



# Understanding Belly Fat, Stress and Self-Criticism

5 real reasons stubborn belly fat sticks around and what your body has been trying to do

# Before You Read This Guide

If you're opening this hoping it will finally tell you what you're doing wrong, pause for a moment.

This isn't a diet plan, it's not a challenge and it's not here to make you think you have to try harder.

This guide exists to help you understand why your body has been behaving the way it has, especially if you've been under stress, pressure, or emotional load for a long time.

Nothing in here means you've failed.

Nothing in here means you're broken.

A lot of people come to me carrying guilt about food, their body, their reactions, or the fact they don't cope like they think they should. If that's you, you're not alone.

Your body has been doing its best to keep you going.

You don't need to read this in one go.

You don't need to take notes.

You don't need to do everything I share.

Read what feels helpful, skip what doesn't and stop if you need to.

Understanding alone can be enough to start changing how you treat yourself.

There is no rush here.

Nothing bad happens if you take this slowly.

# It's Not Your Fault

If you've been dieting, tracking calories and steps, or punishing yourself in the gym and still can't shift that stubborn belly fat... it's not because you're metabolism is broken or you're not trying hard enough.

## **It's because no one ever told you the truth:**

Belly fat isn't just about food and exercise.

It's about stress, trauma, hormones, and the patterns you've been stuck in for years.

I know this because I've lived it and helped 100's of women who were struggling like you.

I numbed myself with food and drink. I pushed harder in the gym. I believed if I could just "get smaller," the rest of my life would finally get easier but, nothing changed until I stopped treating my body like the enemy and started listening to what it was trying to tell me.

This ebook shares 5 reasons that belly fat sticks around and give you the first steps to start getting rid of it.

# Reason 1

## Trauma & Self-Sabotage

Your past experiences don't just live in your mind, they live in your body.

When you've been through any kind of trauma, your nervous system is on high alert. You feel unsafe, on edge, or exhausted.

**And the easiest way to cope?** Food, drink, scrolling, avoidance.

That's why you "sabotage" yourself. Not because you're weak but, because your body is begging for safety, and food offers comfort in the moment.

**Shift:** Healing trauma and breaking cycles of self-sabotage is at the heart of my Discover Me programme.

### For now, try this:

- Notice the moment you reach for food when you're not hungry.
- Pause. Put your hand on your chest and ask: "What am I really needing right now?"

It won't fix everything, but it starts to separate your hunger from your emotional pain and frustrations.

**Awareness is power.** When you catch yourself saying "I always mess this up" or "I'm just lazy" pause. That's not truth, **that's trauma talking.**

# Reason 2

## Stress & The Cortisol Myth

### **Let's be real: belly fat isn't just about food.**

Stress is one of the biggest reasons women get stuck in cycles of eating, exhaustion, and weight gain.

### **Here's why:**

When your body feels under threat, your nervous system fires up and releases cortisol. That's not a mistake. That's your body protecting you. Cortisol dumps blood sugar into your system so you can run or fight.

### **But modern life isn't lions and tigers.**

It's the boss who talks down to you.

The partner who drains you.

The kids screaming for attention when you're already on empty.

Your nervous system doesn't know the difference.

### **To your body, stress is danger.**

And when you eat in that state, your brain drives you toward the foods with the fastest hit, high-calorie comfort. Meanwhile, your life doesn't demand the same energy output, so it gets stored... as fat.

That's not you "failing."

### **That's biology doing its job.**

The good news?

You can teach your body that you're safe. And when you do, everything shifts.

# 3 Somatic Practices

## Release Stress

### 1. Shake It Off (2 minutes)

- Stand up. Put on a song.
- Shake your arms, legs, shoulders, hips — like you're shaking water off.
- Keep going for 1–2 minutes.

**This literally discharges built-up adrenaline and resets your nervous system.**

### 2. Box Breathing (1–3 minutes)

- Inhale through your nose for 4.
- Hold for 4.
- Exhale slowly through your mouth for 4.
- Hold for 4.

**This slows your heart rate and signals to your body: "I'm safe."**

### 3. Grounding Touch (30 seconds)

- Place one hand on your chest, the other on your belly.
- Breathe deeply and feel the rise/fall under your hands.
- Say out loud: "Right now I am safe. I can handle this moment."

**A simple way to anchor safety when emotions spike.**

# Emotional Awareness

## Anchoring Practices:

Somatic work isn't just about calming down, it's about noticing.

**Here are quick anchoring tools:**

### **Name It to Tame It:**

Instead of "I am anxious," say "I feel anxious right now." This reminds you it's temporary, not who or what you are.

**Feet on the Floor:** Press your feet into the ground and notice the contact. This brings you back into your body when your thoughts are spiralling.

**Temperature Shift:** Hold something cold (an ice cube, a cold glass) when you feel overwhelmed. The sensory shift helps break the loop of panic or stress.

**5-4-3-2-1 Scan:** Look around and notice: 5 things you can see, 4 things you can feel, 3 you can hear, 2 you can smell, 1 you can taste. Anchors you in the present.

These are just the beginning. Inside Discover Me, you'll learn how to reset your body and mind daily, so stress stops running your life (and your body).

# Reason 3

## Mindless Eating

We eat fast, distracted, or in response to emotions.

The body never gets a chance to say "enough."

This is why you feel out of control, not because you lack discipline, but because you're disconnected from your food.

**Shift:** Try this mindful eating practice:

- Before your next meal, pause and rate your hunger 1–10.
- Take your first three bites with no distractions. Notice flavour, texture, temperature.
- Halfway through, pause and ask: "Am I still hungry or am I full?"

**It's not about eating less, it's about eating with awareness.**

Mindful eating isn't about eating slowly it's about actually being there when you eat. If you're distracted, your brain never registers satisfaction.

# Reason 4

## Over-Identifying with Emotions

"I'm anxious."

"I'm sad."

"I'm a failure."

We take emotions and make them part of our identity. But emotions aren't who you are, they're experiences moving through you.

When you believe they are you, they control you.

When you see them as temporary, they lose their power.

### Shift:

**Next time you feel a heavy emotion, change your words:**

- Instead of "I'm anxious," try "I'm feeling anxiety."
- Instead of "I'm angry," try "I'm experiencing anger."

It sounds small, but it creates space between you and the emotion. Space is freedom.

When you notice a heavy emotion, say: "I feel anxious right now" instead of "I am anxious." That one word swap tells your brain this is temporary and stops it controlling the rest of your day.

# Reason 5

## Disconnection from Self-Worth

Women are raised to give, care, please, and put themselves last.

And your belly is often the place that carries that weight.

If you've lost yourself in motherhood, in relationships, in work belly fat isn't just fat. It's a physical reminder of the disconnection.

### **Shift:**

#### **Start rebuilding self-worth with boundaries:**

- Say no once this week without apologising.
- Schedule one thing that's just for you – and don't cancel it.
- Notice how your body feels when you choose yourself.

**This is the foundation of lasting change.**

**Every time you put yourself last, your body hears:** "I don't matter."

Boundaries aren't selfish they're self-care in action. Say "no" once today to something that drains you. Even if it's tiny (replying to a pointless group chat, folding laundry at midnight). **Notice how much lighter you feel.**

# Before you move on

If you've made it this far, something in this guide probably felt familiar. Not in a dramatic way, more like a quiet "oh... that makes sense." and that moment matters because when people understand why they feel the way they do, the blame starts to fade. When the blame fades, change becomes possible.

If you've spent years fighting your body, your appetite, your emotions, or your reactions, it can be a relief to realise there was never anything wrong with you.

Your body adapted to what it lived through.

It learned how to cope.

Some of those patterns just don't help anymore.

That doesn't make you weak, it makes you human.

You don't need to do anything with this information right now.

Some people read this and feel calmer.

Some feel emotional.

Some feel tired.

Some feel hopeful.

All of that is normal.

You're allowed to stop here if that's what you need.

# If you're curious about support

For some people, understanding is enough for now, for others, it opens a door.

If you're starting to notice that food, weight, stress or self-criticism aren't the real issue, and you want space to talk through what is, this is the work I do.

Not pushing you to be "better" just helping you understand yourself, build safety in your body again, and break cycles that no longer serve you.

If and when you're ready, you can read more about what that support looks like here.

**See what support looks like**

And if not, that's okay too.

You're allowed to move at your own pace.

