



Cortisol Management *Guide*

BUILD YOUR RESILIENCE
TO STRESS WITH THESE 7
SIMPLE HABITS

CORTISOL 101

What is it?

It's no secret that stress runs rampant nowadays. Between hectic work schedules, bills, traffic, and mile-long to-do lists, there's a lot to stress about! And how do our bodies respond to all that stress? Cortisol.

What is Cortisol?

Cortisol is your body's main stress hormone. It's released from the adrenal glands and triggers your body's "fight or flight" response.

Cortisol comes in handy in short bursts. It gives you a boost of energy so you can run from danger or fight off a predator. Ideally, once the stressor passes, cortisol dips back down.

The problem is, modern life throws stress at us every day. This can cause us to get stuck in a chronic stress response, where cortisol stays high non-stop.

Risks of High Cortisol

When cortisol levels stay elevated for too long, it can lead to:

- Fatigue
- Anxiety & depression
- Weakened immune system
- Trouble concentrating
- Low libido
- Weight gain
- Increased risk of chronic illness



While you can't get rid of stress altogether, you *can* change your lifestyle to help manage your cortisol levels. In this guide, we'll cover 7 habits to build your stress resiliency and get cortisol in a healthy range.

HABIT #1: SETTING INTENTIONS

Much like your sleep-wake cycle, your cortisol levels follow a natural rhythm. It peaks in the morning and falls throughout the day, reaching its lowest point around midnight.

Within an hour of waking, cortisol levels are at their highest. This is known as the “cortisol awakening response” -- or CAR for short. This helps you feel alert and focused, so you can get started with your day.

But there is a downside...

High cortisol levels in the morning can make you more prone to anxiety. This can make it easy to go into worry-mode right away.

The solution? Start your morning off intentionally.

Setting clear intentions helps you get in a **positive mindset** for the day and **direct your energy** towards the most important tasks. This can help ease any morning anxiety.



Morning Intention Ideas

Here are a few ways to start your day with intention:

- Plan your day by jotting down any important tasks and priorities
- Do some gratitude journaling
- Meditate
- Say positive affirmations out loud while looking in the mirror
- Do some deep breathing while visualizing your day

HABIT #2: LIMIT BLUE LIGHT

The average person spends close to 7 hours staring at electronic devices each day. While this technology can be amazing, it can also affect your health.

Electronic devices like laptops, cell phones, and TVs emit blue light. We get blue light exposure naturally from sunlight.

But blue light from screens **confuses your circadian rhythm**, your body's sleep-wake cycle. *Especially* if you use these devices in the evenings once the sun has gone down.

Blue light suppresses the release of the sleep hormone melatonin. But it also increases cortisol levels, which is NOT ideal for a restful slumber.



How to Keep Blue Light In Check

- Limit or avoid electronics for 2-3 hours before bed
- Add blue light screen filters like Flux to your phone or laptop
- Wear blue light blocking glasses when working on your computer during the day
- Choose red or amber nightlights, which don't affect your circadian rhythm

HABIT #3: MORNING SUNLIGHT

Morning sun exposure is one of the easiest ways to help your cortisol and circadian rhythm get in sync.

Morning sunlight suppresses the sleep hormone melatonin and increases cortisol. When you're trying to wake up in the morning, this is an ideal mix.

Morning sun exposure is even shown to **lower cortisol levels later in the day.** This can help you fall asleep more quickly and improve sleep quality.

But that's not all. Morning sunlight triggers a cascade of positive feel-good chemicals, including serotonin. That's why regular morning exposure can have an **antidepressant** effect.



If possible, try to **get sunlight within 30-60 minutes upon waking.** Aim for 5-10 minutes if you can. But even 1-2 minutes is better than nothing!

Tips to Get More Morning Sunlight

- Open your blinds or curtains first thing when you wake up.
- Sip your water or tea outside on your porch or backyard.
- Take your habits outside. If you're journaling, reading, eating breakfast, or making a phone call, do it outdoors.
- If it's cold out, sit next to a sunny window to get some morning sunshine.

HABIT #4: CUT BACK CAFFEINE

Caffeine helps you kickstart your day with a quick jolt of energy. But if you're stressed, you may want to rethink your morning coffee routine.

Caffeine increases cortisol levels. And upon waking, cortisol levels are already at their peak. Drinking too much caffeine can raise cortisol levels even further.

This may help pep you up in the morning. But if you consume it too late, it can disrupt your circadian rhythm. This can lead to poor sleep, which causes your body to produce even *more* cortisol during the day.

Drinking caffeine can also create dependency where you rely on it for energy.

If you can't imagine nixing caffeine altogether, just try cutting back. The tips below will help...



Tips to Cut Back on Caffeine

- **Stick to a limit.** Can't go without your morning cup of Joe? No worries! Just stick to one cup.
- **Avoid caffeine after noon.** Caffeine can remain in your bloodstream for up to 10 hours. So if you drink it, do it early.
- **Go for decaf.** If you love the taste of java, try switching to decaf instead.
- **Try green tea.** Compared to coffee, green tea has a fraction of the caffeine. Green tea also provides a potent dose of antioxidants.

HABIT #5: PRIORITIZE SLEEP

Quality sleep is a must if you want to keep your stress *and* cortisol in check.

Lack of sleep and poor sleep can elevate cortisol levels during the day.

The trouble is, when you're stressed, you often have trouble sleeping. You may find it harder to fall asleep or wake up earlier than you'd like.

Luckily, you can improve the quality of your sleep by practicing good sleep hygiene.



Sleep Hygiene Tips

1. **Stick to a consistent sleep schedule.** This syncs up your body's circadian rhythm, so when your head hits the pillow, you're ready. Aim for 7-9 hours of sleep each night.
2. **Head to bed earlier.** The hours before midnight are said to be the most restorative. So aim to be in bed by 10pm if possible.
3. **Limit electronics before bed.** As mentioned, blue light from screens can disrupt your sleep. So steer clear of them for 2-3 hours before bed.
4. **Have a winding down routine.** Do some relaxing activities to help your body and mind unwind. Read, journal, take a bath, stretch, cuddle with a pet, or do some deep breathing.
5. **Prepare your sleep cave.** The ideal sleep environment is dark, quiet, and cool. Consider investing in black out curtains to keep your bedroom dark. Ear plugs, fans, and noise machines can help keep things quiet. And try cranking the thermostat down a few notches before bed to stay cool.

HABIT #6: EVENING JOURNALING

Journaling is one of the best ways to **ditch stress** and set yourself up for **restful sleep**. When your mind is busy, pouring your heart out on the page can **help your mind relax**.



But journaling's benefits don't end with stress relief. Journaling can help you tap into your desires, gain clarity, problem solve, and can even be cathartic.

Already have a journaling practice that's working for you? Amazing! Keep it up.

But if you're new to journaling or want to mix things up, here are a few journaling practices to try:

Ways to Journal

Free writing - Sometimes called stream of consciousness journaling, this is essentially a brain dump where you write anything that comes to mind. The only rule is to keep the pen moving.

Gratitude journaling - This involves writing down three or more things you're grateful for every day. To juice it up, try including how each thing you're grateful for makes you feel.

Emotional release - Journal about an experience you had to help process your emotions. Be honest and don't censor yourself to get your feelings out.

Bullet journaling - Bullet journals help you record achievements, goals, thoughts, and reflections in an organized way.

HABIT #7: TRY SUPPLEMENTS

Implementing the habits we've covered so far should go a long way into regulating your cortisol levels. However, certain supplements can also support healthy cortisol levels and help build your resilience to stress.



ASHWAGANDHA

This adaptogenic herb is used to ease anxiety and build stress resiliency. Research shows it can help reduce cortisol levels.



MAGNESIUM

This mineral calms the nervous system and promotes relaxation. Studies show supplementing with magnesium can help lower cortisol.



VITAMIN C

Vitamin C doesn't just support your immune health. Your adrenal glands need vitamin C to work properly and make cortisol.



RHODIOLA ROSEA

This is another adaptogenic herb that's shown to reduce cortisol and help build stress resiliency.



OMEGA-3 FATTY ACIDS

Omega-3 fatty acids not only lower inflammation. They're shown to help reduce cortisol too.