

ATHINA FIT

— FREE GUIDE —

A woman with long blonde hair in a ponytail, wearing a black sports bra and leggings, is riding a stationary bike in a gym. She is looking forward with a focused expression. The gym is dimly lit with warm overhead lights. Other gym equipment is visible in the background.

**STRESS IS
MAKING YOU
GAIN WEIGHT.**

The cortisol connection. Finally explained.

YOUR COACH

Hi, I'm Athina,

I'm a certified personal trainer and online coach specialising in helping busy, stressed professionals understand why their body is working against them – and how to flip it.

I've worked with hundreds of clients training hard, eating reasonably, and still gaining weight. Almost every time, the missing piece was stress. This guide explains exactly why – and what to do about it.

MY CREDENTIALS

- Level 3 Personal Trainer & Online Coach
- Specialist in strength, body composition & nutrition
- Habit-based coaching strategies
- Clients across the UK, EU & worldwide

WHAT THIS GUIDE COVERS

- Why stress directly causes weight gain – the science
- The 5 cortisol triggers most people ignore
- How poor sleep, skipped meals and overtraining make it worse
- Your Stress-Reset Protocol: the 3-part approach
- A sample low-stress day built around your real life
- Your action plan – start today

LET'S BREAK THE CYCLE.

THE REAL PROBLEM

You're not imagining it. Stress really does make you gain weight — and it's not about willpower.

WHAT'S ACTUALLY HAPPENING

When you're stressed, your body releases cortisol. Cortisol raises blood sugar, suppresses digestion, and stores fat around the abdomen.

The problem: your body can't tell the difference between running from a predator and sitting in a stressful meeting. Every deadline, bad night's sleep, and skipped meal triggers the exact same response.

WHY IT KEEPS HAPPENING

Modern stress is chronic, not acute. It never fully switches off. So your cortisol stays elevated, your body stays in fat-storage mode, and no matter how well you eat or train — the hormonal environment is working against you.

THE CYCLE MOST PEOPLE ARE STUCK IN

- Stressed → elevated cortisol → crave high-calorie food
- Poor sleep → ghrelin (hunger hormone) spikes → overeat
- Skip meals to 'be good' → cortisol rises further → more fat storage
- Train hard to compensate → add physical stress → cortisol rises again
- Repeat. Feel like a failure. Repeat.

THE CORTISOL CONNECTION

Cortisol isn't the enemy – but chronically high cortisol is. Here's what it does inside your body.

ABDOMINAL FAT STORAGE

Cortisol directs fat to be stored viscerally – around your organs and waist. These fat cells have more cortisol receptors than anywhere else. This is why stressed people gain fat in the midsection even when calories seem controlled.

BLOOD SUGAR DYSREGULATION

Cortisol raises blood glucose to prepare you for action. When no action happens, the excess glucose gets stored as fat. Repeated spikes damage insulin sensitivity over time – making fat loss progressively harder.

MUSCLE BREAKDOWN

High cortisol is catabolic – it breaks down muscle tissue for fuel. Less muscle means slower metabolism. Many people in chronic stress simultaneously gain fat and lose muscle.

THE 5 STRESS-WEIGHT TRIGGERS

These five patterns drive the majority of stress-related weight gain. Most people are doing several at once.

01

POOR SLEEP

Every hour of sleep lost raises cortisol and ghrelin the next day. One bad night makes you eat ~300 extra calories on average — without noticing.

02

SKIPPING MEALS

Going long periods without food signals threat to your body. Cortisol rises to maintain blood sugar — meaning more fat storage and stronger cravings.

03

OVER-EXERCISING

Training too hard, too often adds physical stress on top of life stress. If cortisol is already high, more intense training raises it further.

04

UNDER-EATING PROTEIN

Protein stabilises blood sugar and keeps hunger hormones in check. Low protein amplifies stress-driven cravings and leads to muscle loss.

05

NO RECOVERY BUILT IN

Constant stimulation keeps your nervous system in low-grade fight-or-flight all day. Cortisol never fully drops.

THE STRESS-RESET PROTOCOL

You don't need to eliminate stress — you need to reduce cortisol's net impact.
Three parts.

PART 1 — SLEEP FIRST

- Target 7–8 hours. This is the single biggest cortisol lever you have.
- Set a wind-down window: 30–60 min before bed, no screens, dim lights.
- Keep wake time consistent, even weekends. Anchor your circadian rhythm.

PART 2 — EAT TO STABILISE

- 3 structured meals. No skipping. This signals safety to your nervous system.
- Protein at every meal: 25–35g. Chicken, fish, eggs, Greek yogurt, lentils.
- Reduce ultra-processed food and caffeine after 2pm — both spike cortisol.

PART 3 — MOVE SMARTER

- 4 × 30-minute sessions per week — moderate intensity, not punishing.
- Walk daily. 8,000–10,000 steps actively lowers cortisol over time.
- Prioritise recovery: one full rest day minimum, more if needed.

ANTI-STRESS NUTRITION

What you eat directly affects cortisol. These are the most impactful changes you can make today.

EAT MORE OF THESE	Protein (chicken, fish, eggs, Greek yogurt, lentils) · Complex carbs (oats, rice, sweet potato) · Magnesium-rich foods (leafy greens, nuts, seeds) · Omega-3s (salmon, walnuts, flaxseed) ·
EAT LESS OF THESE	Ultra-processed foods (spikes blood sugar) · Caffeine after 2pm (delays cortisol drop) · Alcohol (perceived as stressor, disrupts sleep) · High-sugar snacks (blood sugar crash triggers cortisol).
MEAL TIMING MATTERS	Eat within 1 hour of waking – fasted mornings raise cortisol. Space meals every 3–5 hours. Don't train fasted when stressed. A protein-carb snack before bed can improve sleep
HYDRATION COUNTS	Even mild dehydration raises cortisol. Aim for 2–3 litres daily. Start with a large glass before coffee. Herbal teas (chamomile, lemon balm) have mild cortisol-lowering effects.

A SAMPLE LOW-STRESS DAY

This is what a cortisol-lowering day looks like in practice.

07:00 WAKE	Large glass of water. 10 minutes of natural light. No phone for the first 15 minutes.
07:30 BREAKFAST	Protein-rich meal within 1 hour of waking: 3 scrambled eggs + smoked salmon + wholegrain toast + one coffee.
10:00 MID-MORNING	2-minute movement break. Stand, do 10 hip circles, 10 chest openers. Active cortisol management.
13:00 LUNCH	Balanced meal: protein + complex carb + veg. Eat away from your desk. 20–30 minutes minimum.
17:30 TRAINING	30-minute moderate session. Focused. Stop when the timer goes. Shower immediately after.
20:30 WIND-DOWN	Screens off or blue-light glasses. Herbal tea. Light stretch or reading. Consistent bedtime – 7–8 hours target.

YOUR ACTION PLAN

You have everything you need. Here's exactly what to do first.

STEP 1

Set a fixed bedtime for this week. Same time every night. Write it down and set it as an alarm.

STEP 2

Add protein to every meal today. Eggs at breakfast, chicken or fish at lunch, yogurt at dinner.

STEP 3

Take a 10-minute walk after your biggest meal every day this week. No gym required.

STEP 4

Remove one cortisol trigger this week: cut caffeine after 2pm, stop skipping lunch, or swap one intense session for a walk.

STEP 5

Tap the link below to book your free consultation and get a personalised plan.

WANT A PLAN THAT WORKS WITH YOUR HORMONES?

Book a free 20-minute consultation – no sales pitch.

calendly.com/athina-fitt/30min (tap to book)

athina.fit · athina.fitt@gmail.com · [@athina.fitt](https://www.instagram.com/athina.fitt)