

AUTOMATE MY FITNESS

Cortisol Cookbook: Rebalancing Weight Loss Through Nutrition & Testing

Welcome to the Cortisol Cookbook, your comprehensive guide to managing stress through nutrition. This resource explores how diet influences your body's stress & fat regulation hormone—cortisol—and provides practical meal plans and recipes designed to restore balance. From understanding cortisol's role in your health to implementing daily dietary strategies, this cookbook offers evidence-based approaches to reduce stress, improve energy levels, and enhance your overall wellbeing.

Understanding Cortisol and Its Impact

Cortisol, often called the "stress hormone," plays a crucial role in regulating inflammation, fat storage, sleep cycles, and blood sugar levels. When functioning properly, cortisol follows a natural rhythm—peaking in the morning to help you wake up and gradually declining throughout the day to prepare your body for rest.

However, chronic stress can disrupt this delicate balance, leading to persistently elevated cortisol levels. This imbalance may manifest as stubborn weight gain (particularly around the midsection), chronic fatigue, anxiety, poor sleep quality, and compromised immune function.



Common Signs of Cortisol Imbalance

- Persistent fatigue despite adequate sleep
- Difficulty falling or staying asleep
- Increased cravings for salty or sweet foods
- Poor concentration and "brain fog"
- Reduced resilience to stress

Physical Manifestations

- Abdominal weight gain
- Weakened immune response
- Digestive issues
- Headaches and muscle tension
- Elevated blood pressure

Coach Darren's Journey



The breaking point that changed everything

"I thought I was having a heart attack. My heart was racing, I couldn't breathe, and the room was spinning. That's when I realised something had to change."

In 2005, Coach Darren's collapse at work wasn't a heart attack—it was his body's dramatic response to chronic stress. After years of 70-hour workweeks, poor nutrition, and minimal sleep, his adrenal system had reached its breaking point.

The Crisis

Darren was diagnosed with HPA axis dysfunction (commonly called "adrenal fatigue"), showing consistently flat-high cortisol levels throughout the day that disrupted his entire hormonal system. Also chronically inflamed & with high internal fat levels.

The Transformation

Within 90 days, Darren's energy returned, his sleep improved, and follow-up testing showed his cortisol rhythms normalising—inspiring him to help others with similar struggles by retraining to become a nutrition coach and creating the brand Automate My Fitness.

1

2

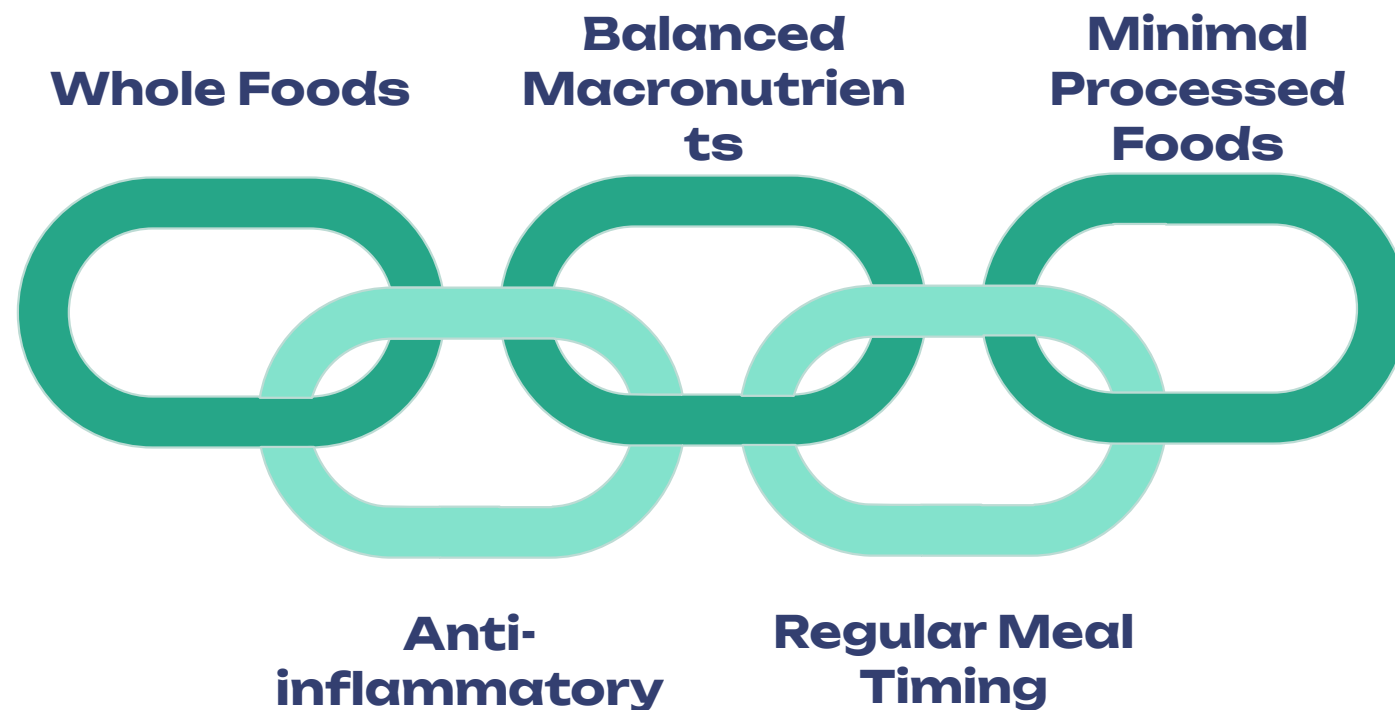
The Intervention

He was tested using non-invasive kit. Then worked with nutritionists and functional medicine doctors, Darren developed a comprehensive cortisol-balancing nutrition plan alongside key lifestyle modifications.

3

Principles of a Cortisol-Balancing Diet

The foundation of cortisol management begins with conscious food choices that support your body's natural stress response. A properly designed anti-inflammatory diet provides the nutrients necessary for hormone production and regulation whilst minimising foods that trigger cortisol spikes.



Foods to Embrace

- Omega-3 rich fish (salmon, mackerel)
- High Monounsaturated fat meat ie Wagyu burgers
- Chicken, tuna
- High fibre salad, leafy greens and colourful vegetables
- Avocados
- Monounsaturated nuts i.e. almonds, macadamias

Foods to Moderate

- Caffeine (limit to before noon)
- High sugar fruit ie grapes, pineapple
- Starchy carbs after 3pm i.e. Pasta, rice & potatoes

Foods to Minimise

- Refined sugars and processed carbs
- Low fat labelled foods
- Bread
- Alcohol
- Diet Coke type drinks
- Fried foods and trans fats
- Ultra-processed foods

Meal Planning for Cortisol Regulation

Strategic meal planning serves as a cornerstone for cortisol balance. Consistent meal timing helps stabilise blood sugar levels, spike cortisol 6-9am and then preventing unnecessary cortisol spikes after midday. The following 7-day plan emphasises anti-inflammatory ingredients, balanced macronutrients, and regular eating patterns to support your body's natural cortisol rhythm.

1

Breakfast like an Emperor

Aim to eat a large breakfast to spike HPA Axis (cortisol) and your metabolism.

This goes against the common 'fast in the morning' advice. If your HPA Axis levels are below 3.5 then this is the right advice for you.

2

Lunch like a King and Afternoon Snack like 'A Pauper'

Eating high protein & mono fat lunch between 12-2pm helps keep your metabolism firing.

Eat your final small meal on a side plate 3-5pm. This means your digestion will stop 4 hours later by 9pm latest.

3

Prepare in Advance

Weekend batch cooking reduces weekday stress. Cook chicken in advance and simply put it in the fridge. Have cans of tuna, sardines, mackerel in the cupboard. Prawns & mussels in the freezer. basically have all your food ready to go.

4

Embrace Reverse Intermittent Fasting

Have your evening meal by 5pm latest and drop 3 afternoon meals. This will give you all the benefits of fasting without suppressing that crucial morning cortisol production.

Example Diet Plan

Day	Breakfast	Lunch	Dinner
Monday	Greek yoghurt bowl with berries and macadamias	Mediterranean Tuna salad with extra olive oil dressing	None
Tuesday	Spinach and mushroom 3 egg omelette	Lentil soup with leafy greens	Chicken and vegetable stir-fry
Wednesday	2 x Wagyu burgers, 1 mozzarella ball & salad	Feta & Avocado on sourdough	Baked cod with salad
Thursday	Can of Sardines & salad	Prawns and vegetable stir-fry	None
Friday	Greek yoghurt bowl with berries and macadamias	Mediterranean Tuna salad with extra olive oil dressing	Kebab & salad (no bread)
Saturday	Bacon, eggs, tomatoes	Air Frier Southern Fried Chicken & salad	Chicken and vegetable stir-fry
Sunday	Ham Frittata	Sunday lunch (Chicken, 3 potatoes, veg)	None

 Your meal plan should be personalised to your specific needs. Individuals with existing health conditions or food sensitivities should consult a healthcare professional before beginning any new dietary regimen.

Breakfast Recipes to Kickstart Your Day

Starting your day with a cortisol-friendly breakfast helps establish a healthy hormone pattern. Morning meals should emphasise protein and fibre while avoiding excessive sugar to inflammatory spikes. These nourishing options provide sustained energy and help set the stage for balanced cortisol levels throughout the day.

Ham Frittata

- Sliced Ham
- 6 eggs
- Feta cheese
- Sliced red pepper & veg of your choice
- *Mix eggs in a bowl. The monounsaturated fat supports immune & adrenal function, while vitamin C from peppers helps modulate cortisol production.*



More Cortisol-Balancing Breakfast Ideas

2 x Wagyu burgers, 1 mozzarella ball & beetroot salad

- 2 x Wagyu burgers (I prefer Tesco ones)
- 1 full-fat Mozzarella ball
- Half bag of Tesco Beetroot salad

Wagyu really is a super-food. It's super high in heart-healthy monounsaturated fat which will keep you full all morning. Combined with mozzarella - also full of this fat is a great choice. The salad is full of prebiotic fibre so great for your gut health.



Bacon, Eggs & Tomatoes

- 2 x Bacon slices
- 3 poached eggs
- Grilled or half a can of tinned tomatoes

Bacon occasionally is a great choice due to its protein content. The meal combination of monounsaturated healthy fats from the eggs, protein, and anti-inflammatory tomatoes supports steady energy levels.



Sardines & Salad

- 1 or 2 cans of Sardines
- ½ bag beetroot salad
- Glug of extra virgin olive oil

Super cheap meal costing about £1!! This is my go-to meal due to it taking 2 mins to prepare. So good for memory, immune system & morning cortisol.



Lunch Recipes to Maintain Your Day

Mediterranean Tuna salad with extra olive oil dressing

- Mediterranean Tuna
- Half bag of Tesco Beetroot salad
- Extra Virgin Olive Oil

Tuna is high in protein so will keep you full.



Lentil soup with leafy greens

- Lentils
- Mixed vegetables
- Vegetable stock cube

Lentils are great at keeping you full and it's packed full of antioxidants.



Sunday lunch (Chicken, 3 potatoes, veg)

- Chicken
- 3 potatoes
- Mixed vegetables

Sunday lunch is mandatory. Enjoy it!!



Nourishing Lunch and Dinner Ideas

Midday and small early evening meals are crucial for maintaining cortisol balance throughout the day. These recipes emphasise Mediterranean-inspired ingredients with proven anti-inflammatory benefits, helping to counteract the effects of daily stressors whilst providing essential nutrients for adrenal health.



Focus on Colourful Vegetables

Aim for half your plate to be filled with a rainbow of salad or vegetables. Their antioxidants and phytonutrients combat inflammation triggered by cortisol and provide essential vitamins for stress resilience. I buy the Tesco Beetroot Salad for this reason.



Include Quality Proteins

Each meal should contain 85-115g of protein from sources like wild-caught fish, organic poultry, grass-fed meat, or plant proteins to support neurotransmitter production and blood sugar stability.



Add Healthy Fats

Incorporate olive oil, avocados, some nuts, or seeds to slow digestion, improve nutrient absorption, and provide building blocks for hormone production and balanced cortisol levels.

Grilled Herb Chicken with Roasted Vegetables

This simple yet nourishing dinner combines lean protein with a variety of vegetables and anti-inflammatory herbs. The balanced macronutrient profile supports steady blood sugar levels, while compounds in rosemary and thyme have been shown to help modulate cortisol production. Serve with a small portion of quinoa or sweet potato for complex carbohydrates that promote serotonin production for mood stabilisation.

- ✔ **Portion Control Tip:** Use the hand method for balanced meals—protein portion should be the size of your palm, carbohydrates the size of your cupped hand, vegetables the size of two open hands, and fats the size of your thumb.

Lifestyle Strategies to Complement Nutrition

While diet forms the foundation of cortisol management, complementary lifestyle practices are essential for comprehensive hormone balance. These strategies work synergistically with nutrition to regulate your stress response system and promote resilience.

Cortisol Management Techniques

- **Breathwork:** Practice 4-7-8 breathing (inhale for 4, hold for 7, exhale for 8) to activate the parasympathetic nervous system
- **Mindfulness meditation:** Even 5-10 minutes daily can significantly reduce cortisol levels. Do this every lunch.
- **Nature exposure:** Spending 20+ minutes in the fresh air between 6-9am is essential. I walk my dog because the blue in the sky stimulates your SCN cells in your eyes and then your HPA Axis.
- **Digital detox:** Implement tech-free periods, especially before bedtime because the blue light will overstimulate you. Keep that blue for the morning only.



Sleep Hygiene for Cortisol Regulation

Quality sleep is non-negotiable for proper cortisol rhythm. Aim for 7-9 hours nightly latest 10pm and maintain consistent sleep-wake times. Create a cool, dark sleeping environment and establish a calming bedtime ritual that might include warm bath with magnesium salts.

Strategic Exercise Approach

Walk between 6-9pm for 20-40 mins. This is crucial.
Aim for 11000 steps per day
Do weights 3 times a week
Avoid heavy cardio after midday because this will stimulate cortisol production when you don't need it.



- Restorative sleep
- Work/productive tasks
- Gentle movement
- Mindful eating
- Social connection
- Stress management
- Nature exposure

Monitoring Progress and Adjusting Your Plan

1 Week 1-2: Observation

Begin tracking symptoms, energy levels, sleep quality, and mood alongside your new nutrition plan. Note any immediate changes or reactions to specific foods.

2 Week 3-4: Assessment

Review your tracking data to identify patterns. Are certain meals more energising? Do specific foods trigger symptoms? Make initial adjustments based on these observations.

3 Month 2-3: Refinement

By this point, you should notice improvements in energy, sleep quality, and stress resilience. Fine-tune your approach by experimenting with meal timing and food combinations.

4 Month 4+: Maintenance

With a solid foundation established, focus on consistency while allowing flexibility for special occasions and life changes. Consider follow-up testing if available.

When to Consult Healthcare Professionals

While dietary changes can significantly impact cortisol balance, some situations warrant professional guidance:

- Persistent fatigue despite dietary improvements
- Significant weight changes (gain or loss)
- Worsening anxiety or mood disturbances
- Sleep disruptions that don't improve
- Unusual symptoms like dizziness, heart palpitations, or extreme thirst

Consider working with a registered dietitian, functional medicine practitioner, or endocrinologist who specialises in hormonal health. They may recommend specific testing to assess your cortisol pattern and tailor recommendations accordingly.



 Consider our free 7 day **Cortisol Balance Programme** available on our website can help you monitor symptoms and identify triggers.

Conclusion: Embrace a Calmer, Healthier You

By implementing the nutritional strategies and lifestyle practices outlined in this cookbook, you're taking powerful steps toward hormone balance and improved wellbeing. Remember that cortisol regulation is a journey, not a destination—it requires ongoing attention and adaptation to life's changing circumstances.

The benefits of a cortisol-balancing approach extend far beyond stress reduction. As your hormone levels normalise, you may experience:

- Improved energy and mental clarity
- More restful sleep and easier awakening
- Natural weight management
- Enhanced immune function
- Greater emotional resilience
- Reduced inflammation and associated symptoms



"Small changes, consistently applied, yield remarkable results. Your body wants to be in balance—give it the tools, and it will find its way back."

— Coach Darren

Additional Resources

Visit our website for our unique non-invasive Body MOT that will test your HPA Axis (cortisol), chronic inflammation, fat%, bone & muscle. Join our supportive community forum to connect with others on similar journeys.

Further Support

To find out your HPA Axis (Cortisol) levels and much more book your test today.[h](#)

Automate My Fitness

Non-Invasive Cortisol Test

Your Body Is Talking. Are You Listening?Get Answers...

Professional Support

For personalised guidance, consider our one-on-one coaching programmes or group workshops designed to support your specific health goals and challenges.

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Begin your journey today with one small change. Your future self will thank you.