

High Functioning Overwhelm



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With Your Host

Natalie Bacon

[Mom On Purpose](#) with Natalie Bacon

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Welcome to Mom On Purpose, where it's all about helping moms overcome challenges and live their best lives. My hope is by being here, you are more inspired to become the mom you were made to be. I'm Natalie, your host, a wife, boy mom, dog mama, Chicagoan, and former lawyer turned professionally certified coach. If you're here to grow, I can help. Let's go.

Hello, my beautiful friend. How are we doing today? How is your fall going? Are you embracing all the fall things like we are over here in the Midwest? I am in the suburbs of Chicago and delighting in wearing jeans and sweatshirts after such a hot, late summer. It has been just so fun for me and the boys to get out and do fall things and the apple orchards and pumpkin patches and enjoy this time when they're little and really being present with that and connected with them.

And I've been working on my thoughts intentionally for how I wanna think every single day. And that's been very powerful for me to be able to feel connected to them, feel grounded to them, feel capable of holding, you know, challenging boundaries sometimes and not let that really impact the quality of the day. I feel like it is just as much of a skill as it is an art. And so I'm practicing that. I'm right there with you regardless of the age of your kids. It's really about what's going on for you internally. And I'm feeling that right now. It's also really great that most of my kids are sleeping through the night. I was so excited when I woke up this morning. I woke up at 5:30 and everyone else was still asleep. They all slept until 6:05. It was so fun. We are a household of early risers and any night that they sleep through the night, all of them and don't wake up until after 6:00 AM, I mean, come on, you don't even have to do though work about being tired, right?

So for me, it's just been fun to enjoy this season of like those small moments and have that connectedness, that present, feeling with my family, with my kids, and also simultaneously be so motivated and driven and ambitious to grow my business, achieve my goals. And for you, that might look different, but I just wanna share with you kind of what that looks like on my end and how I am able to do both and that's really, that's how I came up with my lose more with less method for weight loss because I needed to figure out an easier way to do it. And your constraint might not

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be three little ones at home, it might be something else. But I think whenever you have a constraint like that, like for me it's time and, you know, I didn't have time to spend hours in the gym overhauling my eating habits, following all of these new different recipes.

It just wasn't in the cards for me. But I also simultaneously deeply desired the result of losing the weight. And so both of those things were true at once and I didn't want it to be a someday goal. And so I put my brain to work on how I could lose more weight doing less. And here we are years later with the lose more with less method and it has helped so many moms. Like it's so fun for me to help moms lose weight. I am digressing. That is not at all what we are gonna talk about today, but it's just been on my mind and on my heart putting on my jeans that I've had for years. I have so many jeans. Why do we do this to ourselves, my friends? I have all of the jeans, all of the types of jeans, the wide leg jeans, the skinny jeans, the barrel jeans, the ankle jeans, the, you know, you know, all of them, right?

Love a good pair of jeans. And, it's been really fun to be able to wear the same size and to have fun this fall and just enjoying, the hard work that I put in to, to be here. And if you are not there yet with any of your goals, that's okay. Some goals take longer. There's nothing wrong with you. I want you to keep going, not because you think you should, not because you think it's, something that will make you a better person or mom, but instead, I want you to keep going because that's who you wanna be. I was talking with a weight loss client, and this is the last tangent, I promise, and then we'll get to today's topic on high functioning overwhelm. But I was talking recently with a weight loss client and she said, "You know, like, I'm just not sure if, if I'll be able to do it." And I said, "Okay, like that's fair actually, right?"

'Cause we don't know for sure. No one can know for certain what's going to happen tomorrow, the next day, the next day, and the next however many months. Like we just don't know." And I said, "But don't you want to be the person who tries anyway?" Like let's just say the worst case scenario happens and you don't hit your goal in the timeframe that you wanna hit

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your goal. Aren't you gonna be so glad that you tried? Like for me, it is intolerable to think that I would give up on something that I deeply desire. Now, if it's something that I no longer desire, I'm like, quit all of the things, right, for my kids. If they genuinely don't like the thing anymore, quit, quit, quit all day long. I think quitting leads us to our best life. I think people hang on to things way too long.

Again, a topic for a different day. But what I'm talking about here is you have a goal, a desire on your heart, and you don't know if it's gonna work out. And that's fair, right? Because, you know, your brain's very smart. It's coming up with something logical. But what you can do to get out of that moment of self-doubt is to just tell yourself that's true. And also the type of person I wanna be is the person who goes for it. Because at least if I fail, I'm so proud of myself for going for it. Okay. Very long tangent, my friends. I am excited, delighted, happy to be here with you. And now I wanna talk with you about high functioning overwhelm. This is the type of overwhelm that I have been coaching on for years. And I haven't talked about it in this way before.

I've been thinking about this concept for a little while now, and I wanted to flush it out here on the podcast because I think it has its own unique lens that most of you, if you're listening to this podcast will resonate with. And I want you to be able to identify it in your own life because it's different than what I might call like ordinary overwhelm. So high functioning overwhelm is when your life looks very, very handled, okay? Like objectively speaking, anyone who met you, most people who know you, they would see you as, you know, doing a great job, responsible, productive, capable, you know, you're, you're getting things done. You have, more than you need. Like you have a lot. Your kids have more than they need. They're well taken care of. You're managing the calendar, you're solving the problems, you're taking your kids to appointments.

I'm not talking about, you know, you're perfect. No one's perfect, but I'm talking about like without anyone knowing you, if they just looked at your life, they would think, oh yeah, like you have it all together, you're doing a lot, you've created so much, you have a great family. And you would

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probably agree with that as well on the outside, okay? So again, externally, if we looked at your calendar, you're using it, you're taking your kids to places generally on time. They make it to school, they have clean clothes and food. And, you know, even above and beyond that, if you're like me and you're a high achiever, you're, you know, reflecting that high achieving, trait in all that you do. So it's not necessarily about having the biggest or the most, but it's about attention to detail. So for my kids, most of the time, we still do family birthdays.

So it's not like we're going and renting out a place for all of their friends, but we are having a wonderful family birthday that I am spending a couple of months planning, probably too many months, and really just putting a lot of attention to detail on it. And to me, that's one of the ways that my high achieving trait manifests, okay? So your life looks great on the outside. You are doing all of the things. And simultaneously, internally, there is what I call a low grade friction that could be described as overwhelm, even if you wouldn't articulate it in that way, right? Because, you know, you're so proud of being a doer and creating so much that even just saying I'm so overwhelmed seems out of alignment and out of integrity with your identity, right? Like, you know, there's a lot of high achievers, highly educated women in my program.

So, you know, if I'm coaching someone who is, a physician or a lawyer or something like that, or a teacher, and they are struggling to kind of keep themselves in the right head space, it's, it's them doing so much externally, but it's the internal world that they want to work on. Very rarely are they ever going to say to me, "Oh my gosh, my life is just so overwhelming," right? That, not what I'm talking about here. Um, the kind of low hanging overwhelm fruit is typically not who, ends up in my programs, ends up in this community. If you're listening to this, you are not that person. You are likely someone who has very high functioning overwhelm. You are not someone who goes around complaining all of the time about how overwhelming your life is. But if you and I were at happy hour and I was sipping on a mocktail and maybe you were having a glass of wine or maybe we went to coffee or, you know, your beverage of choice and we went for a walk, it's not necessarily that you would describe this season of

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life as being so overwhelming, but you would give me details about the specific challenges that you're having in your life and kind of like how it's a tinge of frustration.

So you might describe, you know, just the witching hour. It's just so challenging right now. The boys are always fighting. It just feels like by the time I get to them to bed you know, all I wanna do is just like scroll or watch a show and it's just harder to, you know, connect with my husband at that time or some version of that. That's just one micro example. It's not that you're going to be saying, "Oh my gosh, I'm drowning." Like that is not vocabulary that you would use because you're proud of what you've created, you're proud of your life, you're proud of being a high achiever. And the point of me teaching this is I just want you to become more aware of your inner experience because you are already really good, and I mean really good at creating your outer experience, right?

And I am like this person. So I am speaking to you from experience. You are good at getting things done. Someone has a problem, it's not even yours. You're like, "I'll help you. I'll fix it. I'm great at solving problems." You are so responsible. You're the most responsible person who you know. You take on more than your share. If you can't take on something, you feel guilty about it potentially. You, probably, you know, even though, you know, it's not gonna lead to the best outcome for you, you tie your emotions to your kids sometimes. And that can lead to a little bit of overwhelm, even if you wouldn't articulate it in that way. You are someone who cares so deeply about your life and your work. And because of that, there is a shadow. And so if you just think of light, for those of you who aren't familiar with like shadow work or that term, when the light shines on something brightly, it always has a shadow or I like to think of like it as the yin and the yang.

The point here is that your strengths, your character traits that you have been so skilled at over the years that have served you so well, that have helped you create so much, also have a negative side of them when they are overused. So let me give you a personal example. When I was working as an attorney or was I a CFP, I don't know, I was working a ton. One of those jobs while simultaneously running my business, trying to get it up off

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the ground to six figures so I could quit one of those jobs. And I remember being coached and the coach asking me about working less and carving out time for the family who didn't yet exist that I wanted. And I had a flood of emotions come up in my body. It felt like terror. That was the first word that I blurted out.

And I have never used that word even to describe an emotion. Like that's just not what I would typically say. And reflecting back on that, I can see now that I was so in the productivity mindset and amplified that character trait of mine, like get it all done, be the doer, high achiever, fix everyone else's problems, you know, so much so that the shadow of that was, I was less present and content and connected in my relationships and I didn't even realize it at the time. And so that's really what this looks like. It's like for me, rest had to be productive. Productivity felt like safety. This is always a telltale sign. Like where do you feel the most relaxed and comfortable? Like for me, if I am just like on the couch with my heating pad, a hot cup of water and my laptop, I feel very safe and secure.

Okay? Now I don't do that all the time now because I'm aware of this pattern, but I was recently watching the Real Housewives of Orange County, was it? Yes. And I was noticing how much Vicki was working. And it was so interesting to me because I could see that, in my opinion, she is creating safety in her work. Like it's very hard for her to not be working in any of the margin. And, you know, I'm not saying that this is always the case for everyone, please don't hear me say that and I don't even know Vicky obviously. But, for me, when we feel safest doing something, then we will use any excuse we have not to rest, not to slow down. And the problem with that is not that you don't get a nap at a, you know, 4:00 PM on a Tuesday or something.

The problem with that is that connection and calm and your relationships require you to be in the energy of more of like a rest state. So I think of them as opposites, like productivity and connection or rest. And, you know, I'm doing all of them all of the time, but if you are a high achiever, what I'm

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saying is you're probably very familiar and comfortable with the productivity side of things. Like you're a doer. You're not like, "I don't know how to get myself to do my to-do list." You're like, "No, I'm doing my to-do list and it's never ending and I feel like I can't keep up." And at the end of the day, even though I have outsourced, I do have help. My husband's an amazing guy. I still have these racing nighttime thoughts. Am I forgetting something? You know, I'm worrying about my kid.

Do I need to do something else? What do we have on the calendar for today? It's like you've created this life. It's not that you don't know how to create something. You do. You have created it, you know how to be productive. And now your inner experience of that is a little bit off, right? That's the shadow of it. It's like you don't know how to turn down the dial on your brain. Your nervous system doesn't yet feel comfortable in that state of doing nothing, really. And this is why I always give clients initially the assignment of sitting in a few minutes of silence every day. It's so interesting to get the feedback on this exercise. You're absolutely welcome to do it because if you actually do it consistently every single day, it's one of the fastest ways to just expand that nervous system capacity and enable you to get more comfortable doing nothing and not, you know, seeing the sky fall, right?

Like you're safe, your work is safe, everyone else is safe too, and you don't have to be doing and moving all of the time but for someone who's not used to that, it can feel odd, uncomfortable, agitating, right? Like initially people say like, "Oh, I don't really like it." I'm like, "Yes, that's the point, my friend. Keep going." So anyways, I don't wanna get too much into how to solve it yet because I don't want you to miss any signs of it. So I just gave a lot of examples, but I want you to think about what it looks like for you. Is it the nighttime racing thoughts? Is it worrying about your kids? Is it getting over involved in their lives? Now, I'm not talking about being overly present. I am all for spending as much time as possible with my kids. But when my kid has a challenge, I am very quick to manage my mind to get into the energetic state of, I believe in my kid and they're gonna figure this out and they know more than I do.

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Now, that doesn't mean, you know, hands off and I'm just gonna say, you know, I can't help you because this is your life. Like no, of course not. But it doesn't mean that I'm like, okay, well, what do I need to do about this trying to change my kids' thoughts, trying to get them to think more positively. And being able to see that allows me to stay in my own business, in my own life, in my own thoughts and my own feelings and feel more present and content because, you know, I give a lot of examples of working and productivity and that side of things, but you can be someone who's a full-time stay-at-home mom, as an example, and still 1000% be in that productive energy where you are working, it's just not outside the home. But you're busy, you're working, you are not slowing down or shutting off.

And because of that, you're getting a lot done, your life glitch right on the outside. But the shadow of that is that the internal experience is a little bit of agitation, a little bit of frustration, a little bit of, disconnection. Maybe you're noticing you're tense or you're snapping or you weren't present with your kids, or maybe you're not even sure. And so you all of a sudden have all of this mom guilt that comes up like, oh, I should be more present with them and I'm always doing something. Or like the mental chatter, um, can kind of be present when you are experiencing high functioning overwhelm. I think it's important to note too that high functioning overwhelm is rewarded, okay? People praise you for being organized. They say, "How do you do it? How do you get so much done in one day?" "Your kids are always so well-behaved".

You're just rewarded for productivity and you're good at it and so you keep doing it. But you know that there is a little bit of a cost and that cost is not the cost of being like this for a day or a week. I always like to say, it's like if this was just a one day thing or a one week thing, it would not be that big of a deal. The problem is it's, it's decades. It's your whole life. It's, as long as you can remember. And we always think that, oh yeah, over there I'll be less busy. Over there, I will be able to slow down. And that's just not true because slowing down doesn't come from a change in circumstances. It comes from changing the way that you are thinking and feeling in your current life. And so I just want you to be aware that no one's ever gonna tell

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you, oh my gosh, you are crushing it and you're such a great mom because you took a nap and you do more self-care for yourself and you manage your thoughts.

Oh my goodness, that is incredible. No one's ever gonna do that. Okay? And so I think it's important to know because we are creatures of community. We are creatures of status and we love external validation, right? It feels very good. And so when you're aware of that, you can decrease that and, and look to yourself a little bit more. So instead of looking for all of that validation externally and people's approval for where you're vacationing or what you're doing with your kids or how they're behaved or how organized and on top of it you are, how many activities you have them in or whatever it is that you like to get validated for, you can lessen the focus on those things and turn it around so it's more directed at you and your own validation of how you're choosing to live your life. And I hope that your inner experience is at the top of your list for what's important to you, right?

We're talking about your mental and emotional health, but from a very high functioning place, not from a my life is drowning and I'm so overwhelmed place. From a, this is high functioning overwhelm that women who are successful in whatever they do experience. It's the shadow of being highly productive, being able to take on a lot, being able to be such an awesome problem solver, being able to, you know, create so much. When you do that and you get good at it and you haven't done any of the inner work of managing your thoughts and your feelings to match that, you will feel tense, you will be a little bit snappier, you will have a racing mind, you will worry, worry, worry, worry. Oh my goodness, my friends, if there is one skill that you ever work with me on just to eliminate that, that can be such an amazing life changing skill to never worry again.

Now your brain might have some default thoughts that still come up even after you've been working with me, but you will be able to manage it so quickly. So said differently, I don't typically worry at all. Now, I'm not saying I don't care about things, of course, but worry is different. Worry feels useful, but it's not. It's fueled by fear. And if you just let your brain go unmanaged,

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you will experience a lot of worry. You can't have kids and not have that happen if you have a healthy human brain, right? And part of that is survival and the way that your default primitive brain is wired to be mama bear, to protect your little cubs, of course. But guess what? In our modern lives, that part of the brain is, misfiring, shall we say. The red flags that it's alerting you to of your kids having a friend challenge or not excelling in the class that you thought, you can approach them from a connected, confident place and support them through that challenge without ever worrying.

The worry about that is a complete misfire. And because of the way that motherhood works, you'll always have a reason to worry about each of your kids. It is so freeing to eliminate this. So even if you just came into the membership and got coaching weekly on worry, or you wrote in to ask a coach, I mean, I, I do not know another membership for under \$100 a month where you can have this level of high proximity coaching. I just don't. And I'm so proud of that and I'm so proud of the work that we do in there. And I know that if you're listening to this, you are a doer, a self-starter and someone who's gonna do the work. And I think that's what makes that community so incredible is because those of you who are in there, you do do the work and it's just so awesome to see you continue to come on weeks later, months later and, and see your progress from managing your thoughts and doing this work.

And so whether it's reducing overwhelm based on the number of things that your brain is perceiving that needs to get done, or those other low grade, unhelpful emotions that show up as someone who's such a high achiever, whether that's worry, whether that's frustration, whether that's tension, whether that's a little bit of like negative thinking or drama, even if you might not call it that way. So really, high functioning overwhelm comes from some underlying beliefs that you may not even be aware are thoughts that are optional. So you may have thoughts like,

"If I don't do this, no one else will. If I don't think about this, then it's not gonna get solved. Something's gonna fall through the cracks if I don't handle this. I need to stay on top of this. It's just easier if I do it. I should really use this time wisely. I don't think I should be sitting down right now.

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There's so much to get done. I need to figure this out and I need to figure it out now. What if something is wrong and this doesn't turn out well? I really do not want my child to struggle in this way. I struggled in that way and I just don't wanna see them go through that. I cannot rest. I don't need to rest unless everything is done."

So those are just some of the thoughts that came to my mind when I think about high functioning overwhelm. Your version of them may be a little bit different, but there's this pressure to do it all, all of the time. It kind of aligns well with what I teach about having open loops and how important it is for you to create safety when there are open loops.

What I mean by open loops, if you haven't listened to that episode, you can go back, but I mean things being undone, text messages unread, emails, you know, in your inbox. There's doctor's appointments that, you know, aren't yet scheduled or dishes in the sink or whatever it is. When you can create safety, and what I mean by safety is a sense of groundedness, a sense of like, I feel inner peace even though there's lots of open loops and things are undone. You win the lottery. I really feel that I have won the inner experience lottery. I feel so empowered and equipped to navigate challenges in my life while simultaneously feeling grounded and at peace. I remember when I first got certified as a professional coach and the person who I was trained by, she exemplified this and I was in awe because the only way that I had known how to be so highly productive and get so much done was in a state of what I now would describe as a little bit manic.

Like then I wouldn't have described it that way, but now I definitely do. Meaning I was living in my head so much that the energy was almost like buzzing a little bit of tension, probably more likely to snap. I mean, I didn't have kids at the time, so there wasn't a lot to yell at. Everything was like perfectly clean and put away. But, you know, having three boys in three years, practicing all of this work and on the other side of it, being able to be who she was effectively and understand it so deeply, meaning being able to be so highly productive from a state of feeling grounded and being able to turn off the productivity and just let things have open loops or let things be undone. Now, my high achievers might be thinking, "Well, I wanna get more

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done. I want you to get more done too, but not at your own inner expense." And so this isn't about getting less done, not at all.

I want you to get more done. I always challenge myself. Again, it's like that lose more with less method for my weight loss clients. It's like I'm always challenging myself to get more done by doing less. I mean, AI is just a beautiful example of that, but speaking from personal experience, you can also waste a ton of time, on things that just, you don't even need to be doing in there. So my point here is that I don't want you to think that I am advocating for you to be less productive and think that you should, you know, just say, "Oh, well, I'll get to that later and, you know, take a nap." That is not what I'm saying. I'm saying that when you are such a high achiever and problem solver and get it done, you likely view rest as a waste of time.

Even if you wouldn't say that, like no one says that. But could you just go on a walk without any device or could you just get ready without listening to something? Could you just sit around without thinking, "Oh, I should watch that. I should do that. I should follow up with that." Like that's a sign into how comfortable you actually are with being and being present in your life. And this isn't like a small thing, my friend, because what can happen is this goes on for years. It goes on for decades and we have our kids at home for such a short time. And even after they're, you know, gone, they're still in our lives, right? They just don't live with us. And you can spend years and years and years doing so much and being so in your head that you miss out on what is the most important to you.

And I do not say that to add any sort of fear tactics or at all, okay? You can live a beautiful life never doing this work. It's not because, anyone's like damaged or broken. I don't believe in that philosophy. But I do simultaneously think it's important to emphasize, like, the different experience of life you can have when you take care of your mental and emotional health from a high achieving place, from a coaching place, not from a therapy pass focus place that's way outside the scope of anything that I do. But I am excellent at thought work, and I am excellent at decreasing overwhelm and worry and reducing that mental load so that you

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don't have those nighttime thoughts, so that you're not operating from scarcity or low grade urgency or struggling to let other people help you. And your inner experience can feel completely different in the exact same life that you have, which I think is just a beautiful gift you can give to yourself.

It's been probably the most life-changing experience for me that, again, no one's given me a gold star for. No one's like, "It is so awesome that you can be so chill." Like no one says that but I feel it. And I think the people who do this work probably feel it. Like I remember again, looking at my coach and feeling that from her. I was like, "How in the world is she so calm and simultaneously so productive?" Like if I was that productive, I would be in this state of frenzy and busy. And I'm here to tell you that it is possible. So the goal isn't to do less or be less capable. Of course not. Come on, high achiever over here. It is to continue to be highly ambitious or high achieving and get a lot done and simultaneously experience internal peace, whatever that looks like for you.

Maybe it's practically actually resting, but for most of my clients, it's not that they're desiring a nap at 2:00 and don't think it's possible. What they're actually desiring is to feel different in their life. And they don't even realize that it's caused from this mental chatter, this unmanaged brain, this nervous system that's in overdrive. And you can use thought work. Thought work, my friend. Thought work is the solution. Regularly practicing thought work. Weekly group coaching, listening to that so you keep your brain sharp. Writing in to ask a coach, you can write in on the go, I'm the one who replies to those messages and I'm the one who does the coaching. This is what we do inside the Mom On Purpose Membership. If you would like to join us, you can head on over to momonpurpose.com/coaching. I would love to see you inside.