

Ep #104: Pressured Perfectionist Procrastination



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Victoria Albina, NP, MPH

Ep #104: Pressured Perfectionist Procrastination

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. It's been delightful to get so many sweet messages from you all about the new music. I'm glad you're enjoying it. I continue to love it. It's so fun and we have a lot of fun around here.

The issues we talk about are super serious for sure, but why not let it be fun? Because the main remedy we usually come back to is more self-awareness, getting more present in your body, learning to hear yourself and your thoughts and to bring love to you, to bring more pleasure, more joy into your life by continuing to bring your awareness to the thoughts that keep you suffering.

So why not bring in more fun? More fun I say. So my beauty, we're going to talk about something that is decidedly unfun while we're stuck in it. And that is that many of us don't recognize the interconnectedness of our anxiety and our perfectionist stories. The stories that say that we need to do everything to some superhuman unattainable standard or it's just garbage and we're garbage and everything's garbage and someone lend me a match to light this dumpster fire up, please.

So we go to these painful lengths to try to mitigate this experience without realizing that the answers to living in a new way lie in attuning to our bodies and their wisdom. And of course, in learning to manage our minds, to see the thought errors driving this particular bus.

Ep #104: Pressured Perfectionist Procrastination

And that thought error tells you that it makes logical sense to avoid those tasks that you have a perfectionist anxiety story around because your brain reasons, if I don't do the thing, if I put it off and off and off and then do it last minute, then I won't have to be anxious about it for as long, which out loud often sounds like, "I work best under pressure," which is also code for an old favorite: procrastination, which for many of us, was a once brilliant coping mechanism.

If accomplishing tasks in a more spacious way, say, starting an assignment a month or even two weeks before it's due, if cleaning the house a few days before your in-laws come over instead of the morning of leaves room for your brain to flood you with anxious thoughts and stories about how to do it best, how you'll F it up, how it won't be perfect, how others will judge it or criticize you.

In short, how you and the world will punish you for not doing it perfectly. So, our brains punish us in advance by putting it off and letting that familiar pressure build up, which also provides a very convenient out, should our endeavors fail. Because then we can always tell ourselves and others, "I mean, you know, listen, I started the day before so it makes sense if it's not that good."

Aren't brains fascinating? Look at all these loop de loops we put in between ourselves and feeling feelings. So fascinating. If this is you, if you're nodding along with that story, you know I am, then perfectionism anxiety could be underlying root causes for you in your pressurized procrastination habit.

And for more on holistic and thought-work based approaches to anxiety itself, check out episode three from about a thousand years ago, which is

Ep #104: Pressured Perfectionist Procrastination

all about anxiety. As always, what's true here is that the thoughts you think on repeat are the thoughts you come to believe because science.

Nerd alert. When you spend all of high school and then all of college and then your work life repeating this story, "I thrive under pressure, I work best when I pull an all-nighter," when you repeat that story into your mind-body, then you create neural grooves around that story. That is, your brain believes you. Your nervous system comes to believe that this is what is true, that you need that pressure, that adrenaline, that cortisol, that fight or flight state because you've created an identity around that story. A set of habits and beliefs around that story, untrue though it may be.

Let's take a moment to get somatic, to check in with our bodies around this story. If it feels safe to do so, imagine yourself with a deadline tomorrow. You have this big memo to write, a PowerPoint to make, a play to memorize, whatever your thing is in life.

Imagine that pressure of having to complete it on the double. Imagine all that pressure like a huge weight just bearing down on you. Connect in with how that rushing frenetic, "Go, go, go, I have to get it done, I have to get it done, they're going to be so disappointed, I have to get it done," energy feels in your body.

When I go to there, let me check in. I feel my jaw clench, my shoulders go up towards the ceiling, my neck tenses up, and there's this pit around my solar plexus, my belly, it just feels yucky. Like tense and tight because my body doesn't love adrenaline, this all feels terrible to me.

Meanwhile, it may feel normal and fine to you if this is something you experience often, and that's interesting to notice too. How comfortable

Ep #104: Pressured Perfectionist Procrastination

uncomfortable things can feel when it's our habitual norm. Fascinating, right?

What's important here is to recognize that just because we're used to it doesn't mean it's okay or good for us. Like living in chaos or stress. They're cozy because we know them, not because they don't suck. So let's look at how this pressure sucks for our minds, our bodies, from a nerd alert standpoint.

Pressure, by its very nature, is restrictive and creates tension in our bodies, particularly in our fascia. That thin layer of connective tissue that separates the world outside our bodies from the world within. And it creates tension within our vasculature. Our blood vessels, our blood system in our body. All that tension builds up, often over years, like something's going to blow.

And when I think about really stressed high-pressure humans, my mind goes right to heart attacks, which makes sense because blood vessels are thin-walled. They don't like increased pressure. Not at all.

And the irony of putting pressure on ourselves to work faster, harder, better is that blood flow is restricted when our bodies are tense, which means we're getting less oxygen into our tissues, which is why chronic pain makes sense when we've lived a life of pressure.

And when pressure is significant in our systems, we can be more adrenalized. We can be in sympathetic or fight or flight more, which are states in which we can't think as well as usual and because science. So our learning, intelligence, and memory function all decrease.

Ep #104: Pressured Perfectionist Procrastination

In nature, pressure makes diamonds. But the pressure to make diamonds has created a worldwide blood trade. The pressure to make diamonds actually takes three billion years. Humans are not made to take on constant pressure, my darling.

When we depend on pressure to perform, create, produce, there's always this threat of punishment should we fail. And so we put ourselves in this place of almost failing by putting it off until the last second, or putting a ton of pressure on ourselves to make it perfect, using that threat of punishment as the thing to motivate us.

Working under pressure creates drama in our lives. And I'm just done with that. With creating chaos. That was once super cozy for me but it's not the way I want to live my life. And sometimes when we don't know that we have the capacity to create motivation with our thoughts, which we do, you do, my beauty, when we expect to be motivated somehow via magic or lightning strike, we can lean on pressure as a motivator because humans as mammals have this innate fear of being punished.

Remember the three biological imperatives, my nerds. Avoid pain, seek pleasure, and conserve energy, which means do the least to get by always. These punishments take all sorts of forms. Loss of a job, a relationship, a degree by not turning your work in and failing a course.

Oftentimes, the punishment isn't real or tangible. Loss of respect, control, admiration. Harsh judgments are handed down from the pressure of punishing parts within us, like I suck, I can't do anything right, or well, I'll never finish this on time.

And then our bodies that love us so much react to say, hey, this pressure is too much. Here, let me show you what it's like inside this body and let's

Ep #104: Pressured Perfectionist Procrastination

release some of this pent-up tension before I explode. And then we get the heartburn, the exhaustion, headaches, bellyaches, digestive problems, which all make sense as your body continues to build up and build up with all that pressure and all that sympathetic activation.

Another line of thinking for the pressurized procrastinator is based in having pulled this off a thousand times before, so you truly think it's the only way through. And you have all of these accomplishments and accolades to back you up in saying I work best under pressure. And what you're continuing to do is to not look your anxiety in the eye, to not look at the places where you are linking your worth and value as a human with your production.

And beauty, it makes sense. Of course you're anxious if you do that because you're making what you make mean something about who you are, which is never the truth. My sweet tender buttercup, let's take a nice breath together.

I have a friend who is a self-proclaimed reformed pressure worker. Magda was a fancy pants lawyer and worked at a huge company doing high-level work. She accomplished great things at much detriment to herself because of the pressure she put on her, which of course, the patriarchy and capitalism were happy to pile on as well.

And it's important to notice that she was socialized to be this way. This was modeled for her in childhood by her overworking high-pressure dad, who she looked to as her role model. Magda was afraid that if she didn't do everything that was asked of her and more, both at work and at home, and we can talk all about the pressures that career women who are also in particular - career women in general, but women who are also mothers, there's that double pressure on those folks.

Ep #104: Pressured Perfectionist Procrastination

But Magda was afraid that if she didn't do everything that was asked of her and more, both at home and by her managers, that they would fire her. That her coworkers would think she's lazy, her kids wouldn't love her, her partner would leave her. And deep down, that people from high school would look at her Instagram and would laugh behind her back if she wasn't constantly getting that gold star in adulting.

Every single task turned into a pressure cooker because she kept putting things off to the last moment, letting that anxiety and stress build up, and because the more she took on, meaning she didn't set boundaries and limits, the more work they gave her.

Until eventually, she had what she calls a nervous breakdown, which is more accurately called a nervous system response that hurled her into exhaustion, fatigue, belly pain, dorsal vagal, to get her to slow down and get back into alignment with herself. A built-in emergency valve pressure release.

My loves, I do not want this for you or anyone ever. Your life can be one in which you work best by loving yourself. That is the key remedy here, my beauty. You can choose what to give your attention to, instead of continuing to believe some fake crappy narrative that tells you why every little thing is vitally important and worth creating a pressure cooker around.

You can learn to hear the whisper of those pressure stories to put things off, to wait until the last minute, that you're constantly behind the eight ball. The stories that tell you to procrastinate, teamed with a story that it always has to be perfect or your worth is on the line.

And you can learn to hear the whispers when they come up as a reminder to slow down and to assess the situation from a stance of truly taking care,

Ep #104: Pressured Perfectionist Procrastination

to create something so much better, by giving yourself the time and energy to approach your life and your work with gentleness, with calm, with enough time to not stress yourself and your perfect nervous system out over things that kind of maybe don't even matter so much anyway.

And the science is really clear that by doing so, not only will you reduce stress on your mind, your body, your nervous system. You will produce better work from that place of having your full cognition on board, versus waiting until that last minute pressure cooker moment.

I'm imagining this sweet spot where Olivia Pope meets the Buddha. You all know I hear myself and that I'm totally ridiculous, right? But really, when your brain presents you the option to approach something by creating a ton of pressure to perform from fear and anxiety, you can take a breath.

You can put your hand on your heart and ask yourself, how can I handle this situation in a way that is gentle and loving towards me? Trusting myself, and this is so important, this is why we talked about the minimum baseline, do listen to that one if you haven't once this one's done. But I can really truly trust myself to get it done.

Whereas this whole pressure anxiety story says at its core, I don't trust me to do what I want to do, what I say I need to do, what I need to do unless I create all this pressure, anxiety, and stress around it. And that's where's it's so vital to intervene on your own behalf, to remind yourself that you can trust you, or you're in the process of learning to trust you to do it without the stress.

Some other questions that I find helpful here are what part of this circumstance is actually mine to handle? And I say that one really

Ep #104: Pressured Perfectionist Procrastination

understanding the codependent thinker and that we take on so much that's like, legit not ours. You don't have to do that anymore.

Another guiding question, can I get help to get this done in a peaceful way? How can I pace myself to not go into that frenetic overload place with this? How am I linking this task with my worth or what I think of me or what I fear others will think of me?

When you learn slowly day by day to trust yourself, to become your own watcher and to see your own thoughts and question them, when you know that you can align your breath, your mind, your nervous system, then there's no need to pressure punish yourself into performing. And so there's no need to put it off.

You get to recognize the anxiety at play here and give that part of you love. You get to recognize the perfectionist stories in your mind that tie your worth and value as a human with your production, and you get to put them in perspective.

My darling, they're just stories and you don't have to believe everything you think. For realsies. You can engage your brain's amazing neuroplasticity, your capacity to change your thinking in a real way so you can show up and handle life like the cool organic cucumber you are.

You can accomplish what life presents you like you're bullet-proof. Just standing there at the top of a burning building with your hair blowing in the wind. My love, let your Instant Pot use pressure to get things done and let self-love guide you.

Ep #104: Pressured Perfectionist Procrastination

Thanks for listening, my beauties. Such an important issue. If this resonated for you, if you enjoyed this episode, I would be so delighted if you could share it on the social media and tag me @victoriaalbinawellness. It is so fun to connect with you all there and when you share the show, you help share this free resource with other folks who wouldn't otherwise know about it. Thank you in advance, my beauty.

Alright, let's do what we do. Gentle, loving hand on your heart, bring your attention to your breath. No need to change it. 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. I'll talk to you soon.

If you've been enjoying the show and learning a ton, it's time to apply it with my expert guidance so you can live life with intention, without the anxiety, overwhelm, and resentment, so you can get unstuck. You're not going to want to miss the opportunity to join my exclusive intimate group coaching program, so head on over to victoriaalbina.com/masterclass to grab your seat now. See you there. It's going to be a good one.