

Ep #82: Urges: Restricting vs. Allowing



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Victoria Albina, NP, MPH

Ep #82: Urges: Restricting vs. Allowing

Few amongst us like to be told that we cannot do or have or say what we want to. To be restricted, restrained, held back in our daily lives. And so often, what keeps us from living our lives as we most deeply desire are these internal voices screaming, “No.”

That scolding voice that tells you you’re not good or healthy or right if you don’t place a set of unrealistic set of perfectionist restrictions on yourself. What you’re doing when you tell yourself no, no, no is creating the perfect storm of internal rebellion. And you’re telling your sweetest internal parts that they aren’t trustworthy without constant surveillance, and you’re linking your worth to the actions you take.

While I know none of this is your goal, my tender little kitten, it happens so easily and so often. If this concept of restriction leading to internal rebellion is resonating for you, keep listening. 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. I am loving my life up here on occupied Lenape territory in the Hudson Valley of New York. I have had some phenomenal visitors of late. I’ve been doing my morning practices, my journaling and thought work, my meditation, my movement on the porch.

And we have this little back porch that looks over the land where the trees are and it’s just so magical. And lately, I have been visited by hummingbird,

Ep #82: Urges: Restricting vs. Allowing

wild turkey, so many bunnies. Tons of deer. It's been just heavenly really to see all of those friends and allies. And speaking of allies, so many of my favorite most beloved plant allies just grow wild here. So it's been really special to spend time with them too.

So my beauties, we have been talking for the last few episodes about building self-love and self-trust through the framework of the minimum baseline. The concept of choosing one small thing to do each day and committing to it, working on it, getting it done.

Whether it's a five-minute walk, 60 seconds of stretching or yoga, 10 minutes of daily thought work, whatever it may be. And how monumentally life-changing this practice is, in large part because the what is not the focus. The focus is the commitment to self and that's what builds profound self-love and self-trust.

Starting to shift your brain, your thinking, and your somatic bodily experience, your nervous system experience, to believe that not only are you a person who keeps their promises to themselves, you do it within your own window of dignity or tolerance, which we covered in shows 78 and 80.

Today, we're building on that by talking about the concept of restricting versus allowing. When I was seeing patients in clinic for all those years, practicing holistic and functional medicine, one of the main questions I got day in and day out was what foods should I restrict? What should I not eat in order to feel better?

And while yeah, there's an argument to be made that modern American gluten, factory farmed dairy, GMO corn, processed sugar, that these things can be problematic for our health for sure, and so many of my patients, myself included, feel so much better off of these foods. What would happen

Ep #82: Urges: Restricting vs. Allowing

is they would hit an eventual and inevitable wall where these diets that made their bodies feel better, feel less pain, inflammation, more stable moods, digestion, sleep, no longer worked for their mental wellness.

Not because of what they were not eating or eating, but because they were coming at the project from an energy of and a place of restricting. And that is our theme for today, my darling ones. The energy of restricting ourselves, our choices, versus allowing ourselves and trusting our bodies to know what's best for us.

The central lesson here is this; you get to disentangle your choices from your self-worth. Baby, this is critical. I want to say this into the deepest, farthest reaches of your spirit and your heart and your mind. You cannot become worthy by doing the right things, by your actions, by eating the thing or not, buying the thing or not, setting the boundary or not, saying the words or not.

You just are worthy of love and care. So these kinds of choices, to eat the gluten, to not eat the gluten, to buy the coat, to not buy the coat, they don't have to be so loaded. They don't have to be a referendum on your loveliness when you already trust that you are so lovable just as you are, just because you are.

And we so often tell ourselves that there is some right way to do anything and everything, for moving to breathing to resting to journaling, and all of those attempts to restrict and control are attempts to feel safe, but create more armoring tension, stress in our bodies.

And that is totally understandable and is so not aligned with the flow that most of us actually want. Whether we're talking about nutrition and what we

Ep #82: Urges: Restricting vs. Allowing

shouldn't eat to be a "healthy" person, which is not even a concept I believe in. What does that mean?

Or if we're thinking about shopping and what we should or shouldn't buy, which for me in my 20s and early 30s meant never buying food or coffee out because my student non-profit worker budget was tight, sure. But it was really coming more from a place of not allowing myself comforts.

It came from a place of restricting. I worked all the way through school, I was a janitor at Oberlin, I was a teaching assistant, I worked through all of my graduate programs. I could have afforded a two or three dollar cup of coffee, but it was the not letting myself. It was judging myself for wanting to do something that I somehow for some reason decided was as frivolous as getting the occasional cup of coffee.

So whether we're talking again about nutrition, spending, the best use of your time, which so often for the folks I work with, that means overworking and not resting. Or spinning in so much perfectionism that the work starts to feel so monumental. All of this and so much more comes down to the thought problem of restriction.

I should do this to be good and worthy, I shouldn't do that to be good and worthy. And you know what that breeds in the human mind? Rebellion, pushback, a desire to do anything in this entire world other than the thing that your thoughts made so darn heavy.

The thing you're thinking defines you, means something about you, tells the world and yourself the story of who you are and your worthiness as an animal, the moralistic framework of it being good to do one thing and bad to do another, so you must restrict yourself by controlling, controlling, controlling, so often leading you to feel buckets of guilt and shame when

Ep #82: Urges: Restricting vs. Allowing

you don't meet your own perfectionist fantasy goals for your own thoughts, feelings, and actions, and the result, it's not cute.

It's more self-judgment, self-doubt, anxiety, stress, and a reification or strengthening of that internal nervous system based story that you are not trustworthy and reliable for yourself, or you may be totally exact that for everyone else in your world.

So you feel good about yourself if you eat the perfect diet and feel horrible about yourself if you eat one gluten-free cookie. And that is so much pressure, my darling.

Nerd alert, as always, because we love to nerd. Think about the impact on your cortisol and the stress that's flowing through your entire body when you're putting this pressure on you to eat perfectly, spend perfectly, move perfectly, yoga perfectly, breathe perfectly, wife perfectly, partner perfectly, mother perfectly, daughter perfectly, son perfectly, sibling perfectly, on and on.

You're just jacking your cortisol all day, my beauty. And you know what that does to your beautiful body. If you don't, check out the episode all adrenal health. You can learn all about it there.

So let's shift gears just a little bit, but of course not really. Let's talk about puppies. I mean, in general because puppies are just plain magic, but specifically, what happens if your puppy is chewing on your shoe and you see it and you freak out and try to rip the shoe out of its mouth? Well, it bites down harder.

Ep #82: Urges: Restricting vs. Allowing

I mean, of course it does. That puppy is no fool. She knows that shoes is delicious, and now you've engaged in a tug of war that leads nowhere good. Meanwhile, if you were to pause in that moment and not to get mad about the fact that this pup is chewing but rather, to accept that pups love to chew things, it's one of their very few jobs, you could then offer the pup another option.

Accepting her desire to chew versus yelling at her for having instincts and desires and seeking to alleviate the discomfort of getting new teeth by chewing something glorious like those shoes you totally saved up for. And in so doing, in stepping into that acceptance that it's okay to want to do things, you can do a gentle trade out. Chew toy or Kong or bone or whatever for your beloved shoe.

Therein you accept the instinct, the desire to do a thing, and you meet it with love. Resisting here is thinking, "Dogs should not do chewings. Bad dog," which of course leads that smart pup to clamp down harder. Allowing, the remedy to resisting, is accepting that this is what your bundle of puppy joy will do.

Allowing for what is, what's real, and offering a loving alternative. Because whether you're a dog or a toddler or a grown adult, no one likes having what they love ripped away from them. And it's normal and natural to have urges. Remember back to last week when we talked about the autonomic nervous system and how important it is for the body to feel safe in order to do the things we most want to do.

That was foreshadowing to this whole notion of the inner rebel, that inner part that doesn't feel safe while also feeling restricted, and may take false comfort in the story that you are in control when you're restricting yourself and then just actually screaming at yourself in your head.

Ep #82: Urges: Restricting vs. Allowing

And this whole concept, this concept of safety in the body, restricting or allowing, it's so vital for the healing of codependency, perfectionism, and people pleasing because oh my goodness, do we sure know how to restrict ourselves. In seeking external validation, approval, love, and care, we so often prioritize things other than our own wants and desires.

Other people's financial needs over investing in ourselves, other people's dinner preference over ours. For example, I heard this all the time in clinic. Some variation of, I didn't want to tell my mother-in-law that I don't eat what she was serving because I didn't want her to think that I'm rude or picky or difficult, so I ate it and had a belly ache for three days. We do those things.

We also prioritize other people's approval of our weight, our body, our clothes, our marriage, our partnership, our career choices, and for those humans who are socialized as women, that can be - I mean like, a thousand fold over.

And while we're so focused on other people and their approval of us, their validation of us, we can seek that false comfort of conformity and restriction as a way to attempt to feel safe. We're so used to being our own bully and victim, so used to the false safety of black and white thinking, which is typical for brains like ours when unmanaged, the restriction and rebellion seem like the only two options.

And so we eventually find ourselves acting against it all when it's not built around our humanity. And the fact of having a brain. When it's not authentic, when these restrictions we're putting on ourselves are not aligned with our own true deepest wants or desires.

And thus, the example of my client Tabitha, who recently put herself on a very strict no sugar diet, and then found herself unable to pause when she

Ep #82: Urges: Restricting vs. Allowing

felt a massive desire, an urge to eat a whole bag of cookies in one go, which in turn made her feel really, really sick for days.

Now, you know me, my sweet nerd. I am never demonizing any choices. I'm never judging the cookies or the desire to nom them. Cookies are delicious. But rather, I'm just pointing out that in that moment, because she had restricted her food, her wants, her desires, her thoughts, feels, actions, and results so harshly, so intensely, that inner rebel came running to the fore. In that moment, she felt so deeply out of control, outside of herself, she said, which again, makes a lot of sense.

The moment you tell yourself your worth hinges on your choices and thus, you must always not have an urge or desire for the cookies, the alcohol, the rest, the TV break, the water, whatever, you turn it into a sea of potential rebellion by making the strict either or that your self-worth and self-love rests on.

And of course, that mental gymnastics will keep you from doing the things you want to do, whereas starting from a place of self-love, a belief that you are inherently worthy regardless of whether or not you eat the bag of Oreos can give you the space to make these choices more thoughtfully because they're less emotionally loaded.

Let's continue with the example of nutrition. As soon as you step out of your own intuition, your inner wisdom, and attempt to adhere 1000% to a restrictive plan, it's natural to feel a desperate desire for all of the forbidden fruit because what is forbidden and restricted is so alluring.

And you'll want to buffer against the pain of not believing that you're someone who can stick to the diet or the budget or the exercise routine, whatever it may be. So our brains do this funny thing. You may find

Ep #82: Urges: Restricting vs. Allowing

yourself effectively self-sabotaging to show yourself that you are not capable because that can feel safer than allowing yourself to truly believe that you are capable and to then fail a month in.

It's like your brain is picking the situation which will somehow lead to maybe just a little bit less self-flagellation, little less beating you up. And if you only last a day or five on the diet plan or if you decide, man, I felt so much better on that diet plan but god, it's so stupid, if you aggressively push it away or subtly push it away, versus starting to really believe you can do it by restricting for a month and then rebelling.

Well, the hope may be that you may not beat yourself up so bad, and then you won't risk pinning your hopes on this restrictive plan working, finally getting relief, only to be disappointed after a monastic month off everything but air and banana peel sandwiches.

When your brain's habit is to be mean to you, to expect you to fail, and to think of that failure as a very bad thing that you'll be mean to you about and so many of my clients have this habit because it's a cornerstone of codependency, perfectionism, and people pleasing, your brilliant brain will seek the path of less pain because that's a human biological imperative. To avoid suffering and to seek pleasure.

My beauty, it all comes back to you being a human animal and reacting the way mammals do because science. Remember, the more you restrict, the more powerful your urge to do the opposite is. So what are the remedies here? Well, one option is to eat everything you ever want, even though it makes you sick.

All that gluten that worsens your IBS and mood, all the sugar that makes you hyper and then have a crash, and wow, is that me. I actually literally

Ep #82: Urges: Restricting vs. Allowing

start crying after a sugar high. But I mean like, sobbing. It's kind of funny but it's mostly just ridiculous.

You could also eat all the dairy that constipates you or makes your eczema worse. On and on. Babe, you're an adult. You get to make your choices for you. Literally no one else does. And that, eating all the things that make you feel sick, that's an option. That's 100% available to you.

You can also follow other urges like if you set a rule that you'll no longer watch TV. You can buffer and binge on Netflix for hours the next time you're upset. If you set a rule that you won't spend money on yourself beyond the basics, you can drop \$800 on credit card on a pair of shoes when that is definitely not in the budget.

Alternately, the plan I like more for you is to find the middle ground. For me, that looks like allowing my urges and desires to do the things that don't serve my best wellness, honoring that I'm a human. That means that I will have urges.

So what does it mean to allow an urge? It means to sit with the discomfort of it and to hold space for it. Meaning to put aside your judgment, criticism, and critique of that sensation within you and to accept it as part of the human condition. It does not mean that you follow what the urge within is saying necessarily, but rather you just notice it. Awareness.

You give it love and be realistic, noting I am a human having a natural human urge, born of restriction, acceptance, and then deciding with your prefrontal cortex that perhaps today you're not following that particular urge. Action.

Ep #82: Urges: Restricting vs. Allowing

I think many, even most of us have felt urges and not followed them, so we have evidence for being able to do this. For example, you get cut off in traffic and you feel the urge to speed up or to yell at the person or do something else dangerous. Hopefully you do not follow that urge.

Or back when I was riding the subway in New York City as part of my daily pre-corona life, I would get on that super crowded 8am Q train or even worse, the R. And I'll be really real with you my love, I often felt the urge to stomp the foot of the tall white man reading his phone with his elbow in my face and that of every other short human around him. But I didn't follow that urge.

I noticed it and moved on by allowing it. And allowing the urge, feeling it all goes hand in hand with recognizing that you are making a choice. I talked a lot about this in episode 63 about decision making. You truly have the choice to eat 473 cookies, to yell at someone, to never shower, to hit people, to spend all your money the second you have it, to never invest in yourself, in your mental or physical health, to burn your own house down.

These are all choices you can make, but likely don't because you don't like the result or outcome. And you can apply the same framework to all the things you've been restrictive about and can see how you do have choice. You have agency.

You can eat the gluten, the cake, the dairy, you can drink the soda or alcohol, you can buy whatever you want, say whatever you want, and you get to choose each and every time. And by restricting or allowing, you're making a choice either way.

On my own health journey, learning how to eat intuitively, which we discussed back in episode 11 and hat tip as always to Elaine Resch and

Ep #82: Urges: Restricting vs. Allowing

Evelyn Tribole who wrote the book about it in 1995, I came to understand just how much my body knows. And when I decided that no food is forbidden, the gluten and sugar and other foods that made me feel unwell lost their allure.

It's like the glamor just kind of faded from them. Eating them is no longer a rebellious act of agency reclaiming, not a way to prove that I have control over my body because I now believe that I do. I show it to myself every time I pick a meal that makes me feel great.

And instead, eating those foods, it's just something that hurts me, so I'm disinclined to it. Part of what made me secretly binge-eat ice cream in the basement as a chubby kid socialized as a girl in an Argentine household, and side note, few culturas obsess about thinness like us Argentines.

I was constantly told that my weight and my body were a problem. I felt judged for eating what I wanted to and I was actively restricted in the food that I was allowed, the portion I was allowed, and that restriction became part of my internal story and I binge-ate the ice cream from a place of rebellion, to say I can do this if I want to, you can't keep me from eating.

That little girl lives within me and I get to show up for her and as my most loving parent every day to say baby girl, you can 100% have the ice cream. I just want to remind you that it will give you a headache, it will give you a belly ache, it will make your chronic pain so much worse, and then you'll feel all weird and sad and irritable and cranky for a day, but probably two or three, so that's the consequences. That is what is very likely to happen. But if you want to, you should go ahead now that you have the full, full information.

Ep #82: Urges: Restricting vs. Allowing

It's like a form of informed consent. When that's the internal dialogue, that permission giving, combined with reminding all the parts of myself of the consequences of the choice, I find that I just don't want the ice cream like I used to.

And I see this in my clients too. Dropping the story that you're good or bad, worthy or not, a better person if you do or don't eat something, do or don't buy something, do or don't adhere to restriction, well, dropping all that takes the edge off the urge. So you can ride that wave instead of feeling pulled under by it.

This goes hand in hand with our discussions here about building internal trust. You don't have to be a meany-pants with yourself to trust that you'll do what serves you most. You can just put the black and white thinking, the rulebook down, and can start to listen into that quiet voice within that knows what you truly need. Your intuition, that gut feeling.

The more you decide to listen to it and learn to trust it, to discern what is the voice of intuition versus the voice of anxiety, fear, worry, the more powerful that voice will be. And while you're working on that, on building that internal capacity for trust, consider starting with allowing and seeing where it lands you.

Allowing the urge, the desire, means giving yourself space to recognize that you have the ability to make a choice for yourself from your self-love and not your rebellion. So my sweet beauty, I know my nerds love a set of concrete steps to take so let's lay them out.

Step one, recognizing our critic that's telling you you're wrong or bad or in danger if you make a choice outside your restriction, and recognize that staying within the restriction or rebelling against it is a choice either way.

Ep #82: Urges: Restricting vs. Allowing

Step two, recognize the urge and allow it. Sit with it with love versus jumping to buffering to attempt to make it go away. My beauty, that doesn't work because science. There's no amount of distracting that will keep your inner rebel from not reminding you of all the pizza it wants when you clearly said absolutely no pizza ever.

Step three, take a look at your restrictions. Ask yourself why you are putting these stories, these rules, this potential harshness on yourself. What is the goal? Is it aligned with your self-love? Is it aligned with true health or with a story like thin equals healthy, which the science shows is not true by the way?

Take a look at those restrictions and where they're coming from so you can ask yourself in addition to this shift towards allowing, towards intuition, maybe you can just let the restrictions go because they're not actually truly in alignment.

Step four, take a slow deep breath in, long slow breath out. Connect in with your body. Notice the sensations that arise when you feel this urge. Breathe in through your nose, another long, slow out, and bring curiosity and self-compassion in.

Remind yourself that you're not bad for wanting something, it's not bad to have an urge, and that you get to be loving with yourself always. You always get to choose that, my darling. And I'll invite you to ask yourself, what's going on for me right now? What is this urge trying to tell me? What else is going on for me energetically, mentally, physically? Is there something I need that is neither restriction nor rebellion? Remind yourself that you can sit with this sensation and can make the most loving choice for your whole self from your whole self, and not as an act of rebellion.

Ep #82: Urges: Restricting vs. Allowing

Step four, if the urge to do something that you know doesn't serve you shows up, like eating a food you're sensitive to, spending money you don't have for a thing that doesn't move your life forward, offer yourself a loving alternative. A way to embrace the fact that you are a human with wants and desires, needs, urges, without making a choice that will harm you.

And if you enjoyed the show my darling, I want to invite you to head on over to victoriaalbina.com/masterclass. My six-month masterclass, The Feminist Wellness Guide to Overcoming Codependency starts up again on September 28th and there are really just a very few number of spots left.

So if you are curious about the masterclass, if you are really dedicated and committed to shifting the narrative, shifting your thinking around codependency, perfectionism, and people pleasing, through a needs based loving, feminist lens, I'll invite you to join me.

Check out the class. There's a short application form there. Fill it out. We will be in touch and we can get you on a call with me to talk about all of the details. The course starts September 28th and I know it will fill up very fast. We are almost there. So if you're interested, my sweet, do not delay. I'd love to share this incredible program with you.

Oh, and I should say, I of course always reserve a 20% of my programs for sliding scale and those spots have been long since scooped up. So that. I think sliding scales are really important. I think it's an important way to make things more accessible.

Alright my darlings, let's do what we do. Let's take a nice slow deep breath in through your beautiful nose, long breath out through your mouth. 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 will talk to you soon.

Ep #82: Urges: Restricting vs. Allowing

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.