

Ep #271: Befriending Rest



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

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This is *Feminist Wellness*, and I'm your host, Nurse Practitioner, Functional Medicine expert, and life coach, Victoria Albina. I'll show you how to get unstuck, drop the anxiety, perfectionism, and codependency so you can live from your beautiful heart. Welcome, my love, let's get started.

Hello, hello, my love. I hope this finds you doing so well. I found myself saying to someone the other day, with a kind and gentle tone, "Your urgency is not my emergency." Back in the day, it always used to feel that way. Someone else would say, "But I need this to happen right now. I need to, I need to..." All those sympathetic activation kinds of words. "I have to, I have to, I have to," that's the language of sympathetic.

And I would say, "Well, then it must be true. I need to get just as anxious as you are. And I need to believe that because this is stressing you out, if I'm loving and kind and empathetic, I need to match you in that stress out. I need to match you in the push-push-push, in the go-go-go kind of energy." It did what it needed to, for a while, right? You know how people pleasing works, in a way, right? It makes people pleased with you.

But at the end of the day, not only are the people not pleased with you, you're not pleased with you, right? It took me a while to realize just how much I was taking on other people's emotions and making them the driver for my own life, and how much I was doing things from obligation.

"Ugh, I don't want to go to that dinner, but she's going to be upset if I don't go. Ugh, I don't want to do all that stuff that he asked me to do, but I don't want him to think less of me or be disappointed in me." And then, the even more subtle of overdoing presence, overdoing cleaning, and overdoing. Of course this was all unwitting, it was all subconscious, this attempt to garner love through action, instead of through being.

So, this has been on my mind a lot. And so, I wanted to share this piece about when our brains and our bodies say no, and when our brains and bodies say, "hey, rest. Hey, take a break. Hey, you've done way too much."

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You're wiped out, and it's time for some hammock, couch, chill.” And here I mean, conscious distraction and rest, not buffering, not checking out, not having the TV going while you're doom scrolling, while the laptop's doing...

I'm talking about rest, rest, rest. It's a thing that can feel incredibly uncomfortable in our nervous systems, uff, don't I know it? And it's something that really behooves us to become friends with.

So, I think I'm creating a second podcast as a means of introduction for the first podcast. Because it's a topic that is very near and dear to my heart right now. I've just recently had this really big push. I've written a book for you all, you'll get to see it next year; publishing is a sweet and slow sport. Oh, big shout out to Wendy Sherman, my agent. That woman is a goddess. And yeah, I wrote a book.

I've had a lot going on in my personal life, some health stuff going on. I'm fine, but it took a lot of time and energy. And Anchored started, the Somatic Studio's starting soon. Rest has been on my mind, and what it looks like to hear our bodies and our brains say back to me, “Basta, mi amor.” Enough, my love. “Take a breath, take a break.” Then, what it actually means to heed it.

Without further ado, I really hope you enjoy this episode. Just know that I adore you, and I think you are completely and utterly worthy of rest, care, and all good things.

Hello, hello, my love. I hope this finds you doing so well. So, my darlings, today is the day of the week in which I generally create a podcast for you. And that is the theme for today; what to do and how to support yourself when, no matter what you start to work on, your brain says, “blargh.” I'm cracking myself up saying “blargh” repeatedly. So, that's me.

I was sitting there staring at this computer seemingly endlessly, and I realized I had some options. The first, was to try to push myself to do

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something that my brain and body were obviously not having. Which is a message. It's quite the cultural teaching, right? "Push through it. No pain without gain. Yeah!"

It's a message I lived from for many years. Pushing and pushing and pushing myself to keep working, to keep writing, to keep studying, to keep producing, to keep excelling. And then, I took a breath. Grounded myself, and remembered that I don't push myself any longer. I'm not into it, I'm not available for it.

This is one of the things we talk about a lot in Anchored, my six-month program, moving out of the old story that we have to push through to change our thoughts and feels to feel better. That old story that we have to push through the signals from our bodies that say, "Hold on a second, now. This doesn't feel right. This isn't the right choice for me, my life, my world, right now. This isn't the thing that I want or need to be doing."

And in those moments, when we remember or decide that we're no longer available to push or be pushed, instead we can pause and can ground ourselves in our bodies, to open up space for compassion, curiosity, and care. The three C's we talk about here on the show with some regularity, which are vital to overcoming our codependent, perfectionist and peoplepleasing ways of being. To create a life full of more love, and less judgment for ourselves and others.

From there, we can live a life with more passion, creativity, and joy, in which we are of service to the world and our communities. We do that by dropping the obligation energy, that 'has to' energy, that often lurks behind the pushing. Knowing that that energy leads to resentment, taking things personally, or creating drama and stress around the task, thought, or feeling.

We go to there, and roll around in all those old feels, instead of being out there in the world rallying for change and making the world a better place

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for all of us. So, when we release pushing through the struggle or emotion, we help bring our nervous systems out of whatever spinney state they're in.

For some of us, our nervous systems go into sympathetic when we feel stressed or stuck. And that's the revved up anxious, worried, fight-or-flight state. For some of us, we've been pushing for so long that our nervous systems can't even sort of muster going into sympathetic. We might touch base there for a second, and then quickly find ourselves in dorsal; that checked out disconnected state.

We bring ourselves back home into ventral vagal; the safe and social part of our nervous system; by pausing and connecting with presence. So, we can tap into our intuition, our deep knowing about what is in our own best interest, what it is that truly serves us, both in this moment and in our lives in the long run.

If you're like, "Wait, what are these science words?" If you're totally new to Polyvagal Theory, welcome. I go into a lot more detail about this pretty much in every show forever, but specifically Episodes 58 and 174.

So, the curiosity that comes in the pause carries an invitation to get radically honest with ourselves. To ask ourselves, mind and body: What is up in this moment when the internal gears have grounded to a halt? We can lovingly, gently ask ourselves: Am I in that pressured, perfectionist, procrastination spiral that we talked all about in Episode 104?

That is, is there a part of me telling me that what I am trying to do, or believe I need to do in this moment, needs to be done absolutely perfectly or I shouldn't even bother doing the thing?

Next, we'll ask: Am I basing my value and worth as a human on doing the thing, and doing that thing perfectly? Because, wow, that much pressure can sure keep you from doing the thing, right?

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Next, I'll ask; what am I going to make it mean about myself if someone else doesn't like what I create or produce? Is that worry getting in my way? Because when your worth is dependent on what you're producing, then the action you're trying to take carries the weight of your whole life and sense of self.

When really, it's just a memo. It's just a PowerPoint. It's cleaning the house. It's writing a podcast. And, has nothing to do with your actual worth as a human being.

My beauty, I'll also invite you to explore how you're talking to yourself in these moments. Are you saying things like, "Why can I do this? What's wrong with me? Why is this not working? Why can't I get a sentence down?" When you pause and look at it, is that language serving you, my darling?

And from there, what are you making it mean about yourself that it feels challenging in this moment to get started on this work? Are you telling some b.s. old story that you're lazy? That you're no good, or a loser, or somehow lacking? "You're such a procrastinator. You're always late."

Even if some of those have been your historical patterns, like procrastinating or being late, it doesn't serve present or future you to state those thoughts as facts about who you are forever, my love. It jacks your nervous system right on up out of ventral vagal and keeps you believing you'll never change. Which is just not true, my sweet one, so very not true. So, check yourself before you label yourself as a "kind of person", and just assume that that's the eternal truth about you.

I'll also invite you to check in with your expectations of yourself. From that perfectionist thinking, are you expecting you to get more done in one day than is humanly possible? That will make anyone feel burned out overwhelmed and stuck.

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My tenderest perfect ravioli, these stories, and the state of your nervous system, matter. Because our thoughts create our feelings. And the thoughts we have access to in any given moment are deeply tied to our nervous system state.

As us nervous system nerds love to say, “Story follows state.” Which means, that the state of your nervous system... Ventral vagal: Safe and social; sympathetic: fight or flight; dorsal: checked-out, freeze, not present in the room... that state defines what thoughts you have access to in any given moment.

If you're anxious and worried and stressed about not being a robot, and thereby needing a rest day or a break or a pause, your nervous system will go right into fight or flight and you leave presence. And the thoughts available to you have that mean girl, jabby, anxiously unkind tone and sound like, “Ugh, what's wrong with me?”

When your nervous system goes into dorsal, the disconnected, checked out state, you also leave presence. And the thoughts your brain can offer tend to be either nothing, a blank, numb, nothing, which is pretty classically dorsal. Or can be of the ‘Woe is me. I can't do this.’ The resigned and checked out variety.

Neither one of which helps you to get back to the task at hand, or to give yourself the deep rest you're likely craving. So, what we can remember here, is that our thoughts are the direct result of our nervous system state. And that our feelings come from our thoughts. Our thoughts create our feelings.

So, my tenderest ravioli, what kind of feelings do you think you're going to have when your thoughts are mean and judgmental of you? When your brain is telling these stories that paint you in a less than loving light? I would feel feelings like, disappointed in myself. I would feel frustrated,

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overwhelmed, angry at my brain, annoyed, despondent and shut down. And frankly, none of those feelings move us towards our goal.

The alternative to pushing through, or spinning around in all these painful thoughts, which frankly does not get a word onto the page at all, is giving yourself a break. Pausing, grounding yourself, going for a walk, connecting with nature or your breath. Choosing kinder or even neutral, factual thoughts about yourself like, “Looks like my brain doesn't want to write right now, and that's okay.”

Which can support you in coming back into ventral vagal, which is the state of presence from which magnificent things are possible. And sometimes, what that deep inner wisdom is saying is that maybe it's not the right time to get that thing done. That you need to attend to yourself in a different way to be able to do what your mind wants to do. Sometimes your nervous system is at, or has exceeded, your capacity to work.

Sometimes, and this is part of what was up for me today, there are things on your mind and in your heart that you need to process somatically; which means through the body. And your body is focused on getting you to rest, so that you can actually do the deeper emotional work that has nothing to do with writing a podcast or making a PowerPoint.

So, my darling, I'll offer you this. What would it feel like to just call it? To just decide that you've done enough for right now, and that you're going to listen to your brain and your body when they say, “Basta?” That today's not the day you're going to get whatever it is that's on your list done. That today is, in fact, a beautiful day to rest.

For many of us, the thought of even saying this on a Wednesday is mind-blowing. Because we're so used to taking care of everyone and everything in our worlds. To fixing everything. Taking way too much onto our tiny shoulders. And the thought of giving ourselves a rest day likely hasn't even crossed your mind.

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Or what do I know? Maybe you're a championship rester... I almost said 'wrestler'. But maybe you're a championship rester, in which case, good for you. That's phenomenal. But for those of us who have historically worked ourselves to the bone, kept go, go, going, in many cases to try to outrun our own thoughts and our own feelings, what would it feel like to decide that today is a day in which you can choose to honor your body in all its brilliance?

And that you can choose, with intention, if not to call the day then at least to let yourself couch it for an hour. We do that, not in an attempt to buffer or escape your feelings, but rather because sometimes a human just needs a break; because science. As small mammals, we need rest to change the internal channel so we can get back to presence. To shift the mind spin into a moment of calm that comes from deep breaths.

Listen, the way our neurons in our brains work is predicated on rest, which we *need* to be able to absorb new information, process memories, create new understanding, to get creative, and to find interesting new solutions in life. To shift our nervous system state, and to be able to do the thought work of choosing new thoughts and feels, new ways of relating in the world.

And so, instead of pushing through and taking endless action like a chicken with its head cut off, by allowing for rest you can hold space to allow yourself to actually feel what you're feeling. So, your emotions can move through and out, instead of getting trapped in your tissues.

Now, you know me, I'm a nurse practitioner. A nurse at my core. I'm always going to be realistic and practical. So, sometimes we have deadlines, right? Sometimes other people have assigned us tasks because we work somewhere, have an editor, and we really do need to take action to get the task done lest we get made redundant.

And then, two, when someone comes at you with 'do it now' energy and your body goes 'blargh', the invitation is to pause and to not let someone

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else's urgency feel like an emergency in our bodies. Which can also block us from doing what's needed, because any action you take from that energy will create more of that same energy. Frantic begets frantic, and will not lead to getting things done, much less getting things done well.

Much, much, much less to you feeling grounded and safe in your body in the short and long run. Also remember, that pushing through rarely gets us anywhere when the body is screaming 'no'.

We take unaligned action from that pushing energy and end up half-assing a dozen tasks instead of fullassing the thing that really matters. Because that 'get it all done, at all costs to me and my body' hustle energy not only drives ineffective action, but also strengthens that old neural groove that says, "Something outside of me is way more important than me and the energetic and physical needs of my human body."

Which, for those of us who were raised in codependent, perfectionist, and people-pleasing households, was pretty much what we heard and saw modelled for us every day growing up. I want to make it clear, very, very clear, that there's no award that I've ever heard of for sitting at a desk for 10 hours and staring into the abyss.

When you believe that it's somehow laudable to force yourself to try to do things, when you're getting the internal 'no', you keep yourself stuck and spinning.

Meanwhile, through self-awareness, which sounds like, "Well, looks like my brain and body are telling me to pause right now," we can get to selfacceptance. "This is the truth of what is right now. I'm getting a fullbodied body no. A signal to hit the brakes and pause," and that is okay. And from there, giving yourself permission to be a human, and not a robot automaton in this late-stage, capitalist production-over-humanity framework.

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When you give yourself permission to just be, that might be enough for your body to begin to allow you to change the channel and to return to focus. Your body, your inner children, once attuned to by you, once listened to, once loved up on, might just say, “Oh, that was pretty sweet of you. You know what? I will let you write the thing. I will give you the motivation. I can see your commitment to doing this. So, let's get to it.”

I've definitely had that experience. Where I just give myself permission and all of a sudden the block starts to evaporate. But if that's not enough, if concentration or focus continue to evade you, and you don't have a work-life where you feel you can just say, “Alright, I'm calling it. I'm taking the day, closing the computer, and logging off,” then I want to start by inviting you to ask yourself why that is?

Stay with me here. Is it your internal narrative of perfectionism and people pleasing taking the wheel? What are you making it mean about you as a human if you take the day off and rest? Whose emotions are you trying to manage with the choice to not take care of you? Your own? Someone else's?

Are you trying to keep you from being mad at yourself by trying to take action? Remember the think-feel-act cycle: Actions will not create the feeling you're aiming for. We need aligned thoughts for that.

Or are you trying to keep others from having thoughts about you, or emotions around you, like disappointment, frustration, annoyance, anger, etc.? Or is it maybe some of that, but also an external thing? Like, did your boss say, “If this isn't on my desk by 5pm you're fired.” Or, implied that, right? It's usually not said explicitly but we get the gist.

In which case I'll ask you, first, if that's a work environment that truly serves you and your wellness as a human, if there's no space for you to need a break? And if you're like, “Yeah, that's the truth. It is not healthy work environment for me,” but meanwhile it's the job you have, and you have

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kids and a dog and bills to pay, most of us don't have the privilege of just saying 'forget about it' when we have work due. That's so real.

And so, if your current reality is that you *do* really need to get back to work, now, I have some tools for you. Once again, you know I love being practical.

So, the first, is that I will invite you to make a list, and do this from ventral vagal, while you're chill, happy, connected in with yourself, present. You're going to make a list of the things that are your go-tos when your brain says, "Oh, I am not having it right now." Things that are fun and enjoyable and can serve as a reset for you.

Studies have shown that doing something that brings you joy can increase your productivity up to 12%. That's a lot of percents. So, what are the things that you really enjoy doing, that can help you to come back to presence by honoring your body's signals?

Walking or moving, however works for you. Making art, taking a shower, connecting with nature, smelling some essential oils, calling a friend who you haven't talked to in a hot minute, playing with a pet, kid, or playdough, setting a timer and doing a puzzle or a game, or meditating for a few minutes.

Maybe you could put on some music and dance. We do this in Anchored all the time, because it's such a quick and powerful way to come back to your grounding, to move your body, and to get present outside of yourself, with the music as a portal inward to get present with and in your body.

If you can get outside, I think that's an even more potent to connect with nature. Which can be your fire escape looking out on a tree, or going to a park.

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Keep that list in your workspace, and when you find yourself unable to get back to whatever the task is at hand offer yourself a break in which you're not doom scrolling, you're not complaining, you're not chugging more caffeine, but you're doing something that brings you happiness.

Next, before allowing your brain to spin out or declare the day dead on arrival, check the basics. Baby, did you eat? Did you drink water? Do you exercise? Get sunshine today? Enough sleep last night? Is there something on your mind you need to journal about, get coached on, or talk out, so you can clear the cranium?

Ask your body if your basic human, mammalian needs have been met. And if they haven't, get to it.

On that practical note, I'll offer this. When my brain and body said 'no' to sitting at the computer to write today, I grabbed my phone, went out for a walk and talked this episode into it.

When you feel stuck, question your stories about how something should be getting done to see if another way as possible. I also, often, give myself the grace and remind myself that now that I don't work in a clinic, where you obviously have to work on someone else's schedule, I can now decide when I want to do focus work. It doesn't have to be from nine-to-five, and often isn't, because that's not what's best for me.

If you work from home, as many of us now do, and find yourself getting stuck on a project during the day frequently... If this is just what happens at 2pm... then that could be a sign that that isn't your best focus time. You get to experiment, and play around to find out when is.

In the summer, it's from 6 to 10am, for me, and then again, at night. So, I do non-work things like going for a hike, or making art, or gardening, seeing friends in the middle of the day. And rarely find myself staring at the

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computer screen with my brain going blargh, when I work in my own optimal circadian rhythm.

One of my favorite somatic, or body-based, tools to change the channel when you feel stuck is to stand up, if your body does that... you can totally adapt this and do it in a wheelchair, walker, in bed... and give your whole body a good shakeout. To help move pent up energy up, up, up through the body and out through the nervous system. Especially if you've been sitting staring at a screen for too long, not writing a word, and getting more and more frustrated by the second.

I'll invite you to join me start to shake one hand, and let that shake come up your forearm, up to your shoulder, across your clavicles, to the other arm. Now you're shaking both arms. See if you can lift one foot and shake that, shake the other foot, get a good bend in the knees and start to shake the whole body. I love the way that feels. It helps me to get into my body, get present, ground, and it does help me reset and get back to it.

I also love the somatic practice of taking your paws and putting them up in front of you, adapting as needed to match your ability, and taking your thumb and you're going to tap it to each of your fingers and are going to count.

I go fast if I feel stuck or frozen. So, that would be me taking my thumb and touching my index finger, and saying, "One." My New York finger and saying, "Two." My ring finger and saying, "Three." My pinky and saying, "Four." And then, I'll come back. Pinky four, ring three, New York one... New York one? My brain just had to say New York is number one. We all know Rhode Island is number one, but New York is a pretty close second. Oh brains! New York was two. Index finger is one.

Okay, so we're going to do it faster now. So, thumb to first finger, 1-2-3-4. Come back, 4-3-2-1-1-2-3-4-4-3-2-1. I do that, and I'll do it with both hands.

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What's really nice is you can do it up in front of your face; I like to watch my fingers doing it. But you can also do it below your desk or in your lap.

If you're in a meeting or on a Zoom call, and you're like, "Hello brain. Please come online. Please, please, please, please." That's what we do, we go fast if we feel frozen or stuck, and we need to bring a little activation energy.

And we'll go slow, if we feel revved up, anxious, worried. Which will sound like 1—2—3—4. And, come back. Now, if you're feeling really anxious, if your body's just like, "Oof", revved all the way up, foot totally on the gas, then I actually like to do a full exhale between count.

So, go 1-exhale-2-exhale-3-exhale-4-exhale. And if you're not counting out loud because you're teaching this on a podcast, then you would take an inhale as you touch your thumb to your first finger, and exhale in between.

It's a simple, free, accessible practice that I adore. That humans of pretty much most ages can do once you have manual dexterity. It has been so helpful to calm my nervous system, rev up my nervous system in a gentle way, and is really supportive of my magical ADHD brains. So that when the moment doesn't allow for rest I can help myself to get back to the task at hand.

Finally, I'll encourage you, when you're feeling this stuck kind of way to actually ask yourself the questions I posed earlier in the show. To start to understand what the "what" is when your brain and body say 'no'. And to practice pausing throughout your day to get present in your body when things are going well overall. To increase your capacity to come back into presence when things feel challenging.

Few things have been as life changing for me as cultivating presence. And it is truly the pathway into deeper self-compassion, all the time, but especially when my brain and body say, "Basta, No work for you."

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I hope this episode has been supportive, my love. Please take good care of you. You're really worth it.

Alright my beauties, let's do what we do. Gentle hand on your heart, should you feel so moved. And remember, you are safe. You are held. You are loved. And when one of us heals, we help heal the world. Be well my beauty. I'll talk to you soon.

Thank you for listening to this episode of *Feminist Wellness*. If you want to learn more all about somatics, what the heck that word means, and why it matters for your life, head on over to VictoriaAlbina.com/somaticswebinar for a free webinar all about it. Have a beautiful day my darling and I'll see you next week. Ciao.