HOW TO CREATE RESILIENT HEALTH

A Step by Step Guide to what **Stress** is and How to Minimize its Impact on Your Body and **Hormones**

Stephanie Gray

HOW TO CREATE RESILIENT HEALTH

Or. Stephanie Gray





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There, she helps women in mid-life who feel like their bodies have betrayed them step back into their bodies by restoring optimal hormone levels so they can ... regain their sleep, figure, mood, and feel amazing once again. She is co-founder of Your Longevity Blueprint nutraceuticals with her husband, Eric. They enjoy spending time outside with their son William. They own the Integrative Health and Hormone Clinic in Hiawatha, Iowa. She likes to say, "I Balance Mommy's hormones so she doesn't feel crazy. I keep hormone replacement therapy sexy, safe, and effective."

Learn more at ihhclinic.com and your longevityblueprint.com



To all those who struggle with managing chronic stress.

you are not alone.

May this be part of your guide....



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My first book **Your Longevity Blueprint** published in 2017 is all about building whole body health using functional medicine principles. (I will digress for a moment here). Regarding the blueprint concept, throughout the book I'm comparing your home and how it is built to your body. We know how to maintain our houses, keep hair out of the drains, mow the lawn, and change furnace filters, but we don't know how to maintain our bodies as well. One goal with my book was to help!

Each chapter discusses how your organs and the systems of the body work together to build your longevity. It's a bit like building a home—you need a blueprint to ensure the final outcome is a place you can live for a long time. Within each chapter, I share the most progressive available functional medicine testing options, and I also discuss high quality nutraceutical products.

When we think of functional medicine, it asks how and why illness occurs and restores health by addressing the root cause of the disease (IFM.org). One strength within functional medicine is the labs and lab interpretation it offers.

Just as human fingerprints are a detailed, unique marker of human identity, so are your test results. Think of these test results as determining the root cause. These will help your "contractor", better known as your functional medicine provider, personalize a plan to build back your health. While labs are important and I love to talk about them, I've found that while my patients are waiting for their labs to return for their follow up appointments, there are many things they could be doing to better those labs...starting with stress management.

When I initially wrote *Your Longevity Blueprint*, I pretty much skipped over stress management. I assumed that my readers were managing their stress well, sleep was great and that they were exercising routinely, so I really didn't dive into those topics much. I also figured other authors had already covered the topic of stress management so thoroughly that what could I add? Well, I've since found that stress management is something people are still either outright ignoring or struggling mightily with, so I've decided I better return to the topic now.

My goal for you as the reader after completion of this E book is to have gained tools to reduce stress by taking control of your habits. This should lead to improved blood sugar, blood pressure, optimal hormones, weight, and mood, ultimately longevity!

Let's get started!



The Stress Response

We all experience stress, every day, every hour, really every minute. There will always be stressors in our lives, but here's the good news! *Each of us gets to choose how we manage the stress!*

Stress is a physical response. We need it to alert our bodies!

When stressed, the <u>body thinks it is under attack</u> and switches to 'fight or flight' mode.

It's normal for our bodies to behave this way in acute situations.

You've likely heard the analogy before of the cave man running from a saber toothed tiger, going into survival mode, right?

Here our body releases a complex mix of hormones and chemicals such as adrenaline, cortisol and norepinephrine to prepare the body for physical action.

What's happening here? You are scared right? You are scared you are going to get in an accident, fearful of death maybe?

Fear is the underlying driver I want you to remember here.

This causes a number of reactions, from blood being diverted to muscles to shutting down unnecessary bodily functions such as digestion.

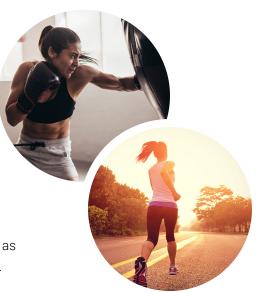
That heart pounding, fast breathing sensation is the adrenaline; as well as a boost of energy, which enables us to focus our attention so we can quickly respond to the situation.

In the modern world, the 'fight or flight' mode can still help us survive dangerous situations, such as reacting swiftly to a person running in front of our car by slamming on the brakes.

Also a side note: Unknown by many, there is another third mode that stress can cause; freeze. The energy mobilized by the perceived threat gets "locked" into the nervous system and we 'freeze'. This response sometimes reveals itself when we breathe. Holding our breath and shallow breathing are both forms of freezing.

The occasional deep sigh is the nervous system catching up on its oxygen intake also.





The Symptoms of Stress

Symptoms of stress can vary person to person showing up in different organ systems.

First, let's discuss the physical symptoms of stress. One complaint I hear in my practice commonly is that of headache.

This may be from tight muscles. This physical symptom can often be reduced by massages, chiropractic and even acupuncture. And... the dreaded back pain similar to headaches may be a result of tight muscles from tension and stress.

Other individuals may have gastrointestinal symptoms like indigestion, heartburn and stomach aches. Others may experience sweaty palms or excessive sweating. Many have problems shutting their mind off to get restful sleep. They may even be antsy or restless during the day. I personally get lightheaded and dizzy when I'm stressed. In my patients who have no other explanation for dizziness, stress may be the culprit.

In my book *Your Longevity Blueprint* I share much of my health journey, how I experienced fast heart rate, and that tachycardia eventually landed me in the Emergency Room. I still get palpitations at times when I'm stressed. Even ringing in the ears can be a physical symptom of stress.

Sadly, if you present these symptoms to your primary care provider, what likely will happen? You will be prescribed a medication for the symptom like headaches or heartburn etc... which doesn't get at the root cause of the problem.

PHYSICAL SYMPTOMS OF STRESS		
• Headaches	• Restlessness	
Tight neck / shoulders	• Dizziness	
• Back pain	• Fatigue	
Indigestion	Ringing in ears	
Stomach aches	Sleep difficulties	
Sweaty palms		

The Symptoms of Stress

Behaviours like excessive smoking, drug or alcohol use, even cumpulsive eating/gum chewing can be a manifestation of stress. Having a critical attitude torwards others and even grinding the teeth at night can be suggestive that you are stressed.

BEHAVIORAL SYMPTOMS OF STRESS	
Excess smoking	Compulsive gum chewing
Excess alcohol use	Critical attitude towards others
Compulsive eating	Grinding teeth at night

Emotional symptoms of stress aren't as surprising. I know I've experienced some of these. One can report feeling an overwhelming sense of pressure, cry easily, feel anxiety/nervousness, edginess, anger, resentment, or even loneliness and boredom. Feelings of unhappiness for no reason and powerless to change can also be emotional symptoms of stress.

EMOTIONAL SYMPTOMS OF STRESS		
Overwhelming sense of pressure	• Anger	
• Crying	• Resentment	
Anxiety/nervousness	• Loneliness	
• Boredom	Unhappiness for no reason	
Edginess (ready to explode)	Feeling powerless to change	

Have you ever been so stressed you can't think straight? I'll never forget the time I accidently shut my son's fingers in the front door. I called my doctors office for help and when they asked his date of birth I couldn't focus enough to recall when that was! You can even experience cognitive symptoms of stress like having touble thinking, what some call memory/brain fog, forgetfulness, and inability to make decisions. Or you may lose your sense of humor and creativity! While these symptoms sound scary they can come and go and you may experience mild to severe degrees of them.



COGNITIVE SYMPTOMS OF STRESS		
Trouble thinking clearly	Constant worry	
Memory fog	Loss of sense of humor	
• Forgetfulness	Lack of creativity	
Inability to make decisions		



Impact of Stress on Our Health

In order to discuss the impact of stress on our health, we should differentiate acute verses chronic stress.

There are different types of acute stresses like: slamming on your breaks or getting a shot which is really stress for only a few minutes, and then it's gone.

These types of stressors, believe it or not, don't impact our health as much as chronic stress.

We were designed to be able to handle these acute stressors.

Let's talk about examples of chronic stressors.

Living in chronic pain, toxic relationships, caregiving, or even in my case attending grad school for years while working full time and starting/operating a business are examples of chronic daily stressors.

I also believe chronic stimulation with our overuse of technology having cell phones, apple watches, computers, TVs all around us, cable boxes, wifi routers, all that electromagnetic stress falls into the bucket of CHRONIC STRESS.

Chronic stress is repeated exposure to the same stressor over a long course of time. What if that saber toothed tiger is always there...?

This can really increase our stress levels especially if that stressor isn't going away and we need to face it.

Chronic stress robs our body of nutrients needed for other processes in our bodies which can lead to high blood sugar, high insulin, and poor immune function. When you have high cortisol your body can't build muscle or lose body fat so many people gain weight which of course ultimately can lead to chronic disease.

I also believe stress impacts our health poorly in part because of the impact stress has on our hormones.

I own a hormone clinic, so checking hormones is a crucial part of the assessment of my patients.

Stress is your body's biggest hormone hijacker. It will eventually lead to low levels of all hormones including cortisol. Initially with stress cortisol rises but eventually it falls.

Chapter 6 of *Your Longevity Blueprint* talks specifically about hormones. Here using my analogy I compare the heating and cooling system of the house to our endocrine system in the body.

I often see women enter perimenopause years earlier than they should due to stress. They start to experience those perimenopausal symptoms and didn't realize how important keeping stress down to keep hormone levels high was. Men too can end up with low testosterone decades too young.

Estradiol can help with hot flashes, nights sweats, memory, cognition, bone density, and vaginal dryness.

Progesterone is the most soothing calming hormone. It's excellent for sleep, anxiety, and moodiness.

Testosterone helps with mood, motivation, drive, libido, energy, and with maintaining muscle mass.

Hormones help us feel good, and they can help improve our relationships. When we feel good about ourselves we're more likely to be kinder to others, and....get along with our significant others better!

STRESS IMPACT ON OUR HORMONES

- **Estradiol** can help with hot flashes, nights sweats, memory, cognition, bone density, and vaginal dryness.
- **Progesterone** is the most soothing calming hormone. It's excellent for fertility, sleep, anxiety, and moodiness.
- Testosterone helps with mood, motivation, drive, libido, energy, and with maintaining muscle mass.
- STRESS is your body's biggest hormone hijacker.
- Chronic stress will eventually lead to low levels of all hormones.

What Can We Do About Stregg? 111

For many people it's important to assess what you can change? What can you say no to? What healthier boundaries can you set so that you don't burn out?

What do you need to get rid of? Maybe you need to move, quit your job, end the relationship etc... While that can be difficult, it may be part of the answer.

If you can't get rid of the stressors in your life you can still work to become more resilient from them!



Creating Regilience

How can we work to create resilience with our health?

We humans are a bundle of habits. Ask yourself do you want to be stressed? You have to want LESS STRESS for yourself. Desire is foundational to any achievement.

We often don't have control over our circumstances but we do have control over how we react to them and what we do about the stress. SO you have to ask yourself, do you truly desire to change your habits to get there?

Your behaviors and habits are based on your existing wiring. Much of this was programmed when you were young.

To change behaviors you often have to discover the root of that behavior. That is what a therapist helps you with. While I can't focus on that today, therapy, even trauma therapy is often needed.

There will always be stress. Each of us gets to choose how we manage the stress!

You don't want to have unhealthy coping strategies numbing out with things like: binge eating, consuming alcohol or drugs in excess, TV watching, video games, shopping and even gambling.

UNHEALTHY COPING STRATEGIES	
Binge eating	TV watching
Alcohol in excess	Video games
• Smoking	• Shopping
Using other drugs	• Gambling

Instead consider the following stress resilience strategies: counseling, focusing on the present, deep breathing, meditation, music, positive affirmation, gratitude, forced laughter, and work to reduce chemicals and electromagnetic frequencies that can delay healing.

Heatthy Strategies

STRESS REDUCTION STRATEGIES	
• Counseling	Positive affirmations
Focus on the present	• Gratitude
Deep breathing	Forced laughter
Meditation	Remove chemicals
Calming exercises: YOGA	Remove any extra environmental stimulants
• Music	

I already mentioned the importance of **counseling** or therapy. This can really help you get to the root cause of your fears, habits, emotions, and behaviors.

Also **focus on the present**. When you spend time worrying about the past or living in fear of the future you are wasting your time to be in the present! Guess who has control over this? YOU!

Let me give you an example of how powerful **deep breathing** has been for me. I do a fair share of public speaking and I always get a bit nervous ahead of time. I had a large speaking engagement early in my pregnancy for which I was concerned I may be actually more nervous. At the conference I was attending, and also speaking at the head organizer had all attendees stop and practice focused deep breathing several times throughout the day. By the time I had to get on stage I just walked right up probably the least nervous I've ever been for a speaking event. I didn't realize it in the moment, only reflected back afterwards. Now before every time I speak publicly I do some deep breathing.

You can try this easily now. This calms the fight or flight and puts you back into that chill out calming parasympathetic state.

Breathe in deeply for 4 seconds through your nose, hold for 6 seconds, and then exhale for 8 seconds from your mouth. Continue breathing in this manner.

Heatthy Strategies

By slowly breathing deeply this allows you again to turn on the parasympathetic response.

You could also try adding imagery.

Imagine yourself looking up to the sky. What do you see? Light blue, gray, or dark blue? With gray or white clouds. Are they full and fluffy? Are they still or moving? What is their shape? Can you feel the wind go by?

Or imagine yourself at the beach. What do you see? Waves? How fast are they coming in? What do you hear? The waves, the wind, the birds? What do you smell? What do you feel?

Imagining yourself in that situation even for a few minutes can be so powerful.

I tell patients if you have to, go get away and deep breath in the bathroom if that is the only place you can get a few minutes during your work day!



Meditation is also extremely helpful. So many of us are constantly stuck in the go, go, go, do, do, do state. I work hard seeing patients all day long and I've learned that I need to take a break over lunch to not look at my computer, but sit eyes closed and do a short meditation before the afternoon takes off.

I've also discovered that a great number of the most successful people start their days with meditation. It gets you back into the present. There are a lot of Apps you can download to your phone that combine breathing, imagery, and meditation to help get you started. One of my favorites is called Breathe.

For those who aren't physically limited, I'm a huge advocate for practicing Yoga! When we are stuck in the fight or flight sympathetic state, cardio is not always the best fit for us. This only further raises cortisol and can make us feel more amped up. Instead, **calming exercises** which incorporate deep breathing like yoga can be more impactful.

Listening to **music** can also be tremendously impactful. It can quickly alter your mood. One strategy to use when you are feeling amped up is to listen to calming music. Don't watch the news or surround yourself with overstimulating, loud, busy music. Elect for music that calms you down.

Read **positive affirmations** over yourself on a daily basis like, "I am capable. I am strong." We each may need different affirmations at different times, but research has even shown that using your name for instance for me, saying, "Stephanie is strong" has a far greater impact than just using the word, "I."

Practice **Gratitude** daily. Focusing on the good things in life keep you away from the negative emotions.

How do you start your day? Take an inventory. Are you breathing slowly or erratic? Are you rushed? Have you heard the term to book end your day with a gratitude journal? Start your day with 3 things you are thankful for and end your day thinking about all the things you are grateful for. This creates a habit of gratitude.

Next, consider trying **forced laughter**. This may be more difficult to do alone, but forcing yourself to giggle for 30 seconds will nearly always leave you smiling and shift your energy for the better!

I also encourage that you work to **remove chemicals** from your life. Find healthier personal care and cleaning alternatives that rank in the green/safe category. Use the Environmental Working Group's skin deep cosmetics database found @ https://www.ewg.org/skindeep/

Heatthy Strategies

Remove any extra stimulants, including blue light in the bedroom to help facilitate sleep, unplug all electronic devices to minimize electromagnetic radiation exposure at night. Don't ever use your phone or computer when they are plugged in. Charge them before using.

Learn more about EMFS @ https://yourlongevityblueprint.com/emfs-why-they-are-dangerous/



Nutrition for Regiliency



I encourage all my patients to focus on increasing protein for breakfast. Amino acids fuel neurotransmitter production to make you feel good and help to balance your blood sugar. A donut and coffee aka: simple carbs, caffeine and sugar are the worse breakfast you could have.

Increase healthy fats like avocadoes, seeds, nuts, olive oil, coconut oil as these fuel your brain which is made out of fat.

Don't poison yourself. In general, eat organic when you can, eat organic especially for thin skinned vegetables and fruits. See the Environmental Working Groups Dirty Dozen and Clean 15 annual lists. Don't eat processed foods. These do not nourish you! https://www.ewg.org/consumer-guides/ewgs-dirtydozen-guide-food-additives

Water helps your body detox. Few of my patients are drinking enough clean water. Aim to consume your bodies weight in ounces divided by 2 daily. So if you weigh 140 pounds, drink 70 ounces/day of purified clean water.



Supplements for Regiliency

Most of my patients come to me not wanting to take medications but wanting supplements to help their body adapt to stress better. The top most common nutrients I use in my practice for this reason are magnesium, B Vitamins, Amino acids like 5HTP and L theanine, adaptogenic herbs and omega 3 fatty acids.

SUPPLEMENTS FOR RESILIENCY



Magnesium is a cofactor for over three hundred enzymes in your body. It is also involved in the production of Adenosine triphosphate (ATP) an organic compound and hydrotrope that provides energy to drive many processes in living cells. I often use magnesium to help relax the mind in order to sleep, and also relax the bowels to reduce constipation. It can help relax the nerves and blood vessels. It can also help to lower blood pressure and is excellent for headaches.

Severe deficiency can lead to anxiety, panic attacks, depression, and muscle cramps.

It's extremely common to be low in. It's very important for stress!

Learn more from my blog on magnesium found @ https://yourlongevityblueprint.com/the-magnificence-of-magnesium/

Shop @ https://yourlongevityblueprint.com/product/magnesium-chelate-120-count/

Supplements for Regiliency

Many individuals are low in B Vitamins due to stress as well as medications they take that deplete nutrients. Birth control is notorious for depleting B Vitamins. Even coffee will rob you of both magnesium and B Vitamins.

Vitamin B6 is a cofactor for several genes.

Magnesium and B6 are necessary cofactors for glutamate-to-GABA conversion (important in those who have anxiety).

B6 is essential to over a hundred enzymes, mostly involved in protein metabolism. It is necessary to convert all amino acids to neurotransmitters like serotonin to make us feel good!

Deficiency can cause neurologic, mental health symptoms like depression, irritability, insomnia, and confusion. Vitamin B6 is found in a variety of foods including fish, poultry, nuts, legumes, potatoes, and bananas. The recommended dosage is 30-500 mg daily. I start patients on 50 mg in the preferred form pyridoxal-5-phosphate.

Vitamin B9 is also important as it produces SAM-e. It is important for healthy DNA production and has been said to have anti-cancerous properties. Severe deficiency can lead to neural tube defects in babies. Major food sources include green leafy vegetables, citrus fruit juices, and legumes. The recommended dosage is 400 mcg/day. Higher doses are often recommended if the patient has the need, such as if they have common MTHFR genetic defects.

Vitamin B12, also known as cobalamin, plays essential roles in folate metabolism and in the synthesis of the citric acid cycle intermediate succinyl-CoA, which means it helps you produce energy. It can also help to lower homocysteine and aid in the production of neurotransmitters. Severe deficiency in either folate or vitamin B12 can lead to megaloblastic (pernicious) anemia, which can cause fatigue, weakness, and shortness of breath. B12 is also very important for nerve health.

Major food sources include meat, poultry, and fish.

Vegan and vegetarians are often low in B12 and need to supplement. The recommended dosage is 400–2,000 mcg/day pending need.

I discuss all these nutrients in detail in my book and within the below blogs. https://yourlongevityblueprint.com/product/methylb-complex/

Supplements for Regiliency

https://yourlongevityblueprint.com/product/sl-methyl-bs/

Amino acids come from protein and can be used to boost neurotransmitter production. I commonly use **5 hydroxytryptophan (5HTP)** which is extracted naturally from the seed of the African plant Griffonia simplicifolia. It is the amino acid precursor to serotonin. It can support a healthy mental outlook and calm the central nervous system. It can be used to help reduce anxiety and promote sleep as serotonin converts to melatonin.

https://yourlongevityblueprint.com/product/5htp/

L-theanine is also an amino acid that converts to GABA in the brain. It is derived from green tea leaves. It can also calm the central nervous system and induce a relaxed state. It is helpful for sleep, anxiety and stress. It can help to counteract the effects of caffeine allowing for focus and concentration. I typically use this before public speaking.

https://yourlongevityblueprint.com/product/l-theanine-60-ct/

Remember I said when you are stressed glucose can rise? **Omega 3** fatty acids, like what you find in fish oil, can help to lower it. What is very important when selecting a fish oil product is that you choose a reputable company whose oil is distilled from heavy metals and hasn't oxidized. The average time from sea to shelf/bot-tle is 1.5-3 years. By that time many oils will have oxidized. Our sea to shelf time is the shortest in the industry at a mere 3-6 months max. Choose also the triglyceride form of the fish oil avoiding the ethyl-ester (synthetic) forms. Choose fish oil from small fish like sardines and anchovies, not derived from larger fish like tuna which can contain higher amounts of mercury. A last mistake many individuals make when selecting a fish oil product is one that doesn't contain any therapeutic value, specifically any EPA/DHA. The EPA/DHA are what will help to boost mood and reduce inflammation. Some fish oil products contain none or very low amounts. Look for at least 1000 mg combined EPA/DHA daily.

https://yourlongevityblueprint.com/omega-3s-fish-oil/

To learn more about how to select high quality supplements check out this blog. https://yourlongevityblueprint.com/how-to-select-high-quality-products/

The top studied **adaptogenic herbs** that help the body adapt to stress are Rhodiola, Eleutherococcus senticosus, Schisandra, and Ashwagandha. Rhodiola rosea can help to support the nervous system, mood, mental clarity, work performance, and the sleep cycle. It can also help to preserve levels of neurotransmitters such as serotonin, dopamine, and norepinephrine. Eleutherococcus senticosus has been used for memory and endurance. It is helpful for improving energy levels, specifically in endurance athletes. Schisandra chinensis can help with mental clarity, stress response, and emotional well-being. It can support increased

Supplements for Regiliency

blood flow through the body as well. Ashwaganda is helpful for memory, mood, energy, and endurance. It helps to improve cortisol levels and also has a thyroid hormone balancing effect. Various adrenal support formulations exist.

Some individuals have high cortisol and need calming down. For these individuals, I use an adaptogen blend with the calming amino acid L-theanine and an phosphatidyl serine—a phospholipid—both of which help reduce the half-life of cortisol. This Longevity Blueprint (LB) product is called **Adrenal Calm**. https://yourlongevityblueprint.com/product/adrenal-calm/

*When considering these supplements always consult with your medical provider if you are taking antidepressant, anti-anxiety or sleeping medications.



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Many times I see in my patients that their stressors are holding them back. They may be fearful of leaving a stressful job, but what they can't see is that they can get a better job and thus that stressor ends up being a blessing in disguise.

We need the right emotional responses in the right situations in the right proportions.

ALL things worth having, require effort.

If you find yourself in a fearful situation, if you are struggling with anger or unforgiveness or any emotion I listed above, remember those healthy habits I mentioned.

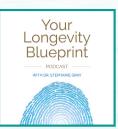
Focusing on the nutrition suggestions, lifestyle strategies and adding calming supplements can make a world of a difference in your resilience.

5 minutes daily is better than 30 minutes once/week. Again, little habits can produce great results.

To learn more from me check out my websites **www.ihhclinic.com** and **www.yourlongevityblueprint.com** for my podcasts, blogs, products and book!

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