I serve up some really good email. They're really short and they're very helpful. So get on my email list so you can be the first to know about all the exciting things I'm doing to support you in making your life better, one thought, one feeling at a time.

Alright, my angels, have a beautiful celebration of whatever you may be celebrating this time of year. I cannot believe that it's almost 2020. It's almost the next decade. And next week, you know it, we're going to be talking about New Year's resolutions because, well, someone's got to. So make sure that you're subscribed and tuned in.

Remember, my love, you are safe, you are held, you are loved. And when one of us heals, we help heal the world. Thanks for tuning in and be well.

[Feminist Wellness](#) with Victoria Albina, NP, MPH

Ep #44: How to Stop Worrying for Good

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.