

STRESS

CORTISOL

NERVOUS
SYSTEM

Stress Isn't a Mood Problem.

It's an Inflammation Problem.

Why chronic stress reaches your gut, your arteries, and your immune system, and what actually switches it off.



ORIGINAL PLAN

LIFESTYLE MEDICINE
HEALTH COACHING

GUIDE

In this guide

A walk through the science of chronic stress, what it actually does to your body, and the lifestyle response the Original Plan teaches.

- 1 The Reframe
- 2 The Numbers
- 3 The Science: The HPA Axis
- 4 The Science: Cortisol & Inflammation
- 5 A Word From Scripture
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PART ONE

The Problem

THE REFRAME

What you've been told:

“Stress is something to push through with willpower.”

What's actually true:

Stress is a chemical cascade running through the HPA axis. It doesn't stop until you send your body the signal it's built to respond to.

THE NUMBERS

Chronic stress, by the data

83%

of U.S. workers report
work-related stress

American Institute of Stress

40–60%

higher coronary heart
disease risk linked to
chronic psychosocial
stress

*Peer-reviewed cardiovascular
research*

2 in 3

U.S. adults report
physical symptoms
from stress

APA, Stress in America 2025

12.5%

of U.S. adults report
regular worry,
nervousness, or anxiety

CDC / NCHS

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PART TWO

The Science

THE SCIENCE

The HPA Axis

Your stress response runs through a loop, not a switch. The hypothalamus reads the alarm and tells the pituitary, the pituitary tells the adrenal glands, and cortisol enters your bloodstream. Built for short bursts, the loop was never designed to stay open.

Hypothalamus

Detects the threat, sounds the alarm

Pituitary

Relays the signal downstream

Adrenal glands

Release cortisol into the bloodstream

Cortisol

Raises alertness, blood sugar, heart rate

THE SCIENCE

Cortisol Resistance & Inflammation

Part of cortisol's job is shutting inflammation back down once a threat passes. Under chronic stress, the cells that receive that signal grow resistant to it. Inflammation keeps running with no brake, showing up in arteries, joints, and immune function.

Glucocorticoid receptor resistance

Cells stop responding to cortisol's off-signal

Pro-inflammatory cytokines

Chemical messengers that keep inflammation active

Atherosclerotic plaque buildup

Inflamed arteries accumulate plaque over time

Weakened immune defense

Chronic inflammation crowds out normal immune response

“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”

PHILIPPIANS 4:6-7, NKJV

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PART THREE

The Original Plan's Answer

PRACTICAL STEPS

Three ways to close the loop

1

Get outside within an hour of waking

Morning light tells your hypothalamus the day has started safely.

2

Move your body daily

Physical activity burns off the cortisol your system already released.

3

Keep a real stop time

A fixed end to the workday, and a weekly Sabbath rest, give the loop permission to close.

A NATURAL REMEDY

None of this requires a supplement or a special device.

The nervous system responds to ordinary, repeatable inputs, the same ones the body was designed to run on.

Morning sunlight

10–20 minutes outdoors, no sunglasses, within an hour of waking.

Daily movement

A 20–30 minute walk measurably lowers circulating cortisol.

Water & rest

Hydration and a full night's sleep support the body's cortisol clearance.

“Courage, hope, faith, sympathy, love, promote health and prolong life. A contented mind, a cheerful spirit, is health to the body and strength to the soul.”

ELLEN G. WHITE, THE MINISTRY OF HEALING, P. 241

THE TAKEAWAY

Stress was never something to just push through.

It's a body signal, and it answers to what you do with your day.

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