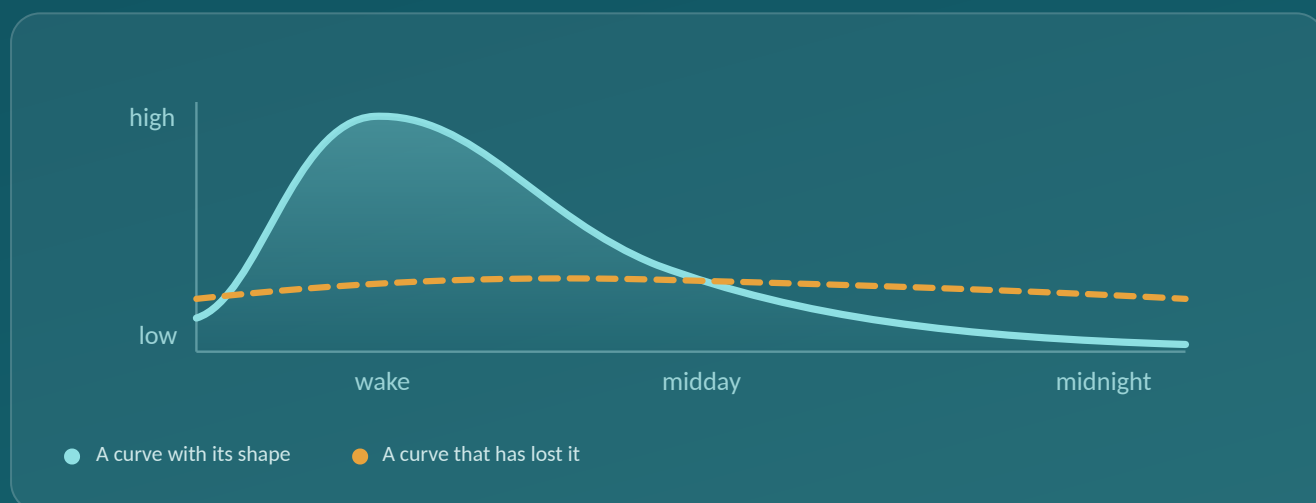


The Cortisol Curve Tracker

A 14-day baseline log for energy, sleep and stress — before you change a single thing.



INSIDE

- 01 Why a baseline beats a reset
- 02 How to use it — five scores a day
- 03 The 14-day log, with space to plot your curve
- 04 Reading your curve — four common shapes
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- 06 Three levers, and questions for your practitioner

Free companion workbook to “HPA Axis Dysfunction Symptoms: What They Really Mean.”
Print it, or fill it in on screen. Fourteen days. Five scores a day. That's the whole ask.

Measure first. Change second.

Almost everyone does this backwards. They read an article, feel seen, and change six things on the same Monday. Three weeks later the honest answer to “is this working?” is *I think so?*

That isn't data. It's hope, and hope fades by week three.

A baseline fixes it. Fourteen days of scoring what normal currently looks like gives you something to measure against — so when you do change something, you can actually tell whether it moved.

It also does something quieter and more useful. Most people discover their symptoms have a **shape**. Mornings are consistently the worst part. Or the 3pm drop only happens on days that started badly. That shape is the most interesting thing you can bring to a practitioner.

WHAT THIS IS

- ☐ A 14-day record of energy, sleep and stress tolerance
- ☐ A way to see your pattern instead of guessing at it
- ☐ Something concrete to hand a practitioner
- ☐ The baseline that makes any later change readable

WHAT THIS ISN'T

- ☐ A test, a diagnosis, or a substitute for one
- ☐ A measure of your actual cortisol levels
- ☐ A protocol, a plan, or a 30-day reset
- ☐ Something to feel bad about missing a day of

One honest caveat. This tracker records how you *feel*. It does not measure cortisol. Even a proper diurnal salivary cortisol test — four to six samples across a day — describes a pattern rather than proving a diagnosis. Your symptom record is evidence about your experience, which is worth a great deal and is not the same thing as a lab result.

Miss a day? Leave it blank and carry on. Twelve honest days beat fourteen invented ones. Reconstructing scores from memory is the one thing that will genuinely ruin the data.

Before you begin

My start date

The one symptom I'd most want gone in 14 days

Write these down now, before the data exists. It's surprisingly easy to forget where you started.

Five scores a day

1 Pick a start date with a normal-ish fortnight ahead

Not the week you're on holiday, moving house, or on a course of steroids. Ordinary is what you're trying to capture.

2 Score in the moment, not at bedtime

Morning energy gets scored in the morning. The 3pm number gets scored around 3pm. Retrospective scoring flattens everything toward “fine,” which is exactly the signal you're trying to find.

3 Use the whole scale

If every number is a 6, the log tells you nothing. Let your best days be 8s and 9s and your worst be 2s and 3s.

4 Plot your week at the bottom of each page

Three dots per day — morning, afternoon, evening. Join them up. That line is your curve, and it's the point of the whole exercise.

What each column means

COLUMN	1 LOOKS LIKE	10 LOOKS LIKE	SCORE IT
Sleep quality	Woke repeatedly, unrefreshed	Slept through, woke restored	On waking
AM energy	Can't function without caffeine	Up and going easily	Within 1 hr of waking
3pm energy	Need to lie down	Steady, no dip at all	Around 3pm
9pm alertness	Fading, ready for bed	Wide awake, second wind	Around 9pm
Stress tolerance	Small things felt huge	Rolled with everything	End of day

Read 9pm alertness backwards. It's the one column where a high number is usually the *problem*. Being wide awake at nine at night, after a day you spent exhausted, is the classic tired-but-wired signature. Score it honestly rather than aspirationally.

The Notes column is for anything that might explain an outlier: a bad night, a hard conversation, a late coffee, illness, travel, cycle day. You will be glad of these when you look back.

Three things that trip people up

SCORING THE DAY, NOT THE MOMENT

Filling all five boxes at bedtime turns five signals into one mood. Keep the log on your phone or the fridge.

BEING GENEROUS

Rounding a 3 up to a 5 because you don't want to seem dramatic hides the exact pattern you came here to find.

CHANGING THINGS MID-LOG

Starting a supplement on day 6 makes the fortnight unreadable. Wait. The baseline is only two weeks.

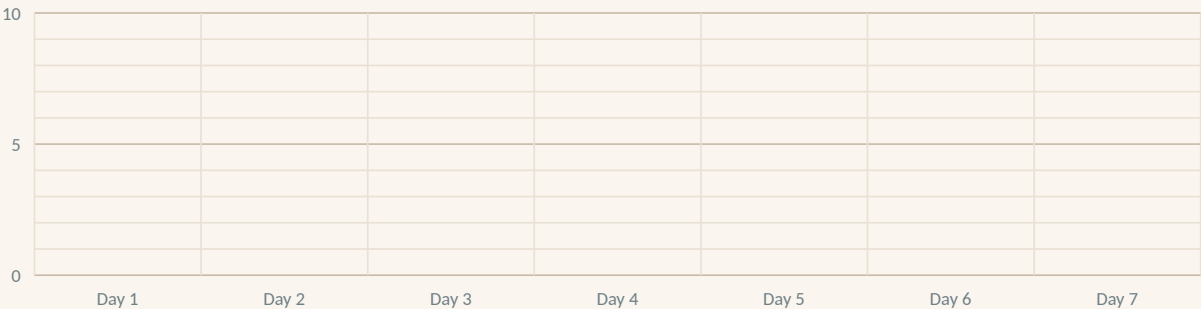
Daily log

Score in the moment. Leave a blank rather than a guess. Stress tolerance is the one you score at the end of the day.

DAY	DATE	WAKE time	BED time	SLEEP 1-10	AM 1-10	3PM 1-10	9PM 1-10	STRESS 1-10	NOTES anything that might explain the day
1									
2									
3									
4									
5									
6									
7									

PLOT YOUR WEEK

Mark your AM, 3pm and 9pm scores for each day, then join each set of dots across the week. ● AM ● 3pm ● 9pm



END OF WEEK ONE — THREE QUICK QUESTIONS

Which time of day was consistently worst?

What did your best day have that your worst day didn't?

Anything you'd want to explain to a practitioner looking at this week?

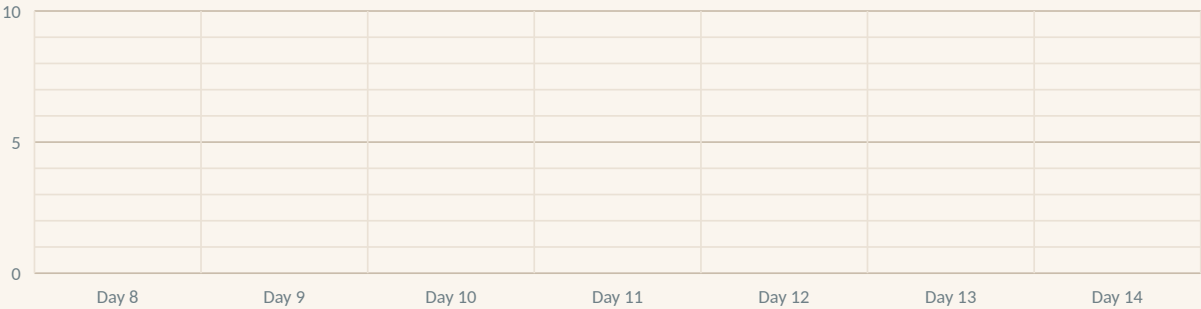
Daily log

Score in the moment. Leave a blank rather than a guess. Stress tolerance is the one you score at the end of the day.

DAY	DATE	WAKE time	BED time	SLEEP 1-10	AM 1-10	3PM 1-10	9PM 1-10	STRESS 1-10	NOTES anything that might explain the day
8									
9									
10									
11									
12									
13									
14									

PLOT YOUR WEEK

Mark your AM, 3pm and 9pm scores for each day, then join each set of dots across the week. ● AM ● 3pm ● 9pm



END OF WEEK TWO — THREE QUICK QUESTIONS

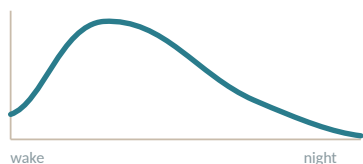
Which time of day was consistently worst?

What did your best day have that your worst day didn't?

Anything you'd want to explain to a practitioner looking at this week?

Reading your curve

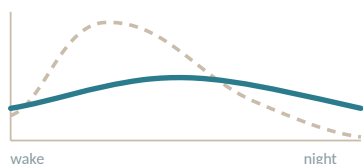
Compare your two plotted weeks against these four shapes. The dashed line shows a curve with its shape intact, for reference. Most people land somewhere between two of these, and that's normal.



Textbook shape

A sharp morning rise, a steady fall, and you're tired at bedtime. AM scores high, 9pm scores low.

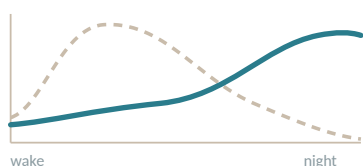
→ If this is your curve and you still feel awful, the answer is probably somewhere else. Thyroid, iron, sleep quality and mood are the usual next places to look.



Flat morning

No real rise after waking. Mornings need 40 minutes and caffeine before you feel human. AM scores sit at 3 or below most days.

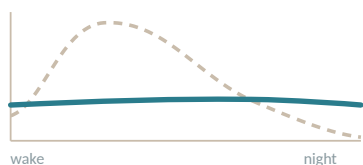
→ First lever: ten minutes of daylight within an hour of waking, every day for two weeks.



Late spike

Flat all day, then wide awake at nine. The tired-but-wired signature. 3pm scores low, 9pm scores 8 or above.

→ First lever: dim your light after 9pm and stop working in bed. Protect the descent, not just the sleep.



Flat all day

Very little difference between morning, afternoon and night. Everything hovers around a 4. Often reported alongside long-running burnout.

→ First lever: daily recovery practice — ten minutes most days, not two hours on Sunday.

These are hypotheses, not diagnoses. A pattern in a symptom log is a good question to bring to a practitioner. It is not a result, and it cannot tell you what your cortisol is doing. Two weeks of unusual life will produce an unusual curve.

When to stop tracking and book an appointment

Adrenal insufficiency — Addison's disease — is rare, and it is dangerous. It is a real endocrine condition with a proper blood test, and it is not what this tracker is for.

BOOK AN APPOINTMENT THIS WEEK IF YOU HAVE ANY OF THESE

- ☐ Weight loss you can't explain
- ☐ Low blood pressure, or dizziness when you stand up
- ☐ Skin creases, scars or knuckles going darker
- ☐ Nausea or vomiting that won't quit
- ☐ Salt cravings strong enough to feel odd
- ☐ Symptoms that are getting rapidly worse rather than slowly

Those signs call for an ACTH stimulation test, not a lifestyle protocol. Take this tracker with you — a written symptom record is genuinely useful in that appointment — but don't let it delay the visit.

Worth ruling out at the same time

Fatigue, brain fog and poor stress tolerance are the least specific symptoms in medicine. Several common conditions produce exactly this picture and are straightforward to test for. Ask about these before concluding anything about your stress axis:

BLOOD WORK WORTH ASKING ABOUT

- Thyroid function — TSH, free T4, free T3
- Ferritin and full blood count
- Vitamin D and B12
- HbA1c or fasting glucose
- Celiac screen, if digestion is involved

NON-BLOOD EXPLANATIONS

- Sleep apnea — especially with snoring
- Depression and anxiety
- Perimenopause
- Medication side effects
- Long COVID or post-viral fatigue

A note on testing. A diurnal salivary cortisol test can show the shape of your curve, and that is genuinely useful for spotting patterns. It is not diagnostic on its own, and results shift with sleep, illness and stress in the days around collection. Be wary of any panel sold with a matching supplement bundle attached.

One change at a time

You now have something most people never get: a written record of your own pattern. Here is how to spend it.

Change one thing, and keep tracking. The baseline only pays off if you can compare against it. Pick the lever your curve points to, run it for four weeks, and keep scoring. Change three things at once and you're back to guessing.

The three levers, in the order that tends to work

1

Anchor your light

Ten minutes of daylight within an hour of waking. Dimmer light after 9pm. Your body clock sets the curve, and the curve won't reset itself.

2

Practice recovery daily, not weekly

Ten minutes of breathwork or meditation most days beats a two-hour reset on Sunday. In a 2023 meta-analysis of 58 randomized trials, mindfulness, meditation and relaxation were the interventions that measurably shifted cortisol — and consistency mattered more than intensity.

3

Eat before your body has to ask

Skipping breakfast and running on coffee makes your stress axis do the job insulin should be doing.

A realistic timeline. Sleep and morning energy often shift somewhere between weeks two and six. Stress tolerance and brain fog usually take closer to three months. Anyone selling a 30-day adrenal reset is selling you a timeline your body never agreed to. Healing isn't linear — a bad week isn't failure.

Four questions to take to your practitioner

- “Here are 14 days of symptom scores. Does this pattern suggest anything to you?”
- “Which of the common causes of fatigue have we actually ruled out with blood work?”
- “Is there a reason to test cortisol here, and what would the result change?”
- “If we change one thing, what should I expect to see and by when?”

Then tell us how it went. The comments under the article are open, and the pattern you found may be the thing that helps somebody else recognize theirs.

Deeper Than Symptoms · Read the full article: *HPA Axis Dysfunction Symptoms: What They Really Mean* · deeperthansymptoms.com

This workbook is for educational purposes only and is not intended to diagnose, treat, cure, or prevent any disease. It does not measure hormone levels and is not a medical test. Always consult a qualified healthcare practitioner before making changes to your health regimen, supplements, or medication. If you are unwell or your symptoms are worsening, seek medical advice rather than tracking.