

The Cortisol Reset Guide

A workbook for women over 40

Welcome

Welcome! I'm Courtney Mericle, and I'm thrilled you're embarking on this journey to reset your cortisol levels and reclaim your well-being. This guide is designed specifically for women over 40 who are experiencing the frustrating symptoms of cortisol imbalance.

How to Use This Workbook:

1. Read through each section carefully.
2. Complete the exercises and reflections.
3. Implement the 7-day starter plan.
4. Track your progress and celebrate your wins.

What's Inside:

- Understanding Cortisol
- Your Symptom Check-In
- The 4-Pillar Cortisol Reset Framework
- Your 7-Day Starter Plan
- Weekly Progress Tracker

Understanding Cortisol

What Is Cortisol?

Cortisol is a vital hormone produced by the adrenal glands. It plays a key role in regulating stress response, blood sugar, metabolism, and inflammation. It's often called the "stress hormone" because its levels rise in response to physical or emotional stress.

While cortisol is essential for survival, chronic elevation can lead to a cascade of negative effects, especially for women over 40. Factors like hormonal shifts, increased responsibilities, and past traumas can contribute to cortisol dysregulation.

It is crucial to identify and address the root causes to regain balance and improve overall health.

When Cortisol Goes Wrong: High cortisol levels can lead to weight gain, high blood pressure, and increased risk of chronic diseases.

The Cruel Paradox: Chronic stress can lead to adrenal fatigue, where the adrenal glands struggle to produce enough cortisol, resulting in fatigue and low energy levels.

Reflection:

What stresses do you think impact your cortisol the most?

Your Cortisol Rhythm

Cortisol levels naturally fluctuate throughout the day, following a circadian rhythm.

- **6-8 AM:** Highest levels, providing energy and alertness.
- **8-10 AM:** Levels gradually decrease.
- **10 AM - 12 PM:** Relatively stable.
- **12-2 PM:** Midday dip, often causing fatigue.
- **2-6 PM:** Levels start to rise again.
- **Night:** Lowest levels, promoting relaxation and sleep.

When this rhythm is disrupted, it can lead to fatigue, anxiety, and sleep problems.

Your Symptom Check-In

- Fatigue
- Difficulty sleeping
- Anxiety
- Irritability
- Weight gain (especially around the abdomen)
- Brain fog
- Memory problems
- Digestive issues
- Headaches
- Muscle tension
- Skin problems (acne, eczema)
- Hair loss
- Low libido
- Irregular periods
- Hot flashes
- Night sweats
- Sugar cravings
- Salt cravings
- Increased thirst
- Frequent urination
- Dizziness
- Weakness
- Shakiness
- Depression

Scoring Guide:

- 0-3: Mild
- 4-7: Moderate
- 8-14: Significant
- 15+: High

Total Score: _____

Which 3 symptoms bother you the most?

The 4-Pillar Cortisol Reset Framework

Pillar 1: NOURISH

Focuses on providing your body with the essential nutrients it needs to regulate cortisol. This includes balancing blood sugar, supporting gut health, and reducing inflammation.

- Prioritize whole, unprocessed foods.
- Balance protein, healthy fats, and complex carbohydrates.
- Support gut health with probiotics and fiber.
- Stay hydrated throughout the day.
- Consider targeted supplements.

Pillar 3: REGULATE

Focuses on implementing stress-reduction techniques to calm the nervous system and lower cortisol levels. This includes mindfulness practices, connecting with nature, and engaging in activities that bring you joy.

- Practice mindfulness and meditation.
- Spend time in nature.
- Engage in hobbies and activities you enjoy.
- Connect with loved ones.
- Practice gratitude.

Self-Rating Exercise

Rate yourself on a scale of 1-5 (1 being the lowest, 5 being the highest) for each pillar:

- **Nourish:**
- **Move Smarter:**

Pillar 2: MOVE SMARTER

Emphasizes mindful movement that supports cortisol regulation rather than exacerbating stress. This means choosing activities that you enjoy and that leave you feeling energized, not depleted.

- Choose low-impact activities like walking or yoga.
- Incorporate strength training.
- Limit high-intensity workouts.
- Listen to your body and rest when needed.
- Make movement a daily habit.

Pillar 4: SLEEP

Prioritizes quality sleep to allow your body to repair and regulate hormones. This includes creating a relaxing bedtime routine, optimizing your sleep environment, and addressing any underlying sleep disorders.

- Establish a consistent sleep schedule.
- Create a relaxing bedtime routine.
- Optimize your sleep environment.
- Limit screen time before bed.
- Consider supplements to support sleep.

- Regulate:
- Sleep:

Pillar Deep Dives - Nourish & Move Smarter

Pillar 1: NOURISH

Key Insight: Balancing blood sugar is crucial for regulating cortisol. Avoid processed foods and sugary drinks that cause rapid spikes and crashes.

Do This:

- Eat protein with every meal.
- Choose complex carbs over simple carbs.
- Add healthy fats to your diet.

Watch/Reduce:

- Processed foods
- Sugary drinks
- Excess caffeine

Reflection:

What are some healthy snacks you can keep on hand to avoid blood sugar crashes?

Pillar 2: MOVE SMARTER

Key Insight: High-intensity workouts can spike cortisol levels. Focus on mindful movement that reduces stress and promotes relaxation.

Do This:

- Go for walks in nature.
- Practice yoga or Pilates.
- Engage in light stretching.

Watch/Reduce:

- Excessive cardio
- Overtraining
- Pushing yourself too hard

Reflection:

What are some enjoyable ways you can incorporate mindful movement into your daily routine?

Pillar Deep Dives - Regulate & Sleep

Pillar 3: REGULATE

Key Insight: Stress management is essential for lowering cortisol levels. Practice mindfulness techniques and prioritize activities that bring you joy.

Do This:

- Practice deep breathing exercises.
- Meditate for 10-15 minutes daily.
- Spend time in nature.

Watch/Reduce:

- Negative self-talk
- Over-scheduling
- Constant multitasking

Reflection:

What are some simple stress-reduction techniques you can incorporate into your day?

Pillar 4: SLEEP

Key Insight: Quality sleep is crucial for hormonal regulation. Create a relaxing bedtime routine and optimize your sleep environment.

Do This:

- Go to bed and wake up at the same time each day.
- Create a dark, quiet, and cool sleep environment.
- Take a warm bath or shower before bed.

Watch/Reduce:

- Screen time before bed
- Caffeine and alcohol before bed
- Irregular sleep schedule

Reflection:

What are some ways you can improve your sleep hygiene?

Your 7-Day Starter Plan

Day 1 — Morning Protein Eat a meal with 30g+ protein within 60 minutes of waking. No coffee first.
Reflection: What did you eat? How did you feel after?

Day 2 — Phone Boundary No phone for the first 30 minutes after you wake up. Just you and your morning.
Reflection: What did you do instead? How did it feel?

Day 3 — 5-Min Breathwork Do box breathing: inhale 4 counts / hold 4 / exhale 4 / hold 4. Repeat for 5 minutes.
Reflection: Morning or evening? What did you notice?

Day 4 — Walk It Out Take a 30-minute walk outside. No podcast. No phone calls. Just walk and notice.
Reflection: Where did you go? What came up?

Day 5 — Sleep Anchor Set a consistent bedtime tonight and keep it for the rest of the week.
Reflection: What time? What did you adjust to make it happen?

Day 6 — Fuel + Move Eat protein before your workout. Notice if your energy or performance shifts.
Reflection: What did you eat? How was the workout?

Day 7 — Full Reset Day Do all 4 pillar actions in one day: protein + walk + breathwork + early bedtime.
Reflection: What felt hardest? What felt most natural?

Weekly Progress Tracker

Metric	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4
Morning energy (waking up)	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Afternoon energy (2–4pm)	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Sleep quality	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Mood / emotional steadiness	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Craving intensity	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Workout recovery	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Mental clarity / focus	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Overall wellbeing	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○

Weekly Wins + Notes

Week 1: *What shifted this week? What felt hard? What are you proud of?*

Week 2: *What shifted this week? What felt hard? What are you proud of?*

Week 3: *What shifted this week? What felt hard? What are you proud of?*

Week 4: *What shifted this week? What felt hard? What are you proud of?*

This weekly tracker is designed to help you monitor your progress, identify trends, and celebrate your wins.

Next Steps

Congratulations on completing this workbook! By implementing these strategies, you're taking a proactive step towards resetting your cortisol levels and reclaiming your well-being. Remember to be patient with yourself and celebrate your progress along the way.

This guide is a starting point — not the whole answer.

Real change happens when we dig into *YOUR* specific situation.

Your hormones. Your stress patterns. Your life.

Ready to go deeper?

[Book a free Peptide Clarity Call](#) — we'll talk through your symptoms, goals, and what might actually move the needle for you.

Link in bio · No pressure · Just a real conversation

About Courtney

Courtney Mericle is a certified life coach, breathwork facilitator, personal trainer, and co-owner of Surge Athletics in Colorado. She helps high-achieving women over 40 rebuild their health from the inside out — through The SHIFT Project and as an EllieMD Brand Partner.

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