

Stress & Cortisol Guide

The missing piece most wellness advice skips entirely.

Why stress derails even a good plan

Cortisol, the body's primary stress hormone, doesn't just affect how you feel — it directly influences blood sugar, appetite, sleep, and where the body tends to store fat. A nutrition or fitness plan built without accounting for stress is, in a very real sense, incomplete.

This is especially relevant for busy, high-performing people: the same drive and intensity that fuels career success can keep the nervous system in a near-constant low-grade “on” state, even when nothing acutely stressful is happening.

How chronic stress shows up physically

- Increased cravings for sugar and refined carbohydrate — cortisol drives the body to seek fast energy.
- Disrupted sleep, particularly waking in the early hours and struggling to fall back asleep.
- Stubborn changes around the midsection, often resistant to diet and exercise changes alone.
- A wired-but-tired feeling — mentally alert yet physically depleted.

“You cannot out-discipline a nervous system that never gets to switch off.”

Rebuilding the off switch

The goal isn't to eliminate stress — that's neither realistic nor necessary. The goal is to give the nervous system regular, reliable signals that it's safe to come down from high alert, even briefly, multiple times a day.

◆ **Daily cortisol-lowering practices**

- Morning light exposure within the first hour of waking — it helps anchor a healthy cortisol rhythm for the rest of the day.
- A genuine pause before meals — even 60 seconds of slow breathing shifts the body from “stressed” to “ready to digest.”
- A consistent wind-down routine in the hour before bed, away from screens and unresolved tasks.
- Movement that calms rather than spikes — walking, stretching, or yoga, balanced alongside more intense training.

This guide is a companion to *Wellness Nourishment: Fuel for the Soul* by Subreen Sharif. For the full framework, daily rituals, and the complete approach this guide is drawn from, see the book — and for hands-on, week-by-week support, explore the 12-Week Wellness Nourishment Programme.