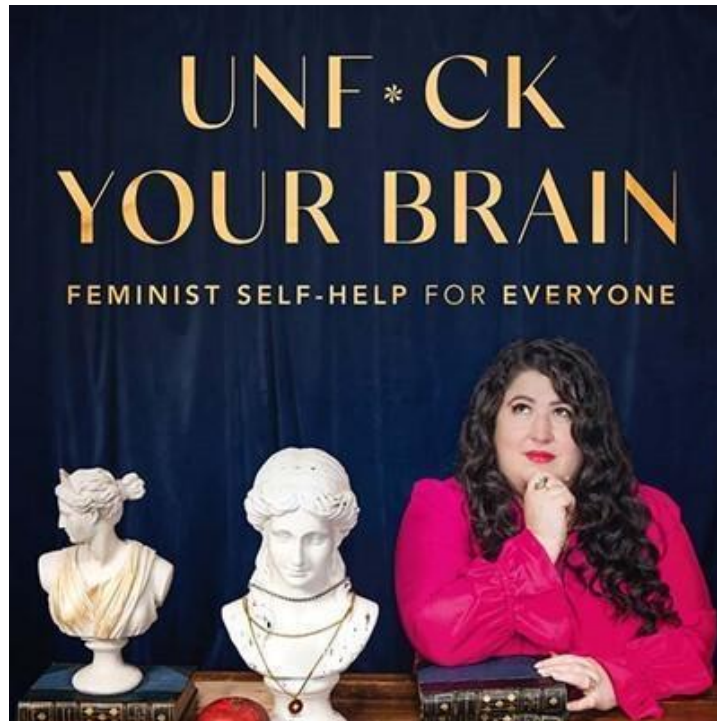


# UFYB 477: Coaching Hotline: How to Deal with Fatigue & Which Thoughts to Work On First



## Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

**Kara Loewentheil**

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## **UFYB 477: Coaching Hotline: How to Deal with Fatigue & Which Thoughts to Work On First**

Welcome to UnF\*ck Your Brain. I'm your host, Kara Loewentheil, Master Certified Coach and founder of The School of New Feminist Thought. I'm here to help you turn down your anxiety, turn up your confidence, and create a life on your own terms, one that you're truly excited to live. Let's go.

Welcome to this week's coaching hotline episode where I answer real questions from real listeners and coach you from afar. If you want to submit your question for consideration, go to [unfuckyourbrain.com/coachinghotline](http://unfuckyourbrain.com/coachinghotline), all one word, or text your email to +1-347-997-1784 and when you get prompted for the code word, it's coaching hotline, all one word. Let's get into this week's questions.

Alright, first question. "I've enjoyed your podcast so far. It's really opened my eyes to the influence I have over my life, which is scary and empowering all at the same time. My question is about burnout at work. I work for a small company. Often there are long hours and a few times of really late night work, up until 2:00 AM, up again at 6:00 AM, for example. I conceptually understand that my thoughts impact my feelings of burnout, but is it possible the physical feelings of burnout, fatigue, fuzzy brain, loss of focus can influence my thoughts too? Are my thoughts really causing these feelings of fatigue even if I "overworked" my body? Thanks."

Okay, so this is a great question and one of the reasons I wanted to answer it is that regardless of calling this burnout, which is almost a separate issue, I get a lot of questions about, well, what about fatigue? What about when I haven't had enough sleep? Isn't that really causing my mood or my feelings? It's so interesting, right? So number one, it's interesting to think about why do we want it to be true that being tired is causing our feelings?

Often I get asked this in the form of, yeah, but what about my physical fatigue? Isn't that part of it? Why do we want that to be true? Why do we want to believe that not getting enough sleep means we can't manage our

## **UFYB 477: Coaching Hotline: How to Deal with Fatigue & Which Thoughts to Work On First**

minds? I think it's almost like we have a logic glitch and we think that if our fatigue impacts us, our tiredness impacts us, those are actually two different things, which I'm going to explain in a minute. But we think if our physical condition is impacting our thoughts, then somehow that would mean that the thoughts are real. It wouldn't mean the thoughts are real.

So when you have this question for yourself, you just want to think about why am I even asking this question? I mean, be clear, obviously, I love questions. I'm not saying you shouldn't ask the question. Just ask yourself, why is this a question for me? If it were true that my lack of sleep was creating my thoughts, then what? Why would I want to believe that? Somehow it takes the burden off of me or it means I can keep believing that my job is bad. Just ask yourself what's your investment in that? Why do you want it to be the case?

Here's how I think about this and what I teach. I'm going to set aside burnout because burnout is your thoughts and burnout is really about the thoughts you have that are causing stress and what you think about that stress. So there's quite a lot, there's some science out there that's super interesting about the fact that stress is only bad for your body if you think it's going to be bad for your body, which is wild.

So let's set that kind of aside because really this question is about what about lack of sleep and how does that impact my thoughts? So I differentiate between being tired, which I think is an emotion, and fatigue, which is a physical sensation caused by lack of sleep. And you can think about it this way. Fatigue is actually a set of physical sensations caused by lack of sleep, right? So for instance, if you don't sleep the amount your body wants, your eyes may be dry.

Some people have more unstable blood sugar if they haven't slept as much, so your blood sugar might be up and down. You may feel drowsy. These are a set of physical sensations, all of which are caused by the lack

## **UFYB 477: Coaching Hotline: How to Deal with Fatigue & Which Thoughts to Work On First**

of sleep and how it impacts different physical systems in your body. Your eyes need all that time closed to relubricate and your brain needs it to rest and your body needs it to repair the cells and whatever else. That's fatigue.

Tired, I think of as an emotion because when we say to ourselves, I'm tired, we produce a feeling in our body, an emotion that I think kind of mimics fatigue, but also is a lot of self-pity. Whenever we say, I'm just really tired, I think that's actually code for self-pity and it makes us feel so terrible physically. Self-pity is not a moral issue. It doesn't mean you're a good or bad person, right? But when you think I'm just so tired, I think that's actually a thought that causes the emotion. I think it's really of self-pity, but also we call that tired.

I find it very helpful to distinguish. And here's a way to think about it. Most of us have experienced being up late for something we really loved and wanted to do. So seeing a band we really liked, having sex with someone new, we've been up really late for something that we loved and were excited about. And the next day we weren't going around going, well I was up all night having amazing sex, I'm just so tired, life is so hard, right? We were like, when can I get home and stay up all night having sex again? So that's how you can tell the difference. In that situation, you are fatigued. Your eyes may still be dry, right? Your blood sugar might still be moving around, but you don't have this emotion of tired that is stress and self-pity.

So that's how I distinguish between those. I do think that fatigue can impact your brain like anything else. Obviously there's studies showing that if you really deprive people of sleep, don't let them sleep at all for 36 or 72 hours or whatever, they can have hallucinations. Obviously our brain needs to sleep. But that impact on your thoughts is a small amount compared to the thoughts you have about fatigue and that impact. If you believe fatigue is not a big deal. My thought is always, nah, not getting enough sleep for a night or two is really not a big deal. My brain works fine. And that's what I experience.

## **UFYB 477: Coaching Hotline: How to Deal with Fatigue & Which Thoughts to Work On First**

Now, I don't know if I have my greatest ideas on that day, but it's just not that big a deal. And it varies so much from person to person. There are people with insomnia who never sleep that much at night and they still get shit done in their lives. I mean, I think President Obama slept four hours a night. People with very powerful positions often are people who can function on less sleep.

Now, some of that may be biological, but I bet a lot of it is their thoughts also. And some of it is biological, but it depends on who you are and how much sleep you need. So that's really my answer. There's a lot of moving parts there, but the bottom line is basically I would think about fatigue and being tired differently. And you can feel the emotional difference between I'm experiencing sensations of fatigue from lack of sleep and I'm just so tired today. Right, they sound and feel totally different. I don't think it's useful to think the second one.

And if fatigue does impact your thoughts somewhat and it's required for your job or because you're caring for a newborn or whatever else, then fine, you don't have to make that a big deal or make that mean anything. And just be curious with yourself about why you want to believe that your sleep has something to do with whether or not you can manage your mind. If it's because you're being mean to yourself when you have a harder time when you're tired, then cut that shit out.

All right, y'all. I know you're as tired as I am of having the top podcasts in wellness or health and fitness categories be a bunch of dudes who don't know anything about socialization and who are not taking women's lived experiences into account. So if you are looking for ways to support the show, and more importantly, make sure the show gets to more people, please leave us a review on Apple Podcast or Spotify. And bonus points if you include a few lines about the way you use thought work and self-coaching or anything you've learned from the podcast in your daily life.

## **UFYB 477: Coaching Hotline: How to Deal with Fatigue & Which Thoughts to Work On First**

Those reviews are what teach the algorithms to show us to more new people. It helps us get new listeners all over the world. And I'll be reading one story from a recent review in each of these question and answer episodes.

This week's review is titled, Makes it simple. And they say, "It kind of is when you think about it. I'm a spiritual person, I think. I like to look for my meanings and messages. This podcast isn't that. What this is what the other part of my brain needs to hear. The simple breakdown of, I allow myself or not to feel what I feel, think what I think, and everyone else also has that right. I love this podcast in my rotation because it's what brings it all to the here and now for me. No past, present, future or alternative timelines. Just my thoughts and my actions right now."

Okay, next question. And this is a great question. They're all great questions. I want to answer this one in particular because I think a lot of you probably have this question, and I certainly had it when I started coaching or coaching myself.

"Hi Kara, I've been listening to the podcast since last fall. It's been hugely helpful. I'm having trouble because usually there's the original thought, which I know I can choose better, but then there's also the bigger, scarier thought behind that first thought. Usually what I'm making the first thought mean or some worst case scenario connected to the original thought. Is it better to focus on the original model or should we go to the deeper pain? Does deeper pain reflect a core issue that we could correct at the source and then by a ripple effect there might be less surface thoughts?"

So this is really common and when I got trained as a coach, my teacher was always yelling at us to not go hunting for the deeper thought, to just take the first thought, right? She was like, your client does not need to cry in every session, right? Don't be looking for the real thought. All roads lead to Rome. I really believe that's true.

[UnF\\*ck Your Brain with Kara Loewentheil](#)

## **UFYB 477: Coaching Hotline: How to Deal with Fatigue & Which Thoughts to Work On First**

Here's the thing. If you think about it, everyone who comes to coaching with me could be like, well, I need to get coached on my self-worth. Yeah, you and every other human on the planet, right? We all have that problem. But when it's at that really abstract level, we really can't work on it because it all connects to everything else. And I think sometimes one of the things that can go not wrong, but just is less than useful. My experience in talk therapy, let me just say it that way.

My experience in talk therapy was that I was often talking at this abstract narrative level about my main, "problem," and it just was a lot of talking in circles. Now, maybe that was my therapist or me, but I really recommend that you not always be like, but what's the deeper real thought? Cuz here's the thing, it's almost always going to be I'm not good enough. That's kind of it. That's always the thought at the bottom. Something terrible's going to happen or I'm not good enough. That's kind of what's always down there.

You can work on those thoughts. I'm not saying not to work on thoughts of, I can handle whatever happens or I'm not terrible or I might be a good person. It's sort of not an either or, it's an and. You can do those, but what I really want to stress is that you guys not dismiss the first thoughts, those original thoughts, the "first level" thoughts. I don't like levels. I would more refer to them as the situation specific thought.

When you're downloading something and your thought is, this person's going to be mad at me. Yes, underneath that you also have the thought, I'm not good enough unless everyone loves me, and you can work on that. But working on those bigger thoughts takes a lot longer because they're not bigger, they're just older or just more established.

I think it's really useful to work on those smaller situational thoughts that are coming up throughout your day because all roads lead to Rome, right? You're going to get there anyway. Those smaller thoughts, you get a quicker payoff, so you teach your brain the habit of changing its thoughts.

## **UFYB 477: Coaching Hotline: How to Deal with Fatigue & Which Thoughts to Work On First**

We have to educate our brains and train them about how to use neuroplasticity to our advantage. And changing those smaller thoughts, I think you get more immediate payoff.

And the best way I know to change someone's core thoughts, "core thoughts," is to build it up from these littler thoughts. Just think about this. When you learn a language, you can't go in and be like, I don't want to do any of the vocabulary practice or making sentences, just teach me the grammar abstractly. Right? That doesn't work. You need to learn all the vocabulary and practice saying, how do I get to the bathroom before you practice discussing existentialism in a new language? And thought work is the same.

I don't know what exactly how the mystery works, but working on smaller situational specific thoughts that you have throughout your day builds up to an impact on those core thoughts. I don't even like the term core thoughts, but builds up to an impact on those, let's say personality type thoughts, like I'm just this kind of person or whatever. And when you only try to work on those, I think it just can turn into a lot of story fondling kind of.

So I'm okay with working on those if you pick a new thought to practice and you know it might take a while to shift, but I don't want you to dismiss those first thoughts that you interact with, all of the symptoms of that thought or all of the flowers of that plant. I don't want you to dismiss those because that's where a lot of the work and the value is, is in working on those thoughts and they will all lead you back and build up to that thought that's a little more of that root.

Here's the other thing about this. I have a lot of thoughts about this. When we talk about a core thought or a core issue, we're kind of taking for granted this is my personality, I have this problem. And I really prefer to think I just have thoughts in my brain. Now, some thoughts I've thought

## **UFYB 477: Coaching Hotline: How to Deal with Fatigue & Which Thoughts to Work On First**

more often, but they're all just thoughts. So I don't need to be hunting for the core ones or looking for only the deep ones, getting to my issues.

They're all just thoughts. I don't know that it serves you to think of some of them as more core or more important or deeper. Even a thought like I'm not good enough, it's really only impacting you when you're thinking it. When you're thinking, I love corn or whatever, that thought is not impacting you. So I really want to encourage you to just think all thoughts are equal. They're just sentences in your mind. Now, some of them you've said to yourself more than others. Okay, so they might have, they're a little stronger in that they've worked out more, but not that they're the real issue than other ones.

So that's the answer. It's really the opposite of what you think. You think working on the "core thought" would change the ripple effect, but I find you got to work on each little ripple, that adds up to changing the "core thought".