



THE GUIDE TO  
*GETTING BETTER  
AT STRESS*

10 ways to strengthen your mind and body  
and reclaim your well-being

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# *Hello!*

As a Registered Nurse, Board Certified Nurse Coach, Bodyworker, and a mom of two little girls, I know the topic of stress very well. Professionally, I have spent decades guiding my clients in releasing stress from their bodies using manual techniques, mindfulness and body awareness. As a Women's Wellness Coach, I help my clients navigate big life transitions while honoring their deepest pain and fears with compassion and love.

Personally, I know the moments when it's all too much. I know that awful feeling of being pulled in so many directions, anxious, and drained. I know the sleepless nights, the emotional eruptions, and the resulting guilt about losing my patience with my people.

We can do our best to plan and anticipate stressors, but the truth is - we cannot avoid stress. Recent global events have been especially challenging, revealing the truth that so much is uncertain and out of our control.

**So what if the question is not how to avoid stress, but how to get *better* at it?  
And how the heck do we do that?**

We shift our *response* to stress. Rather than seeing stress as the enemy, we can start to see stress as our friend and our teacher.

*Yes, your stress can be your friend and teacher.*

As parents, we're always modeling behaviors for our children, making it even more essential to hone our skills in managing stress. No pressure, right?

So here is my official invitation to you. Will you consider that - given the right support and tools - your body and mind can handle whatever you're facing? Will you consider that you are incredibly capable, resilient, and whole? I'm holding that belief for you.

As we get better at handling stress, not only do we feel better, our whole family benefits.

In this together,  
*Brandie Mitchell, RN, NC-BC*

# 10 ways to strengthen your mind and body and reclaim your well-being

## 1. First, *Know Yourself.*

Enneagram

Myers-Briggs

Astrology

Numerology

Tarot

Four Tendencies

Introvert/Extrovert

23 and me

There are so many tools to get to know ourselves. When it comes to getting better at stress, one of the most empowering things we can do is to know our triggers and have practical tools for regulating our emotions. When we know what makes us tick (or explode!), we can take extra care of ourselves in those moments.

So, what sets you off? What sends you spinning into shallow breathing and anxious thoughts? Personally, if I've had disrupted sleep or am super tired, I'm irritable and easily triggered. If I'm running late, if my kids aren't listening and I have to repeat myself endlessly...you get the picture.

As we become more aware of our triggers for stress and anxiety, we are better able to anticipate stressful experiences and respond differently.

And self-awareness is an essential part of reclaiming our well-being. It's hard to claim what we need if we don't even know what that is. When we know what we need, we can set healthy boundaries that honor those needs. That is *real* self-care.

**Try this: Grab your journal and set a timer for 2 min for each of these prompts.**

**I am my best self when...**

**I am my worst self when...**

**Therefore, my essential needs are....**

These are the essential things you need to be your best self. Yay clarity!

## 2. *Change your beliefs about stress.*

Consider this- You feeling stressed. Then you think, *Oh no! Stress is bad for my health!* Now you're having stress about your stress, judging yourself for feeling how you feel, and feeling worse.

Your beliefs about stress have a big impact on your body's physiological response to stress. Studies show that the more harmful we believe stress to be on our health, the more harmful it is. So if you have been beating yourself up every time you feel stressed because you believe it is harmful to your health, as my husband says, *Knock it off.* Instead, when you notice stress creeping in, pause and consider reframing it and create a new belief about your stress.

For example, I always get a little anxious before speaking in front of a group or on camera, and that anxiety can really impact how present, calm, and connected I feel with my family. I can reframe that belief to remind my body that I actually like speaking in front of groups, and I'm grateful to get to do work that I love. I invite my body to relax a bit and it usually works. I use language like, "I *get* to speak to this group today." And rather than getting frustrated with myself for being stressed, I actively thank my body for responding to this perceived stressor and simply ask her (my body) to alter that response a bit. It really works!

**Try this: In moments of stress, notice your language and your thoughts, and consider, How am I talking to myself? What story am I telling myself right now? Would I speak this way to a friend?**

**Instead of saying I can't do this, try saying, *How can I do this? How is what's happening right now for my highest good? How am I becoming stronger and more resilient right now? Breathe deep and thank your body for responding to your stress.***

## 3. *Practice embodied gratitude.*

Yeah, yeah. Everyone's talking about gratitude. But that's because it's so simple, so accessible, and so profound. When we are noticing and appreciating, our bodies release more of the endorphins dopamine and serotonin- chemical messengers in the body that elevate our mood and help us feel well. And it turns out that looking for gratitude is what really matters. So even when it feels nearly impossible to be grateful, it's worth it to try. I've had many difficult moments with my hand on my heart, finding gratitude with tears streaming down my face. The more you practice accessing gratitude during the most difficult times, the easier it comes all the time.

Gratitude practices come in many forms. Speak it, write it, draw it, sing it- find your own authentic way to express your gratitude and make it a daily practice. This is an easy one to overlook. You may think, sure, I'm grateful. But are you feeling and embodying it? Journaling, verbal expression, prayer, art, dance, movement, yoga, even photography- all of these and more are powerful ways to practice embodied gratitude.

*What we appreciate, appreciates. What we focus on will grow.*

**Try this: Write down 5 appreciations daily. Read over your list while taking deep breaths and place a hand on your heart to bring it home to your body. Notice how you feel. Read your list again. Let your body feel an opening at your heart while you focus on what is going well. How do you feel about your stress now?**

## *4. Connect with others during stressful times.*

Health Psychologist and Author, Kelly McGonigal, says that our bodies have a built-in mechanism for stress resilience, and that is human connection. When we connect with others in the midst of stress, we actually create a different physiological response in our body. The hormone *oxytocin* is released which counteracts the harmful impact of the stress hormone, cortisol. So when we make choices that increase our oxytocin levels, we give our bodies a boost that actually strengthens our ability to handle stress. This extraordinary biochemical acts as a neurotransmitter in the brain and a hormone in the body. It is a major part of your body's natural biological cocktail that has the power to increase trust and empathy, foster creativity and curiosity, and improve learning and problem-solving. There are even oxytocin receptors on the heart that allow oxytocin to counteract the harmful impact of stress by reducing inflammation and helping heart cells to regenerate. Incredible!

One of the best ways to stimulate oxytocin is through touch. It takes about 20 seconds of continuous touch for oxytocin to be released. A 20-second hug is a long one, but worth it! Cuddle with your honey, your kids, or your pet for at least 20 seconds and you're well on your way to calming yourself and building your stress resilience. Other ways to encourage oxytocin release are eye-to-eye contact, video and phone calls with a loved one (phone and video calls release more oxytocin than texting).

As Brene Brown says, courage starts with showing up and letting ourselves be seen.

Not only is it okay to let yourself be seen as the human you are, it is one of the best things you can do to access your strength, your resilience, and improve your response to stress.

**Try this: The next time you're experiencing that familiar feeling of stress and overwhelm, make a phone call to a trusted person, ask for a hug, and simply say, I need a hand.**

## 5. *Strengthen your Calm + Connected system.*

Cortisol is the primary stress hormone released in the body in response to stress. Prolonged elevation of cortisol interferes with learning and memory, lowers immune function and bone density, and increases blood pressure, cholesterol, heart disease, and weight (McEwen, 2008; Lupien et al., 2009). No thanks!

Getting better at stress means we can recover quickly from stressful experiences by easily accessing and maintaining a calm physiological state ruled by the parasympathetic nervous system. This state of being is also known as the Calm + Connected System, or Relaxation Response. The vagus nerve is the longest cranial nerve, known as ‘the wanderer’ because it is connected to many vital organs. The ‘tone’ of the vagus nerve largely determines how well we recover from stressful experiences.

Find something to do daily, weekly, and monthly that will ensure you're strengthening your parasympathetic nervous system. Restorative exercise (yoga, tai chi, walking, swimming), breathing exercises, meditation, massage- all of these strengthen your body's ability to handle stress in the short and the long term.

Even big belly laughs and a good cry can go a long way in releasing deeply held tension in your body. As you release tension and engage with your relaxation response, you actually strengthen your nervous system's ability to handle stress.

**Try this: Download the app Headspace, Calm, or Insight Timer on your phone and start with a small amount of time like 2 minutes of guided breathing daily to tone your vagus nerve and strengthen your Calm + Connected System.**

## 6. *Practice good boundaries and honor your body's intuitive wisdom.*

This is a big topic, and one I explore in depth with my coaching clients and in our group coaching programs in *The Well Woman Collective*.

We all have access to inner guidance and intuition. Unfortunately, listening to your body's intuitive wisdom is often not honored nor is it taught in our culture. One of the best ways to practice strengthening your ability to listen to your body is to notice a *yes* versus a *no* in your body. What does a *yes* feel like in your body? What does a *no* feel like? Often, a *yes* will feel light, open, spacious and expansive. Your chest might feel lifted, your shoulders relaxed down. Maybe you notice a smile on your face. A *no* might feel heavy, tense, constricted in your belly, and you may even notice pain and anxious thoughts or feelings.

**Try this: Practice honoring these sensations in your body and see what happens. For example, when you are deciding what to eat (Will this nourish me? Yes or No) When you are about to make a purchase, even a small one! (Is my body saying yes to this?) Experiment and play with this to connect with and trust your body's wisdom.**

## 7. *Move Your Body...A LOT.*

When I say *movement*, I'm not talking about exercise. Exercise is a form of movement, but it's certainly not the *only* form of movement available to you. Our bodies were designed to move. While you're sitting here reading this, movement is happening in your body. Your heart is pumping, your lungs are expanding and contracting, and your cells are vibrating.

How you move your body daily can greatly influence how well you tolerate stressful situations. The benefits of movement go far beyond calorie expenditure. You've likely experienced the shift in perspective that comes from getting up from your desk and taking a walk around the block. We open up new places in our awareness and perspective when we move in different ways. Sitting, squatting, lying down, rolling, twisting, walking, jumping, bending, lifting...these are all natural ways of moving that literally shape your body and mind.

**Try this: Begin to notice how you are moving throughout your day. How can you integrate more movement (exercise or not) into your daily life beginning today? How can you vary your working posture? Try moving from sitting to standing, sitting on an exercise ball, and can you take that work call while on a walk?**

## 8. *Nourish your nervous system with real, whole foods.*

Stress depletes your body of essential nutrients like B vitamins, magnesium and zinc. We need high quality, nourishing foods to replenish our bodies' needs for these nutrients, as well as essential amino acids and other key phyto-nutrients found in plants. Protein and fats are metabolized to provide the essential amino acids and building blocks of neurotransmitters like serotonin, dopamine, and epinephrine, components that are crucial for stabilizing your mood.

Food is information to your cells and your nervous system. When you consume an abundance of poor quality, pro-inflammatory foods, you set your body up for more stress from the inside out. When you consume high quality, nourishing foods and plenty of clean water, you give your body what she needs to thrive and rebound from stress.

**Try this: When preparing and eating food, consider: What information am I sending my cells and my nervous system with this food or drink? Is this food/drink actually nourishing me? How do I feel after I eat this food?**

## 9. *Consider supplementation.*

In times of high stress, it's easy to get depleted and stay that way, making it harder for your body to recover, creating inflammation, and weakening your immune system. Adding high quality supplements including a multivitamin, digestive enzymes, probiotics, and adaptogenic herbs can support your body's extra needs during stressful times. Adaptogens are herbs and other substances that support our body's stress response. Ashwaganda, Rhodiola, Turmeric, and the mushroom Cordyceps are examples of these medicinal plants that can be immensely helpful in managing stress.

*Note: Always consult a qualified healthcare provider before adding supplements.*

## 10. *Take a “nature pill.”*

New research validates what many nature lovers already know - being in nature lowers stress levels. A 2019 study found that just 20 minutes of experiencing nature during the day is enough to significantly lower cortisol levels. What does “experiencing nature” mean? In this study, it was defined as spending time in an outdoor place that brings a sense of contact with nature, at least three times a week for a duration of 10 min or more. Gardening, walking/sitting in a park, riding a bike- these are all ways to experience nature.



Even better, get yourself barefoot on the earth, a practice known as “grounding” or “earthing.” Grounding shifts the electrical currents in our bodies and actually feeds our cells with electrons that pair with free radicals in the body that otherwise cause inflammation and damage to cells. It’s true! So get outside and lay on a cotton towel or blanket (not a yoga mat because rubber blocks the electrical current from the earth), dig your feet in the sand or dirt...wherever you are, there’s likely a place you can get plugged in to the healing powers beneath your feet. It’s free and it’s easy to do!

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I hope I’ve sparked some new ideas for ways to access your innate stress resilience. Remember, you are capable, resilient, and whole. Whatever you’re facing, you can do this and you don’t have to do it alone.

**Connect with other women who are cultivating their own stress resilience in my group coaching program, *The Well Woman Collective*, or by working one-on-one with me as a private client.**

**Here's what my clients have to say:**

*“Brandie has an amazing intuition that makes her coaching truly meaningful in a way I haven’t found from other therapists. She has made such a difference in my life.” — N.T.*

*“Over the past 12 weeks, I have gained a renewed energy toward my whole-woman wellness. By shining a light on my excuses and unhealthy habits, I am now ready to take responsibility for meeting my own needs. I have learned that self-compassion is a key component to my mental and emotional well-being, that self-care is a lot more (and sometimes a lot less) than I originally believed, and that I can become a better mama through play!” — J.G.*

*“When I’ve been in therapy in the past, it’s good to have someone hear your feelings and there’s some clarity that comes with it, but nothing as quickly as when I was coached with you. That clarity has come much quicker and more easily. And it comes from me- it’s you bringing it out of me. For me, it’s been so helpful, so thank you.” — L.M.*

*“I’ve come to realize that my mood changes, and that is totally okay; it is also beneficial to adapt my choices depending on my mood (not pushing myself too hard on rough days, adjusting my expectations based on my mood/energy). Through the Collective, I have gained support, learned how to embrace my whole self and also discovered how to thrive.” — C.F.*

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