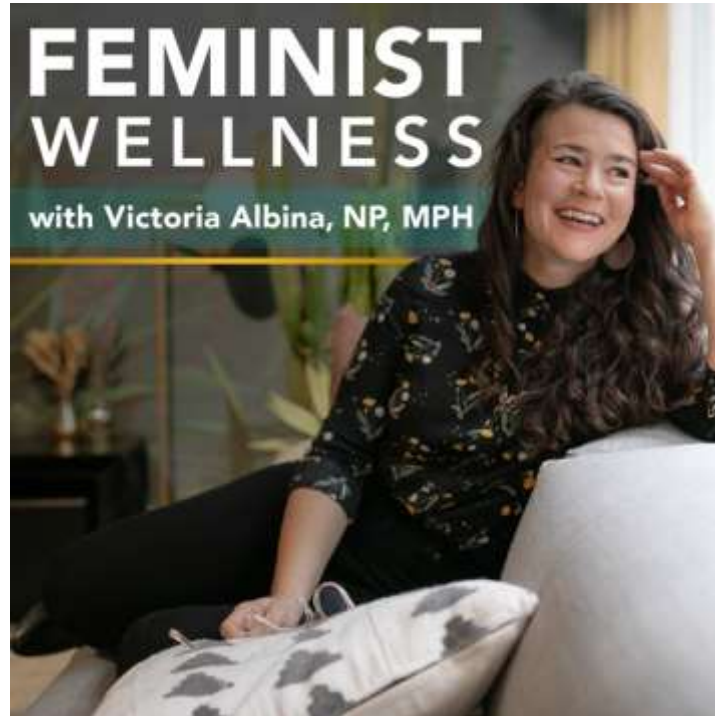


Ep #61: The Nervous System & Your Health and Wellness



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

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This week, we are taking a very science-y dive into polyvagal theory. We're going to be geeking out all about the nervous system with a focus on what you need to know to live your most intentional life, and why all this nervous system talk matters for your mental and physical health.

Okay my nerdlets, make sure your pocket protector is securely in place because here we go. 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.

I know we're all adjusting to being at home or working double shifts at the grocery or the ER or wherever you find yourself. Whatever is swirling in your atmosphere, I want to remind you to dedicate a moment, a breath to you each and every day.

And my beautiful darling nerd, I've been sitting here in the Brooklyn thinking about how I can be of the most service to you right now, and so of course, my geekatronic mind turned immediately to a topic so many of us are talking about, without realizing we're talking about it, which is polyvagal theory and your magnificent autonomic nervous system.

This is a topic that is very much top of mind for me because, well, I talk about it with all of my clients all day long. It's something I monitor with love, and keep sort of close tabs on in my own life, in my own body. And I've been thinking about it, reading about it, writing about it so much because

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it's one of the big foundation points for my upcoming six-month online coaching masterclass, which starts in May.

So if this kind of science of wellbeing, self-care, and healing turns your brain on, you're not going to want to miss my six-month course. And you can get all the info you need by going to victoriaalbina.com/masterclass. I kept that nice and easy for you.

Alright my beauty, let's get nerdy on it. So we're going to start with a roadmap because brains love to know what's coming. It helps us to stay focused and to stay nice and grounded. So one, we'll be talking for a minute about why this information matters, how it impacts you and your healing.

Two, I will dive into a very nerdy nervous system 101, and three, we'll do what we always do together, my beauty. We'll talk about the remedies. The antidotes. What you can do to start shifting your experience of your beautiful, perfect nervous system.

Okay, let's take a breath in, long exhale. Okay, one, why this information matters. I say this often, like, probably about 4000 times a day. You can't heal what you can't see. And since we're all about healing in this family, taking deep, loving care of ourselves, I think it's vital to understand your nervous system so you can name what's going on for you.

Once you can understand and name it, when you can say internally, "I'm having a bit of a sympathetic reaction here," then you have more awareness. And the awareness feeds into your capacity to name it, of course, but then once you can name what's going on, you can know what the next step is. What you can do to actively support yourself in that moment.

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Without that information, it's so much more challenging to know what the next right thing to do is. As a feminist, education is so vital to me. What we don't know can feel mysterious in a bad way, as opposed to the mysteries of the universe, which I find mysterious in a beautiful way. And when you can understand your beautiful physiology, you have power with it. Not power over it. Because we don't do power over around here.

So knowing what's going on in your body, being able to name, to sit with it, to befriend it, to attend to it, this is a powerful, empowered place to be. And this is what I want for you, my beauty. So let's dive into the nerdiness. I wish you could see my face. I look like - you know when a three-year-old starts talking about their favorite teddy bear or cartoon movie they saw and they get so excited? That's my face.

I love geeking out. Okay, so I want to invite you to think about a time when your spidey sense, your intuition, your deep - that gut-level knowing - got activated. When something in a situation, a person, place, or thing, an interaction just felt off. There was just something not right there. And maybe no one else even noticed anything at all, but in your gut, in your body, in your energy field, something felt off and you couldn't even really explain it.

That knowing, that gut sense of the world is your intuition. And your capacity to monitor the world constantly without even really knowing it is thanks to your magnificent autonomic nervous system, which is constantly surveilling the facial expressions, tone of voice, body movement, reactions, and energies of the people, places, animals, things around you, through the process of neuroception, which is this intuitive scanning for safety and danger.

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And this system activates your vagus nerve to react to what you're taking in. Through these evaluations of the world, we both learn about who is trustworthy, safe, dangerous, and we learn about ourselves in relation to others. As humans, we are wired for connection, for interdependence, which is a topic I talk a lot about as I help folks to shift out of codependence.

We need each other as humans. Our minds, bodies, and spirits are built to connect with one another for our mutual survival. And our autonomic nervous system helps us to know when there is a threat to us individually and to the village, as it were, as a whole.

This whole topic, safety, danger, what is what, is particularly poignant right now. So in case you're listening to this two or 10 or 40 years in the future, I am recording this from New York City during the COVID-19 pandemic. I personally have been in quarantine for well over a month and there's a lot swirling.

This is the week that New York City is said to peak, meaning we will have the most deaths and the most cases this week. And other cities and states around the country and around the globe have either already peaked or having a second peak or are soon to peak. There's a lot going on and our nervous systems may feel revved up, activated, reactive to every little thing.

We may feel hypoactive in that depressed, shutdown state, and yes, I will be nerding about each of these things individually in just a millisecond. I just want to say that right now is a moment where whatever your nervous system learned in childhood can be - it isn't necessarily for everyone, but may be coming to the fore right now as there is more stress, more trauma, just more experience of uncertainty.

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So I talked in episode 58 about how the world is inherently always be definition uncertain. We never know what is coming next. And right now, that fact of the uncertainty of life is coming to the fore for many of us who may not have previously felt that uncertainty.

So pausing to understand the science and to situate your own lived experience within the framework of your nervous system can be such a beautiful way to get a little cognitive distance, which is one of the things I also teach. I teach folks to journal. The thought work we do is predicated upon doing morning thought downloads, which is when you write down everything that's swirling in your brain and take a thoughtful look at it.

And by understanding your nervous system, what's physiologically happening, you can get that cognitive distance and you can understand through that framework, oh, I had a reaction from my sweet, tender, amazing animal body, and I can give myself love and I can understand what was the trigger there, what provoked that reaction, so I can support myself differently in the future. Maybe set different boundaries, limits, but I can show up for myself once I understand cause and effect.

So that's where we're at and that's why this is what we're doing this week. Okay, so let's zoom out, back this whole knowledge train right up to infancy. So our earliest understanding of the world through our nervous system begins to be formed at birth. And it's in the first three years of life that our nervous system gets its primary wiring, which is also not coincidentally when the root chakra, muladhara, the first chakra and the chakra of stability, security, grounding, and our basic needs is formed.

Your sense of safety around getting your basic needs met, such as having enough food, water, shelter, safety, as well as your emotional needs of interconnection is housed here in the root chakra. I like to think of kids

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whose bodies and therefore, their bums are on the ground because they don't have another option, just standing. And I like to think about how their root chakra, the base of the spine was close to the ground when we were little ones.

And so that's what connected us to the most basic and vital of energies. The earth below. And that just helps me remember what happens in the root chakra. So as babies, we learn about if the world is safe and learn to interpret cues from the world through our own particular lens, based on how our caregivers did or did not show up for us as wee ones.

For those of us who grew up with codependency or caretakers with ambivalent attachment styles, a push-pull energy may have been part of your childhood. That is your caregiver may have been affectionate, but then set a harsh boundary or limit.

A client of mine's father would do this. He would let her snuggle into him and he would pet her head, and then he would hit some sort of internal limit of capacity to express and experience tenderness and he would say, "Okay, that's it. Cuddles over," in this really brusque way and would pull away from the snuggle.

And her inner child self interpreted this to mean that someone showing her love was unreliable, unsafe. And her nervous system took note and responded with the primitive response of withdrawal, dorsal vagus, which I'll detail in a moment.

I bring this up to say I'm about to talk about the nervous system in general, and your particular experiences of what feels safe and what doesn't are yours. Unique, individual, and may be very different from someone else's.

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And will shift and move throughout your life as you heal and learn to regulate your nervous system.

This is a big part of why I encourage you to work with a coach like me, a therapist, someone who can help you to see your own mind, to see your own bodily reactions and to help you make sense of them. Trauma, stress of all sorts can shift our nervous systems into one habitual pattern or another.

And luckily, you have neuroplasticity, which is what my work as a life coach is all about. Recognizing your habitual reactions, feeling them in your body, honoring your somatic or bodily experience, and then choosing a thought with which to respond to these sensations. Sensations being the body up experience of life, from your body to your brain, so that you can choose the next right feeling, brain down, you want to have on purpose, with love for yourself and the collective.

And this is how we heal. By understanding these systems so we can show up for them and can manage them. And I always say that word manage with care and gentleness. So we're going to focus on the vagus nerve and the autonomic nervous system here today, which I remember as automatic because it controls all of our involuntary processes.

And let me pause to say thank goodness for the autonomic or automatic nervous system because frankly, if I had to think about my heart or lungs or digestive system doing their things, I would be dead. If while recording the podcast or while coaching someone I had to also be thinking, okay heart, 60 beats per second, lub dub, lub dub, lub dub, I'd be toast.

So three cheers to the autonomic system. The ANS, autonomic system, is also the great surveillor. It's like a sentinel. It scans the horizon for lions

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who may be coming to eat your village, and interprets what it sees through your own lens with questions like, “Is that a tabby cat or is that a lion?” And it responds to danger as you understand safety and danger.

Thanks to the work of the renowned researcher, Dr. Steven Porges PhD, we now know that all this magic is controlled by your vagus nerve. So I’m kind of obsessed with the vagus nerve and so much of my work over the last 20 years has been that mind-body connection, the gut-brain connection. And the vagus nerve is the jam there too.

So this is the longest nerve in the human body and its name comes from the Latin, to wonder. It starts in the lower brain, at the medulla oblongata, and it’s the 10th cranial nerve, and it wanders right down through the middle of you, controlling everything from your neuroception tools, eyes and ears, down through your swallowing, heart and lungs, your diaphragm, your gastrointestinal or digestive system, and all the chemical releasing systems and glands along the way.

The vagus nerve has a front, ventral, and a back, dorsal, and they do different things of interest to us, as we talk about how vital your nervous system regulation is to your experience of life and your mental and physical health. The vagus nerve is the information super highway that runs through your body from crown to tail and that all of our fellow mammals and vertebrates have.

And there’s something kind of similar but a little different in fishes, which I have decided that fishes is forever the plural of fish because it sounds better to me. So the vagus nerve is a bottom up system, scanning our body for information about safety and taking it to the brain for processing.

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The more danger we experience or feel or perceive, the more primitive our reaction feels. So think about your last fight with someone you love. Your arguments, the points you were attempting to make likely got less thoughtful as you got worked up.

In an activated state, your sense of choice, your cognition narrows, and your capacity to thoughtfully choose your words and reactions kind of goes out the window, which is part of why it's so vital to understand your own reactions when you're not in them, to be in touch with your own feelings in your body so you can recognize what's going on in your body. Not just your mind, before your nervous system shunts you into that activated low cognition state.

Your sympathetic nervous system, so this is one branch of the autonomic nervous system and there's one part of the vagus nerve that attends to this, is the activator. It's our energizing system. It helps you both get up and go and live and function. It's a beautiful, useful, important thing, and it also mobilizes you to get moving when in dangerous situations.

It turns on your fight or flight mechanism and activates your adrenal glands to release the stress mediator hormones. Adrenaline, norepinephrine, cortisol into our bloodstream, which can feel like a flood of energy into your body. A heating up. An adrenaline rush, so you can get out of harm's way.

And non-vital bodily functions such as digestion, making thyroid hormone, making sex hormones, everything that makes us effective, we feel nice and calm and good in the world sort of shuts down. Your inner ear constricts because it's listening for high tones and low tones, which are the sounds of different predators, and our oxygen level decreases.

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Can make your palms feel sweaty, it can make your fingers and toes feel cold and tingly. It can make your breathing feel so short and your heart rate really rev up. This system mediates anxiety, panic, worry, overwhelm, stress on the physiologic level. What's important to understand is that your perfect sympathetic system has not evolved to keep up with things like the interwebs and an 80-hour workweek.

Not to mention, pandemics. But also like, wow, pandemics. You, my love, were built to see things like lions, tigers, and bears, requisite, oh my, snakes, marauders, tornadoes, these things were what we were meant to see as danger. But these days, every ping on your phone, every email from your boss or your mom or your ex, every article or headline about death rates and peak days and new cases, every experience of a parent disapproving of your choices, your partner being angry, I mean, I could go on and on.

These things can activate and rev up your sympathetic nervous system and can fill you with worry thoughts, with low-grade anxiety, a sense of dread, or full on panic. So the options here are fight or flight. Fight can look like blaming, shaming, guilt, getting defensive, pushing back, getting aggressive. Flight can look like storming off, withdrawing in an angry way, not in a healthy boundaries way, stonewalling, leaving in a huff.

And while on that physiologic level, all of these responses may help you to shift through and move through that revving up, they aren't really, gosh, conducive to a healthy, happy life when going to that revved up, aggressive, or duking it out, or jabbing, or attempting to shame or blame place, defensiveness, when these things are your norm.

And when we have experienced trauma or stress in our lives, whether it's a big T trauma like assault, abuse, war, immigration, violence, or a little T

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trauma, like the daily trauma of life, being a person of color, a woman of color, trans or queer person, a differently abled person or anyone else who is subject to micro aggressions, macro aggressions, or systematically oppressed in this country and culture, or other little T things, well, that whole list can also definitely be big T. Let's just call it trauma.

But little T things like being misunderstood, having your feelings negated, being gaslit, having an authoritarian parent or an absent one, too strict boundaries or rules growing up, or too few boundaries or rules growing up. I can go on. But these things can all imprint on the mind, particularly the child mind, as trauma.

And so our ability to scan our environment for safety and danger can be skewed because it should be, because our bodies got set to that sort of frequency as little ones. And we can become hyper-vigilant, meaning we smell danger quickly and react intensely, or we can become hypo-vigilant, under-reactors.

And there are people in my life and I can imagine in yours who are like, "What's this whole COVID thing? I'm fine," right? These are all responses that come from somewhere, and the work that we do in this family is to get in touch with them, give them love. We are strength spaced. We honor our inner children who came up with this way of reacting as a way to survive and we do that work before we try to shift anything.

Okay my darlings, so next, part two. Your parasympathetic nervous system. So this, broadly, is your rest and digest system, and its tasked with calming your body and I won't get into the ventral break today, but if you know what that is, hey, that's a thing. But I promise, I'll be doing more of these shows where I geek out hardcore, so make sure you're subscribed. Don't miss it.

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But okay, parasympathetic is generally speaking, tasked with conserving energy between lion attacks with slowing your heart rate, regulating digestion, modulating blood pressure to a nice, slow pulse, and has two parts. So ventral is the social engagement system. And it makes sense.

So ventral means the front body. And a friend recently shared this and I love it. So I remember ventral is social engagement because if you picture two people who love each other, looking in each other's eyes, holding hands, they form a little V. Isn't that so sweet? I love that.

Okay, so ventral is where we feel safe, secure, like our own best friend, connected with another person, place, thing, or animal. All is well here. When the body senses safety, it's like the lights go on in the building that is you. You are your own best self, your best friend, your mind is at its most capable, and your heart is wide open.

Physiologically, your heart rate is nice and slow and steady, as is your breath. You're able to digest your food, make thyroid and sex hormones, make eye contact and connect with others, and your hearing is keen and sharp. This is a tender place where you feel safe. I picture it as your happy place, so that could be the beach, the mountains, the forest, cozy in your bed or on the couch with a lot of warm blankets, held, loved, safe, connected with self and others, in community, interdependent.

Dorsal is associated with a serious life threat. Trauma, high-level chronic, or acute stress. I think of the dorsal fin of a shark, which is something to respond to, certainly. And there are two types of dorsal responses. An involuntary shutdown, which can look like you're emotionally withdrawing on purpose, but it's actually that in this state, you temporarily can't process language. You literally can't connect with it. You've gone flat.

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The second type is temporarily increased aggression, and going into this nervous system choice really depends on your history and what you have learned works to get you out of danger, but this response is so exhausting and can lead to overwhelming your system into full collapse.

That can look like dissociation and a current trauma response. Dorsal means back body. Dorsal fin of a shark, on the back, and this is a possum playing dead. This is your back up against the wall. So picture yourself back in the cave human days. You're unsure of what's going on out there, so you're in your cave and you're scared.

You stand with your back, your dorsal side against the cave wall, and you have your ventral side, your front, where your neuroceptive face is, eyes and ears trained on the cave door, looking for hints, scanning for safety and danger. If a fellow villager comes in and smiles at you, your ventral vagus, your front body will register that.

And should that person say something in a nice soft tone, which is called prosody of voice, a soothing tone, then you let your guard down and you feel safe, secure, okay, able to connect with others. You're able to be social, to tend and befriend. But instead, should you hear a lion in the distance or if someone speaks to you harshly or loudly or gives you one of those fake half smiles, you might, as the saying goes, get your back up. Back body. Dorsal vagus. Back up against the wall.

See how I did that? I hope that helps you remember it. Your dorsal vagus response to cue of danger and pulls you out of connection, out of awareness, and ups all your self-protective everything. This is the freeze response.

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So fight or flight is sympathetic, rest, digest, or tend and befriend is ventral vagal, and freeze or immobilization is dorsal vagal. This is a state of playing possum and is the oldest of our responses evolutionarily speaking. In real life terms, what this could look like is you're having a challenging conversation with a partner and they won't let you get a word in, and they're telling you that you messed up.

And so you try to connect through a ventral response. "Oh babe, I didn't mean it, I'm sorry," while trying to make eye contact and smile, which are some of our nervous system's ways of connecting, to establish mutual safety, to both connect with and feel that smile, that sweet response, to connect in with that other person so you can feel safe in your body and to let them know that they are safe with you.

So in this experience, your partner keeps going not wanting to socially connect with you or establish that ventral vagal energy, but rather, they tell you you really messed up. You did something that really upset them and they keep going, not making it, in this example, about what you did but making it about you.

And your inner adolescent, that part of you that is often our sympathetic partner can get activated. And so as those chemicals are starting to rush through you, you're starting to get a little anxious, you're starting to get maybe a little lightheaded or a little tingly in your fingers, your heart rate is starting to speed up and your breathing is getting to the top of your chest, which is literally happening for me as I'm sharing this experience with you, and so you say, "Baby, you don't understand. I was trying my best."

And you try to stay ventral, but sympathetic is revving up. It's ramping up and you have that fight or flight energy. And so you may try to walk away. Flight. To leave the room, to get a little space. And your partner follows you

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into the other room and keeps talking with an angry tone, not a sweet, prosodic voice, and it's just too much for your system.

You get overwhelmed. Your inner child part of you, that inner four-year-old, six-year-old believes them. And maybe has always worried that you're this colossal mess-up, and so you start to sink into shutdown, hopelessness, despair. And you start thinking those old habitual thoughts, "I do everything wrong. Of course I didn't communicate that right. I should have thought about that more. I can't believe I messed up like this." On and on.

And those thoughts feed into you feeling like wet garbage, and your nervous system that loves you and is doing its best to protect you stays with you, feeling all that shutdown energy and feeding into that shutdown energy. That collapse, that immobilization, that distancing from your capacity to think and express yourself from your highest self, from your highest cognition.

Let's take a breath in and a deep breath out. Let's shake it off a little bit. That revved me up and then shut me down. Okay babies, this is a common enough scenario, right? And it can happen in two to three minutes that you move through every single little corner of your nervous system.

And we can use this framework to unpack what we experience in our lives, so we can learn to shift our patterns and experiences slowly but surely by bringing more intention with more attention to these physiologic responses, the thoughts they trigger, and the thoughts that we then actively consciously think in response.

What's really vital to remember is that social connection is our first biological impulse under stress. To smile, to try to meet someone's eye, to feel safe with another, and even if they're aggressing, to communicate, "I'm

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safe, it's okay." There's this misconception out there that our first response to threat is to fight or flight, to run or punch, or to get activated.

By design, humans are pack animals and the first survival impulse or instinct is to connect. To socially engage however we can because ventral vagal is the most physically, physiologically, spiritually, energetically, supportive state for both feeling wellness in the world and for physical health because that's the state in which your digestion, your thyroid, your hormones, et cetera, are up and running and working as we want them to.

What's important to note here is the importance of co-regulation. Your body will mirror the people around you. Heart rate, breathing, energy, in a beautiful attempt to feel connected and thus safe. And co-regulation helps bring us back from distress to balance. When you are open and able to co-regulate, this increases your resiliency and sense of being embodied and safe in the world.

So my beauties, of course there is so much more detail to all of this and how to apply it to our lives, but that wasn't our goal today. We were doing a mile high overview so you can start to really bring your awareness to your experiences, to noticing the sensation in your body that tells you you are headed into a particular state, so you can then pause to intervene for yourself, which is the crux of the work I do with my clients and in my upcoming masterclass.

And that, my beauty, is remedy one. Our first antidote to going into fight, flight, freeze, and to staying and getting and being as ventral as possible while allowing, loving, and supporting yourself to flow through these states, which is what we're meant to do throughout the day.

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To review quickly, sympathetic is fight or flight. Parasympathetic has two parts. Ventral vagal, front body, tend and befriend, safe and secure, rest and digest. And dorsal, back body, freeze, immobilization, I just can't with this.

Before I go on into further remedies and antidotes, I want to say clearly that as with everything I teach and suggest, there's no one thing that works for every human. That's not how nervous systems and bodies work, my darling. You get to try different techniques on to see what works for you, knowing that different modalities, different things will work for different people in different moments.

Sometimes, I'll say often, a deep breath with a long slow exhale works for me. That long slow exhale shunts your oxygen-carbon dioxide balance in your body, and tells your body it's time to calm, get parasympathetic, get ventral, and sometimes it just doesn't work for me. And that's bodies. Bodies is weird. I think that's my main takeaway from 20 years in health and wellness. Bodies is weird.

My beauty, that's okay. That's perfect. It's like, literally bodies is weird. So if one technique doesn't work in some given moment on some given Wednesday, you get to try another and that's all. There's nothing wrong or bad, nothing to guilt or shame yourself about. You're just a perfect animal in process and that's perfect.

So my beauty, when you notice you're getting activated, when you're starting to feel that rev up start, or you're starting to collapse, to pull out, to withdraw, some of the things you can try are one, naming it. Really just pausing to name the sensations in your body.

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One of the most important things I teach is the power of the somatic connection, to really, really feeling your feelings in your body and being able to name them. Sometimes with a trauma history, or for folks who are really new to this, this can feel really challenging to say, “Oh, that feels - sadness feels blue and heavy in my chest,” for example.

And so I want to invite you to start - this is a suggestion I’ve been making literally for a decade, but it’s so right on right now. Wash your hands. But don’t just wash your hands because you’re trying to get the COVID off. Wash your hands to feel the water.

To feel the warm water between your fingers, maybe cool water on the back of your hands, to get present to those sensations. Name them as you do it. This can be a way into a somatic framework, to naming your experience.

You can put a hand on the wall. I feel a firm strong cool surface. I feel it under my left hand. But on and on with whatever quotidian daily experience is calling for you. Petting one of your best friends, say a dog, a cat, a hamster, a human, and saying, “I feel this fur. It feels soft.”

We’ve done this before together here on the show. Connect in with your body, your environment as best you’re able, and creep up on it. Slowly ramping up your experience of feeling into your body every day. Don’t forget the power of breathing.

So I just mentioned this but I’ll say it again. Breathing in and focusing on the long slow exhale. That can really work for folks. There’s also the four-seven-eight breathing, or the breathwork breathing. There’s so many breathing patterns that one can do that can bring us back into that ventral state, and I’ll invite you to play around with it.

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Three, remember, we humans are social animals and our wiring is for connection and care. So build co-regulation into your life in an intentional way every day. So when we co-regulate, our bodies are awash in neuropeptides, oxytocin, gabba, these are some feel-good amazing chemicals and hormones that are released with connection.

If being in person isn't possible because social distancing and again, recording this during COVID, then the next best thing is seeing someone's face however you can. Try FaceTime or whatever technology you can use to see the eyebrows, the smile lines of the people you love, and ask the people you love to send you voice memos or video greetings because remember, tone of voice is a really important thing for helping us get ventral. And so ask for that, instead of text messages.

Animals. Don't forget to connect with animals. They are the most amazing gift. As are plants. I talk to my plants all day long. Don't forget that you can ventrally regulate yourself through self-love, by telling yourself sweet, loving things and I do this all day long.

I literally start my day by stating my whole name and telling myself I love me. So it sounds like this. "Buenos dias, Maria Victoria Albina Cordero, sho te quiero tanto." That was, "Hello, good morning, Maria Victoria Albina Cordero. I love you so much." And I say that out loud to myself. Nice and quiet because my partner is usually still sleeping.

But I start the day with my own prosody of voice, that sweet, gentle tone, and I'm giving myself a little love, to help me start the day ventrally connected. If you live alone or don't have a social network, there's still lots of things you can do, such as greeting yourself, listening to podcasts that feature sweet people who love you.

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And one of my favorite active ways is if you feel yourself getting ramped up or sort of collapsing, I'll wrap my arms around myself, give myself a hug, and one thing that you can do is ipsilateral contractions. That's obvious what that is, right? So right paw, left arm, left paw, right arm. Hug and then squeeze. Left hand release, right hand release. Left hand release, right hand release.

You can go slower, faster. It helps to reset the two hemispheres of the brain and just kind of feels nice. So for some folks with a trauma response, oh my gosh, being squeezed or hugged tight or constrained may be the last thing you want, so don't do that. Instead, you might consider a gentle shake, a gentle rocking back and forth, or a little shimmy to help you start getting back into your body.

One of my favorite ways to co-regulate in person is to sync my breathing with someone else. And I love and I'm so grateful for my community, which is one in which this is just what we do. So we hug and it's this fascinating thing. It's like an unspoken thing, but we hug each other and take this big deep breath in and out together.

And I'm so grateful that that co-regulation is something that's just the norm in my network of embodied weirdos and has been for long before I know what co-regulation was. But right now, I, like you, I'm not seeing my people IRL. So we hop on the phone or video, and we often start by co-regulating our breathing together.

Deep breath in, long out. And I've put up two free resources to support you in co-regulating, and those can be found in the show notes for this episode or at victoriaalbina.com/coregulate. My love, these are some tips to help you get going. I want to say that distress is normal in the face of such large scale global worry, anxiety, and fear, especially if you have the historical

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habit of wanting to control situations beyond your control, which is so normal to want to do right now.

Whatever you're thinking, feeling, experiencing right now makes sense. And as always, I want to invite you to honor it, to listen in to it, to get present with it, and then you can do your thought work to choose the next right thought, to help you shift your nervous system back into ventral vagal, back into regulation, through the amazing portal of kindness, gentleness, and self-love.

I know it's much right now and I know that you got this, babe. And in some moments, you might feel like, oh my gosh, I do not got this, and it's all okay. Come regulate with me on the internet. Follow me @victoriaalbinawellness. I'm doing lots of weekly lives on Thursday afternoons, 2pm Eastern time, and I'm going to start doing some longer format webinars very soon to help you attend to and regulate your perfect nervous system and learn more about this interplay between mind, body, and spirit, and how you can support yourself.

So make sure you're on my email list. I also have a set of free meditations right at the top of my home page, so head on over to victoriaalbina.com to download those now. They are meditations for your inner child, about boundaries, and an orienting exercise, which is specific to calming and regulating the nervous system back towards ventral vagal. So take a little moment, go download those. I'll wait. JK, but really, go do it now, my darling, please.

Alright my beauty, thank you for listening in. I'm grateful for this opportunity to connect. I'm sending you all so much love and care. Nice breath in and out. Remember, you are safe, you are held, you are loved. And when one of us heals, we help heal the world. Be well, my darling.

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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.