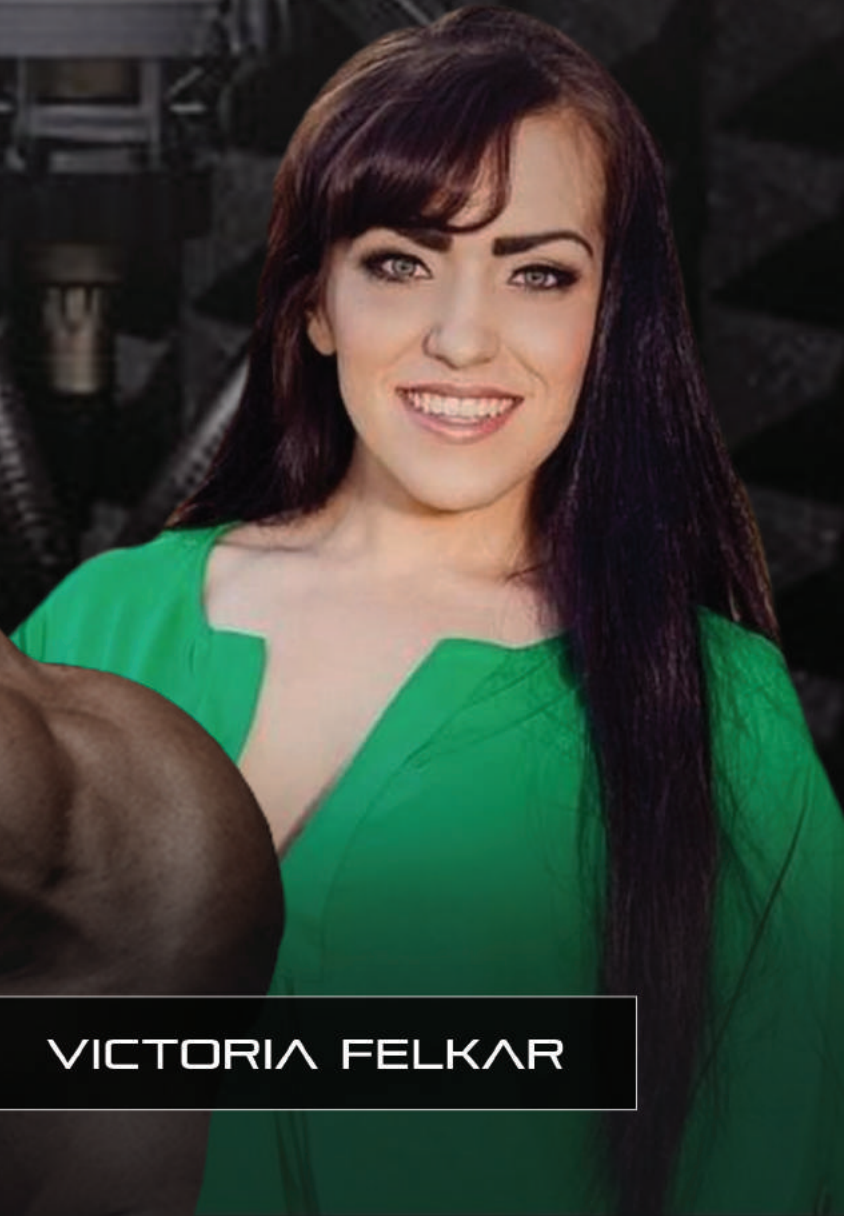




# MUSCLE EXPERT PODCAST



EPISODE 58

VICTORIA FELKAR

## EP-59 : Victoria Felkar

Welcome to the Muscle Expert podcast with Ben Pakulski, one of the world's top professional bodybuilders – an expert on human performance and mindset mastery. Ben dives deep to deliver the strategy of top experts to upgrade your body, mind, muscle, strength, performance, biochemistry, and how to become the upgraded, modern man.

Join us on [www.benpakulski.com](http://www.benpakulski.com) to learn the cutting edge techniques to take control of your body, your brain, and create your greatest life!

**BEN**

Hey what's up guys? The Muscle Expert Podcast, I'm your host Ben Pakulski. You know what's coming at you, the best info in the industry. Now, guys and girls, this is our first female guest. She is phenomenal. You're going to dig this chick. She is full of golden nuggets, and guys just because she is a female doesn't mean we're going to tune out. There's a lot of really important stuff that we discuss here on how to optimize your brain state to optimize your physiology something, you guys may not be thinking about.

We're talking a lot about hormones, maybe we're talking about some things that could benefit your life or your spouse. So many golden nuggets here from Ms. Victoria Felkar. She is a researcher working on her PHD and specifically studying the area of female hormones and how to overcome all of the pitfalls of hormone use, hormones being destroyed by our environment, being destroyed by our food. We talk about a lot of really cool stuff. She's going to give you some really unique insights into how to optimize your gut, maybe what strategies you might be looking at to reverse hormone damage from dieting for contest or excessive exercise.

Super-exciting. We get into stuff that Victoria uses to mitigate stress in her life, how she approaches her nutrition. Really cool stuff so definitely listen all the way to the end guys and when you're done, head on over to iTunes and leave me your review because we appreciate your reviews. And this episode is brought to you by ATP Labs. So I'm a huge fan of ATP Labs, you guys know I've recently aligned myself with them and my favorite stack that I want everyone to run out there and try, if you're not a good sleeper – many people have a problem falling asleep, many people maybe wake up in the middle of the night. And my go-to stack lately has been a two capsules of Stress Less around dinnertime. So around 6:00 P.M and it tends to get me starting to wind down. You know I'm a big advocate of this kind of 4 hour window before bed to start preparing your body and preparing your nervous system and your mind for sleep. And at about 30 minutes before sleep I'm taking two Optizome, which literally puts me into the most ideal mindset, ideal state to rest. And I'm sleeping 7 to 8 hours in a row which for me is kind of the impossible dream. And you guys know I quantify everything with my aura ring and I'm a huge fan of both of these supplements. So if you want to head over to [www.atplabs.com](http://www.atplabs.com), you can use the code BPAK and get a discount. Check those out, and if you love them again, let me know. I want to hear about it because it's really been a game changer for my sleep. I hope everyone enjoys this episode and I look forward to hearing from you.

Tell me about what's your dissertation?

**VICTORIA**

My dissertation, so that's my doctorate project which is the next 3 years of my life. I am looking at, specifically I guess I should kind of frame it that I am somewhat inter-disciplinary research, and I am exploring the world of female hormonal manipulation in elite sport. Frap.

**BEN**

So tell me about it

**VICTORIA**

So what I'm really doing is, like I'm digging into both the medical world of it, the research phase and clinical applications, as well as, just as an inter-disciplinary researcher, the social sciences are obviously near and dear to my heart. so it's bringing in ideas around gender, around what it means to be a high performance athlete, some of the myths around just performance enhancement, all the way to looking at the clinical research that's actually has been done on both female androgen use and then female estrogen and progesterone use.

**BEN**

Fantastic. This is amazing. I want to hear all about this. How deep are you into this? Is this something that just kind of come under your radar or you've been diving...?

**VICTORIA**

No, it really is a synthesis of like, I'd say the last ten years of my life. Because when I was doing my Master's degree and even my undergraduate, it was always on my radar, so am like a mass sourceholder. So I would get these sources and these books and everything else and I would just hoard. But I never felt like I had enough there to pursue it. So my Master's degree was actually on like totally a different topic, but I kept in that performance enhancement realm.

And then as I continued to develop like both professionally and academically, I finally was like, you know what? I'm just going to do this. Nobody is talking about it. As a consultant I see the ugly side of it when women are coming to me with all these different health problems. I would start working with a bunch of clinical researchers and more of the like female HRT, birth control realm, and they had no idea about performance enhancement. I mean when I mentioned that women commonly were going something like tumocsafine, their jaws dropped. I'm like, how do you not know this? Like, you're one of the leading endocrinologists in the world for female reproduction and you don't know what female athletes are getting themselves into! That kind of hit me as how much this is needed and how there's this massive void.



So it's been a long time coming, and it's been for me something that I am passionate about because of my own background within like my own hormonal background with having diagnosed PCOS, but also just with the multitude of misinformation of the modern day bodybuilding world.

**BEN**

So how do you plan to undergo your thesis? Is it going to be something where you're kind of reaching out to people who are currently admitted users or is it going to be something where you're running some studies, you're doing some anecdotal stuff? What's the objective?

**VICTORIA**

So because there's such a dearth of information, getting started is really the most important thing for me. I'm actually going to be doing this in a 3-part series because I figured it was easier to almost bite it into three different parts so I can almost do simultaneous studies.

The first one is simply just setting a scene: it's a massive, like just systematic review for of the literature and analysis, just discussing general ideas around female performance enhancement, I mean, reproductive medicine – because it is all just the same. But also the relationship between endocrinology and sport medicine. Because often those are thought almost as, it's funny because I'm going to speak to physiologist, they go like, "Yeah, we talked about hormones," but we don't really have sport endocrinology. That's not really a profession if you do specialize in it. It's because you have kind of gone your own way, almost as if the renegades of the exercised physiology.

**BEN**

They're trying to dissuade it, right?

**VICTORIA**

Exactly. And then it terms of like sport pharmacology, I mean that's a black market industry. So I think in our kind of world this fitness strength bodybuilding world, we have such a beautiful knowledge base that doesn't really get past that. It stays in our little bubble. And there's growing research that's being done especially on men and the whole TRT revolution, then starting to talk about like hypogonadism and reaches out to former users.

But then again, there's just so much that isn't really explored especially with methodologies. As you probably know, there's just how one reacts or doesn't react or the effects of influence of testosterone is going to be completely different among individuals even within their life course. And now we're creating almost clinical guidelines based off of this.

So because it's not done through the same methodologies as you would with other types of like pharmacology testing, because we're taking substances ultimately been around since the 1930s and now all of a sudden trying to almost backtrack to be able to put into a clinical framework, which is complex and has promoted a lot more myths I think, than most believe.

### **BEN**

That's the problem in this industry I think. And you can imagine I get a lot of women that reach out to me and say, "Hey, can you help me with this?" and they're so misguided and they're often so far down the rabbit hole of misuse and abuse that you don't know where to start. So I'm very grateful for you doing this, to be honest. Because you said there's a beautiful amount of information in the fitness industry and I'd love to find it and I'd love to help to direct people there, because to be honest, to me it's so obscure especially with women. They basically fall in the same protocol as men are and I'm like, "No, that doesn't make any sense."

### **VICTORIA**

So I should backtrack then. There's a beautiful amount of information for the average individual as it relates to a male user, females there's not a thing. I really have gone into the trenches, worked hard for ten years looking for stuff, and I have to laugh because like last year I was at Tenknakenin Swiss and I was on the doping panel. I mean, I was the lone female up there and I think about 45 minutes in, I just was like, "I got to say something."

Like they're talking about all these different side effects that relate to the male user, and we have not talked about women once since of course I said something totally crude but I didn't know how I had a prostate, because that's what was really the conversation. It was about PSA and I'm like, "We got to break this down." I think there's a lot that the industry can kind of get from clinical studies, but more like our clinical guidelines. Because one of the other things I realized, about two and a half, three years ago, I started looking at just hyper-androgenism in females. So there's numerous different types of both genetic and environmental causes of hyper-androgenism.

So PCOS which I prefer to be called like Andage A of androgen excess. We're still figuring it out but there's at least increase on it. So I started cross-referencing the susceptible side effects of female androgen use with the clinical manifestations in symptomology of androgen excess in women, and they're the same.

So when I did that, I was like almost awestruck, then I was like shit, what did I just find? Because if I can navigate side effects through similar means that I reduce symptoms in androgen excess, well that's got a huge potential to help a lot of women out. So that's when I actually went more into my like pre-med endocrinology bubble and started figuring out that, yeah, something like metformin or some type of glucose agent, can be incredibly affective to be able to break the cycle that a lot of women get in especially post-cop, because it gets induced almost through the use of both androgens, but then also just completely eating like an asshole post-cop, stopping training and then also screwing up their estrogen in the process through using anti-estrogens (and not just anti-estrogens, but like the big guns like Rumid X and Lunchazole). And then we're also talking about environmental stress in which their progesterone has been completely reduced.

So they put themselves into this cycle that is so almost synonymous with PCOS, and that's where you get this relationship between high levels of androgens, high levels of almost like an estrogen imbalance. So it's not necessarily a high level of estrogen, but your high estrogen is trying to be free again, and in some resistance. And it feeds and it's this cycle. It's like women that have come to me and are like, "I did one show using gears naturally, and I did one show using gear and I just can't lose weight for the life of me..." And I'm like, "Fuck that, you're in the cycle and you've got to be able to break it."

The thing that I also realized too with like my own experiences with PCOS, it is that, the athletic population really hasn't been studied. And so with polycystic ovarian syndrome, the number one kind of like, I don't want to call it treatment but it really is almost like an intervention, is, you eat, clean and you train. You have to exercise and I'm like that's great for gen pop, but when it comes to somebody who is an athlete, it's going to take a little bit more than that.

And a lot of times athletes aren't willing to do the second kind of intervention, which is like eco estrogen, because again that's completely counter intuitive to what we know for high performance pharmacology.

## BEN

So I don't want to interrupt you but I want to dive into, actually know what, I'll let you finish because I want to dive into this because I know hundreds of women who are in this exact scenario, literally. So talking about strategies, because I know women are just helpless, they're like, "I don't know what to do. My coach screwed me up. My coach told me to take androgens and told me to take too much. And told me to take Rumid X."

And then thyroid in this disastrous place. As a coach I don't want to get involved because I'm like, "Listen, I'm no authority on that stuff and I certainly don't want to tell you something that's going to make it worse and take you further down the rabbit hole." So first thing you got to do is, get your blood and see an endocrinologist. But if we can start giving people some strategies to start, at least begin the process of reversing, because as far as I can see, other than yourself, there's nobody out there having this conversation.

## VICTORIA

No, and I get told that a lot. Honestly Ben, it's been my own health struggles here. It has been both like a blessing. It's like a double-edged sword, I had to go through a lot of bullshit, but they've helped me to open up my eyes to this world. I've been a guineapig too along the way but I've connected with endocrinologists, I've connected with other practitioners, coaches, you name it. Like Dr. Saran, was the one that really kind of helped me out of my own slump.

I lived in Vancouver and I spent like the first four years. I'd say the first four years or three years I knew him and John. That was my spring break, when my undergrad was done I went to see Saran because he was the only person that could help me, because up here I got passed around to seven different specialists and no one knew what to do, because their basic interventions weren't working for me, as somebody who trained.

I've got lots of strategies because it's not actually that complicated. We just have to think of it similar to what we do when we have conversations about men and PCT. Women need PCT too, it's just different. That's the takeaway.

## BEN

Okay. So let's talk about what different looks like. So if you're to tell an athlete: one, a competitive athlete who may be drug tested, or two, an athlete who's just trying to optimize their body composition, that you need an estrogen supplement. What's your typical response? Or what do you expect your typical response to be? Like is that the first line of defense?

## VICTORIA

No, not at all actually. Progesterone is a lot more effective if we were to talk about that endocrinology realm. But essentially, there's a bunch of different ways that we can look at this: number one is PCOS is a state of chronic inflammation. So you have to take measures to reduce inflammation through diet, through proper supplementation, through sleep patterns, lifestyle and mentality, as well as just training. You can't train, and that's one of the times I see as you get these women that get into this pattern, and they do more and more trying to break the cycle and it just does the more and more damage. It put them farther down the rabbit hole.

## BEN

So before you continue with that, let's talk about what those strategies are that you apply because I love to give people the golden nuggets immediately to what are they going to do to mitigate inflammation dietetically, supplementary? What are the strategies you apply?



**VICTORIA**

Of course. I'd be careful here because like my gut always says like, "Just don't eat like an asshole." Like it's really simple.

**BEN**

But what that means to you and me it's not the same way as somebody else, right? If it fits their macros, they're okay today, right?

**VICTORIA**

No, exactly. Actually I was listening to Mark Wellington, I had to laugh because we're really similar in our deals around anti-inflammatory foods. So removing triggers, that's one of your biggest things. If you've been eating the same diet from last year, you've got to switch it up. You've got to remove your triggers. Reduce your chance. So I take away a hyper-allogeneic food compound for a while, but I border with people too because I'm also really I guess realistic. I mean, not having eggs for breakfast for some people is really hard to do. So if you can get rid of the big, depending on what guidelines you're looking at, there's typically eight different major allergen foods, kicking out seven of them, I'll let you keep your eggs, but we're going to get you really good gut support, we're going to get you really good just overall trying to balance the best I can. Like, I'll give you that one if we can do the rest.

Thinking about like removing even just the other kind of triggers that most are mal-functional medicine, not the high inflammatory foods as well like your nightshades, your potatoes, tomatoes, eggplants and peppers, soy. So that's where I would start. And also limiting the polysaccharides of course. Fructose I think is an incredibly important tool when it's used properly. So for a lot of times I use fructose like cream post workout in the form of just berries and fruits as a part of their kind of concoction. It's a great form of antioxidants, it gives you what you need especially because oxygen we're using, it's all just hormones, there's nutrient deficiencies and depletions.

**BEN**

So what foods do you focus on for someone who maybe has a GI issue or they're manifesting some of these symptoms you're speaking of?

## VICTORIA

So essentially I guess in my professional opinion, one of the best protocols is really common sense. But it's taking from different types of, I mean, from paleo, from body ecology, from food map. All of these different ideas, I mean you can sprinkle on a little bit of keto and primal and whatever the fuck the names are, but really it's okay. Let's look at food as its therapy. Food as a therapeutic tool. So utilizing things like carbohydrates that are fermentable, that are low inflammatory, and let's time them properly. At the beginning it's things like squash. It's sweet potato, like I said, fruit but utilizing it in a very strategic manner. It's focusing on healthy fats but also balancing fats. Like one of the things I keep seeing like ketogenic revolution is that people aren't balancing their fats and they're just eating all off one source and wondering why they are still inflamed. And their ratios are so spewed. For proteins, I also again try to be realistic, try go farm low hormone, let's try to go with some as great as we can with our protein because really that's the cornerstone of most people's diet, and they can't afford to do organic everything. But if we can try to do like a good source of protein, I'm happy with that. I remove milk products, especially the whey. And again, people that are sponsored by supplement companies, it's like I'm taking Christmas away from them because they're like, "Oh my God! I've spent half of my money now as I'm going to be spending on food." And I'm like, "You'll get used to it. You've got 4 to 6 weeks or even realistically 6 to 8 weeks for us to try and get your gut back and get your body back."

## BEN

You said two things in there that I want you to kind of go back on. Talking about balancing their fat ratios, do you have a specific recommendation of approximately what that should look like?

## VICTORIA

So I know in terms of like if you want, and I do borrow this one. So typically speaking, I utilize the greatest amount of monounsaturated, a moderate amount of saturated and then the lowest amount of polyunsaturated. But you still need some of course polyunsaturated.

## BEN

The first one you said was poly but you seem meant mono.

## VICTORIA

I'm sorry I meant mono. Pardon me. And then in terms of, just looking through all of my different notes on this one. I try to track my clients that I work with as data, so one of the things I typically see is most people eating way too much omega 6 and not enough omega 3. And so the ratios I use on these, and again they are very flexible, but usually I just try to increase their omega 3 levels. Like I don't really have a strategic like, you could say I mean like a one-to-one ratio, I know that there are people that are proponents of that. But I think really is to try and get a balance here. The thing that I run into issues is that, when you have to eliminate something like a trinit from somebody's plan because of the high allergen, it then does create a little bit of a potential for imbalances.

I remember reading this one study. I can't recall what the study was but it was saying that like the estimates are anywhere from 10 to 1 to 20 to 1 or 25 to 1 per people's modern day diet ratios of omegas. And that just to me, like blew my mind until I started actually looking at my clients and breaking down their plans when they were sending them to me and I would say, "Good God!" even as fitness professionals, you guys are falling into this trap and into this hole.

**BEN**

So the other thing I want to ask you about, that's brilliant, the other thing I would ask you about, you said food is therapy. So I want to talk about I'm big into this psychology of performance, I'm big into this psychology of literally every aspect of optimizing your body. Like so many people are focused on the external stimulus and I'm trying to teach people to pay more attention to the internal response to that stimulus.

Talking about food as therapy, how does that play in? So is it a psychological response like you know, the idea of eating a chicken breast when you are pissed off versus eating a cheese burger when you got a big smile on your face? So really though, there's obviously the biochemical response but then there's also the neurochemical response, right? So I want to know how much you've kind of dug into that and how much do you consider that when you're into someone's plan who is looking to optimize their hormone and their health.

**VICTORIA**

I mean again, as a sociologist, there's a huge social impact of food. Food is absolutely social and one of the things I guess it's one of my little mantras is that like you really have to focus on cellular to social. That we have to put importance on all of that, because what food does for bodies on a cellular level is incredibly important. But we also have to think about that like you said, emotional response that sometimes has been taught to us but often it also is created. And we create that positive reaction to it, we create that spike, I mean, dopamine response from eating a jar of peanut butter.

**BEN**

I've never done that in my life, I promise.

**VICTORIA**

I have. So I will confess my sins.

**BEN**

Me too. I think I do it weekly!

## VICTORIA

I absolutely understand and agree with what you're saying. I think that almost food becomes therapeutic through a sense of psychological benefit or almost like a tradition. We think about in sports like those kind of myths of somebody using a lucky rabbit's foot. I feel like a bodybuilding you get the same hive invented tradition of I have to eat this to carb up before my show because this is what worked the last time. Even though it actually didn't work, you just have it in your head that it worked.

With binge eating behaviors too, I think that that's really multi-factorial, and I don't think that a lot of people in our industry are getting into that kind of very complex topic that sometimes when your body is so messed up, no matter what your will power is, you're going to bench. It's going to happen. You can try to have all the restraint in the world, but especially when you have these epic nutrient deficiencies, or you've actually deprived yourself of something like carbohydrates in your body and your body is sending you signals.

So there is of both I think physiological response but also a psychological and sociological. So that's with that whole bio psychosocial model comes into play with looking at food.

## BEN

So you've obviously looked at a lot of women post contest who go through that binge cycle. And I try to dissuade as many people and it's not like, dead for saying this but I'm trying to dissuade as many women as possible from competing because it's so common to see women develop terrible relationships with food. And like you know what? If you can do it and see food as, you know, just eat healthily rather than eating as a reward system, then great.

Unfortunately most people can't and then they end up destroying their bodies. I've seen women put on 60 pounds in three weeks and never been able to reverse it. I'd love to have you speak about first lines of defense to have them: one, overcome the psychology of the binge and purge attitude and two, like hormonally, where do they start? I mean obviously it's very hard to guess because, so many potential avenues. You brought up progesterone as being potentially the first line of defense. Is it just a matter of go see a doctor and send go see an endocrinologist? What are you thinking?

## VICTORIA

So the first thing I try to do when I work with even women that are experiencing heteros, and I work with women like, I mean from your amateur all the way the Olympian stage. The big thing here is that we have to de-stigmatize the post-contest period. Because I think with the amount of stigma that is around, kind of binge eating behaviorism the kind of the post-contest blues, it kind of makes some people hide them and they especially hide them from their coaches.

Whereas if we can create this open line of communication, right from the get go, like starting at our first time we meet each other, then I can kind of monitor and understand your eating behaviors all the way through your prep into the post contest as well. I don't actually take on clients anymore because I guess I have learned to love and hate competitive body building to the point I just can't do it anymore from coaching standpoint. But I can consult with these women and that's what I do. I mean, with the post contest hormone period, one of the things I kind of refer to is that, and this is going to sound like a crazy example, but I'm sure you've got how many kids now? Two kids?

**BEN**

Three

**VICTORIA**

Three kids, oh my goodness! So hormones during pregnancy and how crazy it is, and how crazy hormones are post-partum and how sometimes, and I've heard from lots of different men on this one that they look at their spouse and they go like, "Who are you? You're eating things that you've never even wanted before, you've got this crazy craving." And we almost have this like commonality in culture that like you've got a crazy pickles and peanut butter pregnancy hormones.

And I'm like, shit! I've seen that post-comp with women. That their hormones are doing all of these different things and so that's the first thing I might, sometimes it's not you, it's your hormones. And I hate that kind of like very binary perspective, but in order to get them out of that very like, "I'm afraid to talk about it. I'm ashamed of what I'm doing," I have to de-stigmatize it. I have to explain to them like there's just so much going on from this depletion aspect. Your hormones are all over the place. You also have these like feelings of really deprivation. And so you're going to binge.

**BEN**

And then you stack that with depression and anxiety from, "Hey, I just put on 5 pounds in 5 days." And then you stack that and their trying to eat to get rid of these anxiety feelings they're having and they're almost set up to make it impossible for them to be successful. I'm not the biggest advocate of reverse dieting from a physiological perspective, but from a psychological perspective, does that seem like the best mitigation strategy like, we're going to give you a slow reverse plan here to kind of allow your brain to slowly adjust to this increased calorie phase?

Because most people they reward themselves for 3 to 5 days or even 2 days and they can't stop because once you start eating you can't stop. So as far as mitigation strategies...



**VICTORIA**

Absolutely. Number one thing I remind everybody is shit happens, get over it. If you cheat you cannot just sit there and let yourself become almost fixated on the fact that you cheated. And it's not cheating, you ate. You didn't cheat, you ate.

**BEN**

And conversely you don't need to do two hours of cardio to work it off.

**VICTORIA**

Yeah and that's the second thing I say, okay, get over it, do not go to the gym, you're not a rabbit, you don't need to go on the treadmill or the hamster and go running around. Think of that being the greatest re-fee agent that you needed to go in tomorrow and absolutely crush whatever your session is. And your body probably needed it at that point. If you've just been dieting and dieting hard for 16 weeks, that one kind of epic meal is not going to kill you.

**BEN**

Sure. But it's never one epic meal, let's use the ten epic meals.

**VICTORIA**

Well but actually I can speak from experience, I have kind of found that when you give somebody that kind of mentality, it's not a repeated offense at all. And I mean too but I'm also looking at progesterone as something that like, I don't like playing with fire when it comes to like fixing somebody's sex hormones, I would rather look at non-sex hormonal pathways. So a really good like glucose disposal agent, really almost like a giant blend of things like barvarin and cinnamon and really trying to be able to stop that insulin response to kind of get to the androgen response from happening. At the same time I mean, if they're on certain compounds like say they fucked with their thyroid, don't go off because your show is over. You got to ease out of that because that's just going to make this whole thing even more problematic.

Also one of the things that'll get you to sleep. A lot of times in those last kind of weeks of competition, their sleep cycles are really messed up. We know that when the body hasn't slept, it's increasing levels of inflammation but we also crave glucose. So really getting into their sleep patterns right away post-comp as a way to kind of combat that waking up at 04:00 A.M, finding yourself at the fridge and binging.

And then with training, I sometimes won't go actually into a strength phase, not like a hard core one. It's not like power lifting by any means but getting them to stop seeing themselves as a body and start to see themselves as a functional vessel again, falling back in love with the weight and seeing what their body is able to do.

**BEN**

And trying to minimize the cortisol response to training and maximize the insulin sensitivity which they're going to see in a strength phase. So one thing that you brought up there, and I don't want to gloss over this because this is so powerful, you spoke about women during pregnancy and post-partum and just trying to bring up the conversation about just the power of hormones. People don't realize the power they have over you and it becomes an unconscious thing.

So when someone is in this negative kind of state of depleted thyroid, depleted progesterone, elevated cortisol, maybe elevated androgens from excess allergen use, whatever it happens to be or at least estrogen imbalance, we got all these five major contributors to basically working against you. What can they start doing, obviously paying attention to their nutrition, they start sleeping a little better, optimizing their gut, is that the only strategy? Because I'm just seeing like I want women to realize that it's not their fault. It's like your hormones are so jacked up, you're not yourself.

So starting to turn that around and make it work in your favor, is it just a matter, like is there anything they can do that's almost a quick fix? I love the fact you brought up thyroid and keeping that in there. And as soon as they're done the contest, should they be going right into doing a blood test to see how screwed up things are or should it be like maybe waiting a few weeks and continuing to train? I want to get them some applicables here that they can run away with.

**VICTORIA**

First and foremost, they're not alone. Like how many people across the world right now, whether they've competed or not are having hormonal imbalance? I think it's huge and the more that medicine is expanding, and going into things like epigenetics and the microbiome, the more that we're realizing that yeah, hell there's a lot of different variables involved here. It's really not that simple. But as complicated as it is, we can break it down and we can get through it. And that's one of the things I always try to remind.

Same thing with the notion of a risk-to-reward ratio. Before somebody even goes into prep, I tell them that and then post comp I remind them of that. So everything we do is going to have a risk to reward ratio. And yes, you're going to stand up there on stage and you might win your pro-card or go to the Olympia but what's the risk of that? And the risk of that is, you're going to fuck your hormones up, I mean...

**BEN**

For the rest of your life.

**VICTORIA**

Yeah. Hormonal adaptations are real. That really comes to that, like I said at the beginning that's kind of sport endocrinology world that I think gets almost passed over for women especially. I'm very fortunate to work with some of the researchers that have been kind of very groundbreaking in this. But thinking about something just like I mean, if you're doing excessive amounts of cardio, let's talk about what researchers looked at like high endurance athletes or long distance runners in women. Like there's a huge hormonal shift that happens. And then you're doing that and then also you're adding in this cocktail poly-pharmacy at the same time.

**BEN**

So what type of things has research shown that's going to happen? Because I want people to hear that because, you and I know, but it's not common knowledge. Unfortunately the paradigm of the fitness industry as you know like, "Hey, you need to do 2 to 3 hours of cardio a day and starve yourself." And just I hit myself over the head and I'm like, "What are you people thinking?" you're not trying to become a marathon runner, you're trying to get lean and it's not necessary to do two hours of cardio.

**VICTORIA**

I think one of my things I even like I was stuffing in my prep notes, I was like sharing a recent success story where almost every single individual female I've worked with, I've had to explain the whole less is more idea. Less is more when it comes to drugs, less is more when it comes to training and more is more when it comes to food. You eat more, often I see you're going to have a lot more overall benefit and that doesn't mean obviously like putting yourself in the surplus stage of carb intake but dropping things down and just having this chronic state of overdoing everything – which really has been fueled by our ideas, I think of like early performances in 2017.

I mean, some of the different adaptations that happen, like I noted earlier, you've got your progesterone response right away and that's a big thing here. And so with your progesterone, your progesterone and your estrogen have to be balanced along with a bunch of other different sex hormones but in order for you to have a normal healthy menstrual cycle, and the menstrual cycle is not perfect, it doesn't need to be 28 days, that's a complete bullshit math. But it's not okay not to have a period and I think in the fitness industry now more than ever I see this almost glamorization of amenoria and it's disgusting.

Women wear like a badge of honor because they perceive it has to do with their body fat levels, and it absolutely does not. It means that you're not in a healthy state and you've also increased your risk of things like cervical cancer, ovarian cancer, and it's not just by a little bit. Every time you don't get your period, it causes damage in your body. So that's one of the first kind of I guess aspects that really needs to be touched on. Another one is, adrenal failure doesn't exist or dysfunction on whatever people call it. It's your hypothalamus pituitary adrenal axis is just fried. Your hypothalamus pituitary ovarian axis is also fried. Because we make hormones from multiple different sites within our bodies. Thyroid dysfunction so a lower obvious thyroid function, usually I see secondary meaning that it's not necessarily that their thyroid gland is not working properly, it's that they are not getting the right signals sent to it. And that T3 is not the solution for life, you have to figure that shit out at the root cause. You have to go deep and it's really taking care of the stress in your body.

Hyper-insulinemia is another one. And controlling central adipose is another issue because a lot of times when we get into this chronic stress state, and like I don't believe in kind of that body typing where your body fat is, it's really that like you've been running yourself into a hole and your cortisol is not necessarily high, it could be low. We really don't know. But most likely you're insulin levels are really screwed up. And if you're somebody who's already predisposed to storing fat in your midsection, it's going to go there. So just suck it up and let's try to get it down through whatever options we have. Liver health is another big one too. I think that when women perceive that they can't have liver issues because they're not running, I mean all these crazy compounds they're counterparts, and that's bullshit. Whenever you have hormonal imbalances, you're going to have liver issues. So you've got to take care of your liver, you've got to get that healthy because that's not only going to relate to how you're metabolizing hormones but it's also relating to digestion. And because this is really like the body's integrated system, we can't just look at one aspect on other aspects, we have to get things back in sync.

## BEN

We can obviously go deep on each one of these. Do you have any resources that you can recommend because maybe we can spend hours here talking, but how people can start? Do you have any resources or sites or books or anything you recommend? Is there anything you've done where you kind of go deeper on discussing mitigation strategies with people?

## VICTORIA

I'm working on an e-book right now, and it's taking me forever. What I'm essentially working on is I'm talking about non-hormonal ways to fix hormonal imbalances. And so it's something that both women, kind of post-partum, pro-comp, pre-comp anywhere really can kind of get use of. Even post birth control because that's really one of my big clientele is. So that will be obviously coming out and my website will be eventually coming out in the next month.

But in terms of resources, I can't lie, there isn't a lot of good stuff out there, and I'm not going to beat around the bush. As a practitioner, like I kind of really look more into that functional medicine realm because there are very easily understood. Guys like Brian Walsh has some really great stuff. He's more of that functional med doc. Dr. Axe and Chris Keshner they've got more of this pop culture vibe, but if you look at things with a more critical lens, you can get some really good information, not necessarily from them but from their resources.

I always go straight to the resource section. I'm just looking in my collection of bibliography that I'm staring at the moment, there's just not a lot of good information out there, I'm sorry. I wish I could solve that problem.

## BEN

We're anxiously waiting for you to tell us about it. So one thing I want to bring up that you said is the idea of less is more, because tilt to glass over that would be, wouldn't be of justice to the people listening. And the paradigm in the fitness industry particularly amongst fitness and figure and bikini girls is, "My coach says I need to do 2 to 3 hours of cardio a day." And one of the things I really like to teach people is to eliminate attachment to the external stimulus, eliminate the attachment to the external vehicle. So the cardio, people attach themselves to I have to do x amount of time, I have to do x amount of frequency.

When starting to create an internal thought process, like what's actually the internal response I'm trying to get after? Like am I trying to get my body to build muscle? Well then it doesn't matter how much weight I lift if I'm not getting that right response. Same with cardio, I'm trying to get my body to switch into using a little more fat for fuel. So what's the external vehicle to allow me to illicit that internal response?

There's something I want people to start to realize that you need to loose attachment to the external stimulus. As an athlete whether you'd be a power lifter or a football player or a whatever, swimmer, you're attached to the external stimulus. You're attached to the time, you're attached to your speed, you're attached to the amount of weight on the bar. But as a physique athlete, you need to attach to what's happening inside your body. Creating an internal response, an internal hormonal environment and an internal response that makes them illicit the desired outcome. And these are all things that you are very much speaking about. Like how do we create that internal environment for loosing fat and maintaining muscle?



## VICTORIA

So I think for me one of the first kind of ways I can answer that question is that like, within bodybuilding, we like to compartmentalize and we like to put things into boxes. And over time, we've created this almost the tri-factor of bodybuilding, which is: diet, training and supplementation. And we've failed to look at all the other just immense and innumerable factors that actually undermine our success with bodybuilding.

And so I utilize a model, it's like I think I actually bastardize the sociology model contradict stream and apply it to the world of bodybuilding, but it works. So it's something called the, and it's got a really long name but it's called the critical biopsycosocioecological model of dynamic relations. And it's really simple actually. You've got an inter-dynamic connection between certain responses that happen within you the individual, you get fed information from your network. So this is things like your coach, your family, your relationship, your partner. You're also fed and you feed messages, it's a two way street within the industry, gives us messages.

And then we also have things like historical and cultural and social factors. So there's a lot that actually impacts our success within bodybuilding, but we still boil it down to these three basic ideas. And so by trying to push ourselves out of that, we're going to be able to actually get a lot more success like you said, does it really matter how long a cardio session is? No, because it has to matter to the individual. It's the individual's response, it's how their body is actually responding to it, it's actually what their body needs. And for an individual, they might not need to do two hours of cardio and that's awesome, other people might have to do that.

So first individualizing. So thinking about things and I guess really the multitudinal factors that influence that, genetics. I mean, previous health history. If they've got a positive body image, are they sleeping enough? How long have they been even training for? Have they trained before? What's their athletic background? What's their family history? So there's a lot of different things that impact us on a very intrinsic level.

And I try to break down when I coach people, which is why I don't do it anymore, but break down the external stuff too. I'm kind of the belief now that, and I've shifted definitely into this, that there are basic tenants in bodybuilding. It's like gravity falls at 9.8 milliseconds per second, right? That's going to happen but we don't all need to be underneath the tree like Isaac Newton. Some of us might be flying in the sky, some of us might be looking at the apple itself. It doesn't matter. The basics don't change.

We know we're going to do some type of diet strategies, we know we're going to probably have to do some type of supplementation, we know we're going to have to train. But how we actually look at each of those different types of elements has to be different in order for us to create sustainability and success.

**BEN**

Yeah, it's the idea that people attach to the external vehicle rather than the internal response that they get from it. If we can shift the paradigms of the fitness industry to that realization, it makes it so much easier. It's so much empowering like once people start to understand the internal stimulus they are trying to achieve, how do I do that with the least possible work. Obviously like people attached, "I want to be the hardest working guy in the room."

Well, guess what happens when you're hardest working guy in the room? Your cortisol goes out, your inflammation goes up. You're becoming so resistant, all these other things are happening that you don't think about. And minimum effective dose is, that's why I'm so glad that you said less is more. Such a brilliant thing.

**VICTORIA**

The two other examples that I commonly also use, like again and other ones like my little mantra trying to get to people's heads but it's: when there is function, form will follow. When your body is functioning properly, you will be able to have the form you would like. It's really simple and we can kind of trick this. I mean I think a lot of bodybuilders, they can kind of trick it for a couple of years through the use of either exogenous means or just being an idiot!

But it comes back to bite them in the ass every single time, and then it takes years to reestablish that functionality. I give an example of essentially building a house. And that when we have a house, my partner is a home inspector, so he comes home all the time with these crazy examples, you know, they did renovation that was like 100 grand and they got granite counter tops but you know what? The foundation was cracked. And that when he first started telling me these examples I was like, "Jesus Christ! This is my world, this is what I live every day."

Because we try to build this facade of muscle when our physiological, biological, sociological, psychological foundation is not there. And we don't come into this world, it's funny I hate the word bodybuilding, because we don't build bodies, we manage them. Because you're not coming to me out of the womb. And even if you were, you're still going to have factors stacked for you or against you.

**BEN**

And the reality is, people who chose this industry are probably the most broken to begin with, because they're trying to build the armor, right? I'm actually teaching a camp this weekend I had a bunch of people on the camp and we're talking about the kind of illusion in muscle building, it's kind of the paradox in muscle building. People think building muscles is going to change who they are, it's going to make them more confident or overcome their fears. In reality, none of that matters. Like you give somebody 50 pounds of muscle, they're still going to be the same insecure, fearful person unless they build the character that's required and they'll become a better person, they'll learn to overcome their fears, they'll learn to overcome the desire to be lazy.

That's where the character is built. And unless people search and realize that; it's the same for women, it's not about being lean. Being lean will not make you more confident, being muscular will not make you more confident. It's the person you become during that process, right?

### VICTORIA

I've been it all; I've been fat, I've been skinny, I've been lean, I've been jacked, I've been strong. You know, I've been everything and that's one thing with growing up I had an eating disorder. I was a ballet dancer competitively, and I always thought that once I got skinny I would get that utopian, I'd be there. And then really that was kind of programmed into me in my young age because I lost weight and I started winning. I would always get second or third place then as soon as I got the body of a ballerina, I was first place. So it was conditioned into me. And that rode on my back like an ugly ass monkey for years until I finally woke up to the fact that none of this really matters. Like, how I look does not fucking matter. And it was because my mom was sick at the time and she was losing her motor skills and her motor functions, she's still quite sick. It's actually really sad, but that was for me. It was like that turning point and I forced myself to be grateful of my body every day.

And that gratitude for me is absolutely key. And I would do sometimes the stupidest techniques. Like, I look back and I go like, I sound like an idiot but getting out of the shower and moisturizing my legs and literally going like, "Legs, I'm so thankful that you were able to push me through that workout today."

### BEN

You work, right?

### VICTORIA

Yeah, and it took programming. It took absolute programming and practice to find gratitude, but once I found gratitude I found acceptance.

### BEN

And gratitude for things that it's hard to find gratitude in, right? It's easy to find gratitude in the great things in your life but finding gratitude for the things that are teaching you. Like you spoke about you've been all things; fat, skinny, muscular, all those things, each of them has taught you something. Every phase you've learnt something. You've become this great person because of those challenges and those obstacles.

And the thing we need to realize is our obstacles become our character and such a paradigm shift for the fitness industry. Most people are looking for the easy way out. They are looking for the steroids, they're looking for the secret diet, they're looking for something when in reality, none of that shit is going to make you a better person. You need to look for the struggle to overcome and then all of a sudden, now I'm a more confident person because I know that I held my feet to the fire and overcame this shit.

### VICTORIA

Yeah, and I think the other thing too that I learned was balance doesn't exist. Balance is this utopian bliss. It does not exist. And I searched for it like Pandora's Box for years and when finally I'd almost think I would achieved it, then something would go astray in my life, whether it was within my relationship, my body, my health, whatever it was. And I woke up to that fact that like no balance, it's bullshit. And no, I don't like that kind of idea like balance doesn't exist because you're grinding it out. Like no, we're all fucking grinding and working our hardest.

But balance for me is like walking a tight rope. And you're walking over like the city skyline and there's wind and gusting and elements and everything else. Why would you want to put yourself in that uncomfortable situation where you constantly feel like you have to go back and forth just to stay grounded? And ultimately you're going to fall off and that for me is constant crap because everybody thinks of this on season and offseason bullshit. And I've got to find balance after a competition. I'm like, "No, balance you're never going to."

It's about living life and knowing that you have to manage your bullshit essentially. There's going to be really tough decisions that you have to make, whether it's taking time out of your family to go to cardio, you have to ask yourself if that's what you want to achieve. And if everybody, all the parties involved are okay with that, then yeah, go and do it.

But then afterwards manage that relationship. Manage your variables. We're all like a giant CEO of a huge company with these billions of employees underneath it. Because that's our life: that's our job, that's our training, that's our diet, that's our nutrition. I mean, that's everything. We have to be constantly managing them because balance, that whole idea is not going to do anything for you.

### BEN

Good thought. So not to take too much of your time but I want to get kind of an idea of what your stress mitigation strategies are. So a lot of our women are sitting there saying, "You don't know the stresses that I'm going through, you don't know my day-to-day activities." But like you said, we're all going through bullshit. So how do you overcome stressful situations? Or how do you learn to I guess absorb stressful situations? Talk about that.

## VICTORIA

I don't know what to say. It's funny because first of all doing a PHD is no easy feat. I would start off by saying that it's stressful as it can be. And I have a lot of kind of complex life things to go on, so the first thing for me was managing my variables. I know I can't be perfect. Like for me one of the ideas here is, there's optimal and then there's realistic.

I can try to put optimal sleep in my schedule, but there's some points in my life it's not going to be realistic for me to do. And that's okay, as long as I manage my variables after I'm out of that storm. And if I'm not ever going to get out of that kind of place, well I got to really reevaluate my life at that point in time.

So an example that I can use is like when I was travelling in the spring, like I did 2 seminars and had another conference within three weeks. I honestly still don't know how I did it, but I knew as soon as I got home, because I was overseas in Europe, I had to take time off first of all. I had to be able to say to myself, "Okay, you've not slept, therefore we need to focus on sleep. You've been eating on the road, you need to now be able to now go from the foods that you know are sometimes are okay, they have to go and you only have to eat foods that you know work for you and your body. We have to get yourself back in check."

And it doesn't mean running out and getting a blood work or anything like that, it's literally just going, "What did I pull from? What aspects of my life have I pulled from? Now how can I replenish them?" it was spending more time with my partner, it was catching up on all the research that I actually didn't get done over those couple of weeks. And that's what I mean by managing. For me once I grasped that idea, life became so much easier. Gratitude has given me so much perspective, so much acceptance because when I look at certain situations, I can now just literally like, sometimes it's harder depending on the situation, sometimes it's harder to find gratitude, but you got to find it eventually.

So if it means you know, taking a time out for two hours, turning off your phone and doing something that you enjoy no matter what the chaos and bullshit is around you, go and do that. But set your time limit and get back in. You can't run from your problems forever, which I feel like most of our society tries to do. We're supposed to feel pain, we're supposed to feel emotion. Life is not easy, but you still got to do it. You don't need to go drown yourself.

So probably I can thank my parents for that one, my coping powers have become very, very resilient in the last 15 years of

## BEN

Struggles develop character, right? So one last thing, I want to talk to you about your morning routine. How do you kick start your day to make sure you're functioning optimally? People are so kind of enveloped right now in what a morning routine looks like. I'd love to hear what you do to make sure you're on top of it?



## VICTORIA

So it really depends on my day, but I start off by breathing – which sounds like very kind of this New Age meditation and breathing exercises but it's not even that. I literally have to just take a breath. Often I can get up and I can get going into my routine and I'm somebody that gets into my head a lot. Like I'm an academic, I'm constantly thinking about everything under the sun. I can do that as soon as I wake up in the morning and I've had to train myself to stop.

And when I'm putting on my contacts or brushing my teeth or something, I literally will force myself to take a breath. It's not inhale exhale for 5 or 10 seconds or even multiple, it's just a breath. I find that that is a great way for me to ground myself, to be present in the moment, even if it's just for a couple of seconds.

Gratitude is another big thing. I don't necessarily do like a gratitude journals or anything like that anymore, but I used to. And when I have kind of found myself in hard times, I've had to sometimes wake up with a mantra or a quote or something to get my day going. I'm grateful and I'm not in a position anymore that I need to do that, but when I find myself kind of slipping and getting a little bit kind of anxious or overwhelmed, I reestablish and I recheck in with myself.

Another big thing that I do in the morning is, I avoid emails, because I get ridiculously overwhelmed with emails. I think that that comes from that whole notion of being realistic and optimal. Yeah, it would be great if I could wake up and force myself to do all my emails right away, but the reality is, it just doesn't work for me and I've accepted that.

So I start my day off with either writing, I write great in the mornings, or I do some reading. I go check out all of my list serves and get all up to date on some research. And I try to stay out of social media. That's my other thing.

## BEN

Good thought. Starting your day off being reactive like most people do, responding to emails or getting on social media literally just disempowers you and you've lost your prime time, you've lost your focus, right? You're in somebody else's time at that point. You're not able to focus on your best task, your biggest and best.

## VICTORIA

And it drains you. It's just so draining. I like to start off with like full energy stores and emotional stores, so I don't want to have to drain from right in the first hour of my life or my day.

## BEN

That's probably the best advice right there for every woman out there. Just leave your phone for at least three hours, I usually try to do four, three hours no phone, no email, no reactive life.

**VICTORIA**

And do something that gives you comfort. And comfort doesn't need to come from eating. I have a dog that I absolutely adore, she's like my child. I'll take her around for a walk around the block. Even though that's probably not what is optimal for my schedule, it's what I need to do.

**BEN**

And conversely you don't need to do two hours of cardio to work it off.

**VICTORIA**

Exactly.

**BEN**

That's the only thing that matters. Just feeling great ultimately, right?

**VICTORIA**

Exactly.

**BEN**

Victoria thank you so much. You're awesome and I'm so much looking forward to all these amazing things you come up with. And as soon as you come out with that book you let me know because I'll be one of the biggest advocates to get behind it.

**VICTORIA**

Thank you.

**BEN**

So thank you very much and people, where can they reach you? I'll put it in the show notes but where can they reach you so that they can hear it?

**VICTORIA**

So you can reach me at, my website like I said it's almost done. But it's [www.victoriafelkar.com](http://www.victoriafelkar.com) and then like all of my social media is exactly the same. I keep it simple because I'm not trying to sell anything, I'm just trying to be me and that really is, I think for any listener out there is, if you can be as authentic as humanly possible with social media, it makes it so you become untouchable by its bullshit.

**BEN**

Wonderful. I love that you're inspiring women and educating us all, so thank you so much. I really appreciate your time.

**VICTORIA**

You're welcome. Thanks.