LIFE'S CHANGES · THE 13+ SYSTEMS OF THE HUMAN ANATOMY

Your Body Knows the Way

Solution Focused Questions · Living Food

A 7-post series on understanding how your body responds to change
and how to work with it — not against it.

Post 1	The Alarm Bell — stress response
Post 2	The River and the Storm — cardiovascular
Post 3	The Gut Knows First — digestion
Post 4	The Shield — immune system
Post 5	The Breath Between — respiratory
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Stress First Aid 101 · SFBT Questions · Living Food

Based on the 101 Solution Focused Questions © 2025 The Solution Focused Universe · thesfu.com

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Each post follows the same rhythm:

Challenge → Body's response → SFBT questions → Living food → Stress First Aid step

POST 1 · NERVOUS SYSTEM · ENDOCRINE SYSTEM · CARDIOVASCULAR SYSTEM

The Alarm Bell

When life changes, your body answers first

Before your mind has fully registered what happened, your body is already three steps ahead. It decided you were in danger. It decided to prepare you to fight or flee. It decided that the prefrontal cortex — the part of your brain responsible for calm, rational thinking — was going to have to wait.

The nervous system

The moment perceived threat registers, the sympathetic branch of your autonomic nervous system activates. Adrenaline and noradrenaline flood the body. The prefrontal cortex — seat of planning, impulse control, and sound decision-making — is deprioritised. Blood and neural resources redirect toward the brain's older, faster, survival-oriented centres.

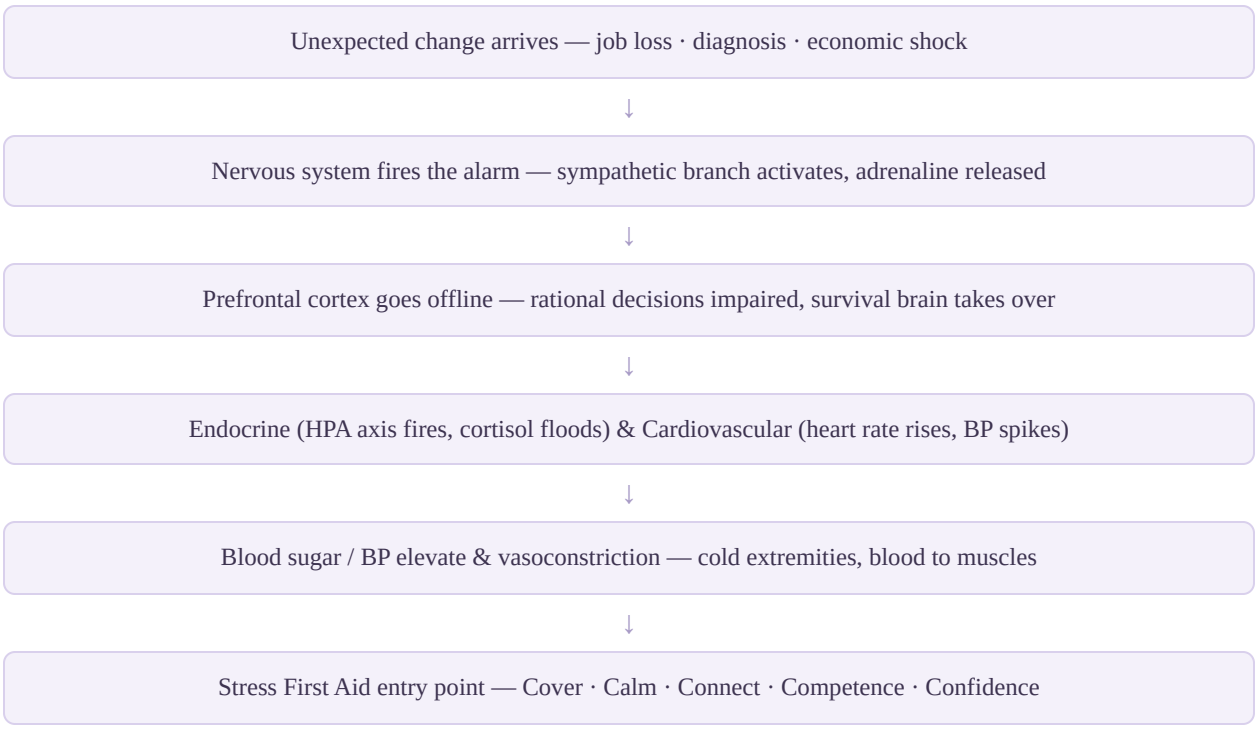
The endocrine system

The HPA axis activates: hypothalamus → pituitary → adrenal glands → cortisol. This raises blood sugar, raises blood pressure, and suppresses digestion and immune response. In short bursts this is life-saving chemistry. Sustained over weeks and months, it becomes one of the most systemically damaging physiological states a human body can experience.

The cardiovascular system

Heart rate increases. Blood vessels constrict. Blood is redirected to large muscle groups. Cold hands, racing heart, chest tightness — these symptoms closely mimic a cardiac event. Knowing what is happening is itself a form of first aid.

CASCADE FLOWCHART



Solution Focused questions

"What are your best hopes from understanding what your body is doing right now?" **Q.1**

"When in your life have you had your desired outcome the most?" **Q.15**

"What do you know about yourself that lets you know you can achieve what you want?" **Q.41**

Living food connection

- Magnesium (pumpkin seeds, dark leafy greens) — supports nervous system calming after activation
- B vitamins (lentils, avocado, sunflower seeds) — essential for serotonin and GABA synthesis
- Complex carbohydrates (oats, sweet potato) — steady glucose to keep the prefrontal cortex fuelled
- Water — even mild dehydration measurably impairs emotional regulation

Stress First Aid focus: Cover · Calm · Connect · Competence · Confidence

POST 2 · CARDIOVASCULAR SYSTEM · AUTONOMIC NERVOUS SYSTEM

The River and the Storm

What unexpected change does to your heart

Your heart is listening. Not metaphorically — literally. The moment genuinely threatening news arrives, your cardiovascular system mobilises. In the short term, this is remarkable. Your body is protecting you. But under prolonged stress, elevated heart rate and sustained high blood pressure create a slow tax on the cardiovascular system.

Vasoconstriction

Blood vessels narrow, raising pressure. Blood is redirected to the muscles that might need to run or fight. Extremities go cold. This is the body optimising for survival — at the cost of circulation to the surface.

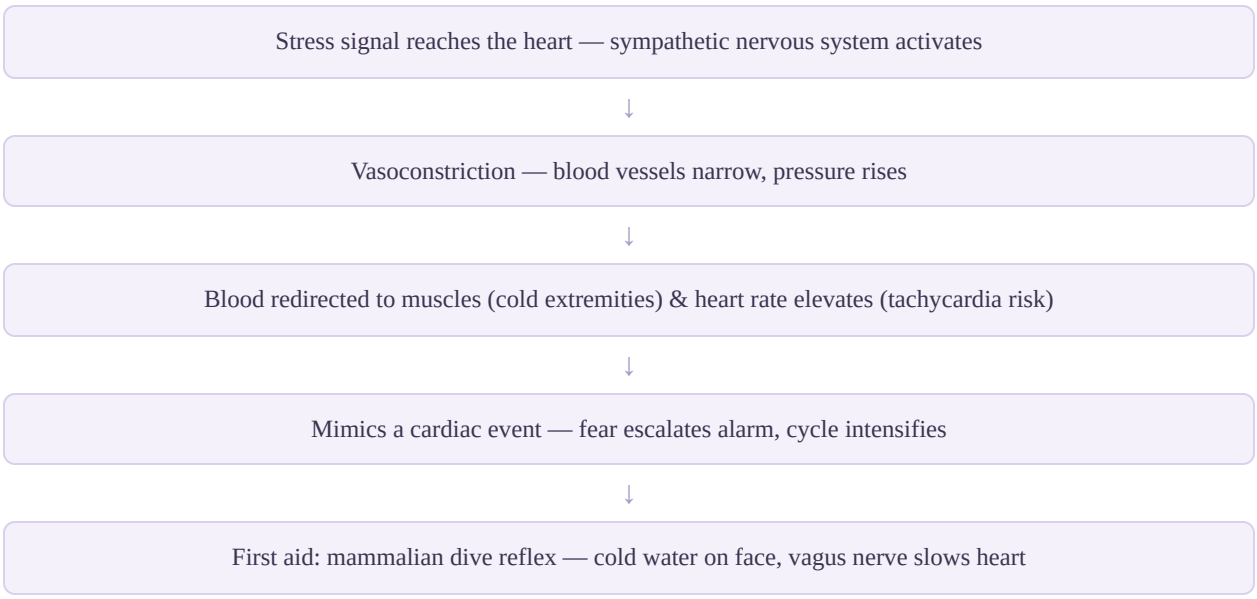
Tachycardia and mimicry

What mimics a cardiac event in acute stress — tachycardia, chest tightness, shortness of breath — can terrify people who don't understand their own physiology. This terror escalates the alarm, creating a feedback loop. Knowledge is the first intervention.

The dive reflex

Cold water on the face activates the mammalian dive reflex, rapidly slowing heart rate via the vagus nerve. This is not folk wisdom — it is physiological first aid. When escalating distress meets a racing heart, this is a practical, immediate intervention.

CASCADE FLOWCHART



Solution Focused questions

"What have you done to prevent the situation from going further down the scale?" **Q.83**

"What do you know about yourself that lets you know you can navigate this?" **Q.41**

"What would be the first thing you would notice that was different when your desired outcome was present?" **Q.75**

Living food connection

- Magnesium (pumpkin seeds, dark chocolate, almonds) — supports healthy heart muscle relaxation
- Omega-3 fatty acids (flaxseed, walnuts) — reduce inflammatory markers in cardiovascular stress
- Potassium (banana, leafy greens) — helps regulate blood pressure and electrical heart rhythm

Stress First Aid focus: Calm step — cold water face immersion · controlled breathing · safe space

POST 3 · DIGESTIVE SYSTEM · ENTERIC NERVOUS SYSTEM · GUT-BRAIN AXIS

The Gut Knows First

Digestion, disruption, and your second brain

The enteric nervous system — over 100 million nerve cells lining the gastrointestinal tract — communicates bidirectionally with the brain via the vagus nerve. When life is disrupted, this system is not a bystander. Under acute stress, digestion pauses entirely. The body decides that digesting your lunch is less urgent than surviving a threat.

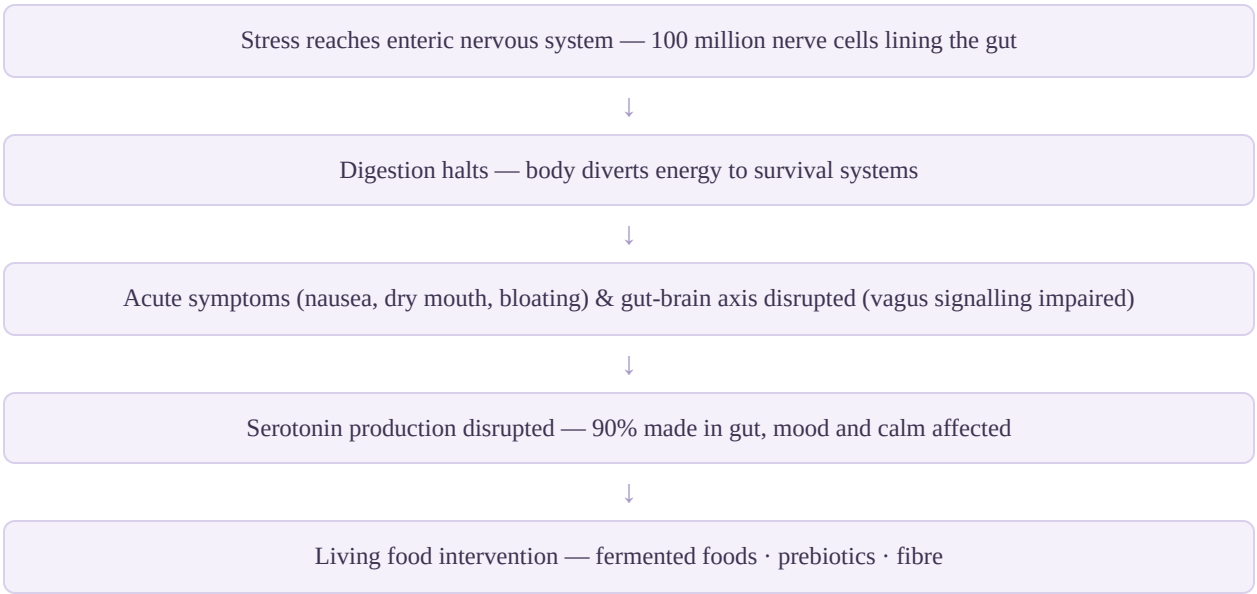
The serotonin connection

Roughly 90% of the body's serotonin — central to mood regulation — is produced in the gut. A disrupted gut is a disrupted emotional landscape. This is why the food we eat during hard times matters so much more than we typically acknowledge. It's not comfort — it's chemistry.

Chronic disruption

Over time, sustained stress leads to dry mouth, nausea, loss of appetite, bloating, irritable bowel symptoms, and in serious cases, stress-induced gastric ulcers. The gut is a long-running record of the nervous system's state.

CASCADE FLOWCHART



Solution Focused questions

"What would you like to experience instead of the problem?"	**Q.65**
"When has the problem diminished or become less intense?"	**Q.67**
"What role did you play in it diminishing or going away?"	**Q.68**

Living food connection

- Fermented foods (kefir, kimchi, sauerkraut, kombucha) — directly seed the gut microbiome
- Prebiotic fibre (bananas, oats, garlic, leeks) — feeds beneficial gut bacteria
- Polyphenols (berries, dark leafy greens, olive oil) — reduce gut inflammation
- A flourishing microbiome is directly correlated with lower anxiety and emotional resilience

Stress First Aid focus: Connect step — social support changes gut-brain chemistry directly

POST 4 · IMMUNE SYSTEM · ENDOCRINE SYSTEM · LYMPHATIC SYSTEM

The Shield

Chronic stress, the immune system, and why rest is not laziness

Cortisol in acute doses is your friend. It sharpens focus, mobilises energy, and prepares your body for rapid response. Cortisol in chronic, sustained doses is one of the most immunosuppressive substances your own body produces.

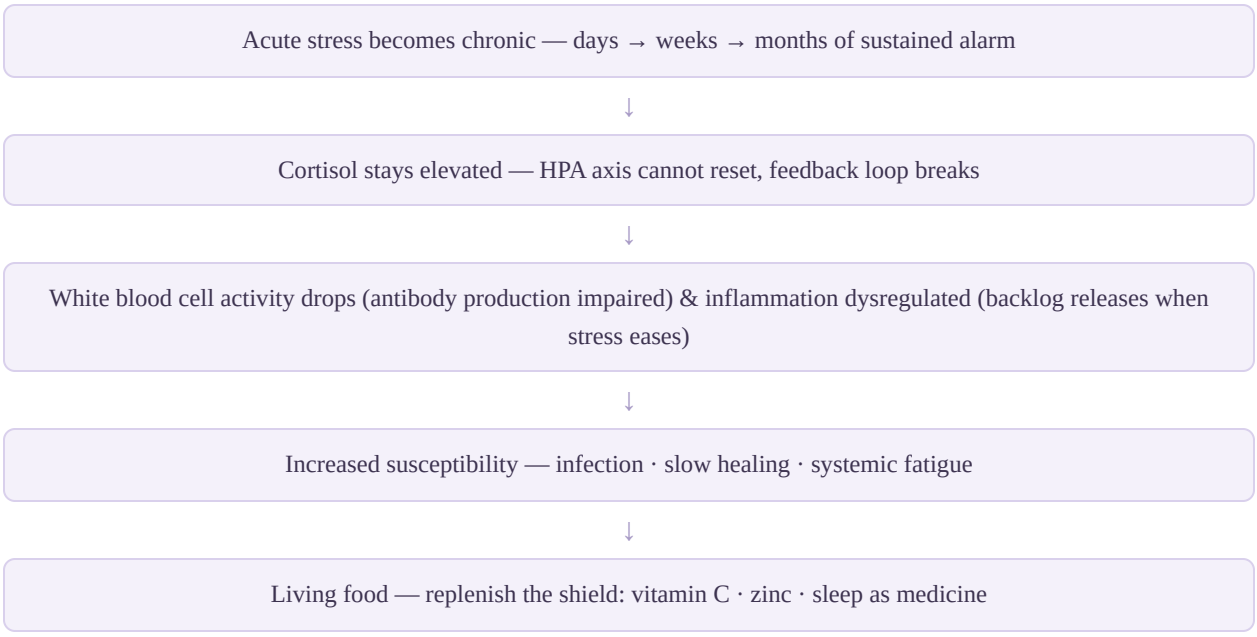
The suppression mechanism

Sustained cortisol systematically suppresses white blood cell activity, reduces antibody production, and impairs the body's ability to mount an effective inflammatory response against infection. The immune system is being told to stand down — for a threat that never resolves.

The backlog effect

This is why people who go through extended periods of crisis often get sick the moment things ease up. The immune system, suppressed throughout, finally gets the signal to respond — and the backlog comes due. Stress doesn't just feel bad. It makes the body biologically vulnerable.

CASCADE FLOWCHART



Solution Focused questions

"What are you learning about your ability, especially since things haven't gotten better yet?" **Q.95**

"What skills and characteristics are you having to draw on while managing these difficult things?" **Q.96**

"What traits have you used to make such a big difference?" **Q.97**

Living food connection

- Vitamin C (bell peppers, citrus, kiwi) — directly supports immune cell function
- Zinc (pumpkin seeds, legumes, hemp seeds) — essential for immune memory and repair
- Antioxidants from deeply pigmented vegetables — reduce oxidative stress load
- Sleep is a nutritional act — immune memory consolidates during sleep

Stress First Aid focus: Competence step — restore agency · identify one thing that can be done

POST 5 · RESPIRATORY SYSTEM · AUTONOMIC NERVOUS SYSTEM · VAGUS NERVE

The Breath Between

Respiration, panic, and the fastest reset you have

Breath is the only autonomic system you can consciously control. Your heart beats without you asking it to. Your digestion proceeds without your permission. But your breath can be taken over — deliberately, intentionally — and that fact is one of the most underused tools in human self-management.

The hyperventilation trap

Under acute panic, the respiratory system dilates airways and breathing quickens. This can tip into hyperventilation — too much oxygen, too little carbon dioxide — leading to dizziness, tingling, and a sensation that something is catastrophically wrong, which accelerates the panic cycle.

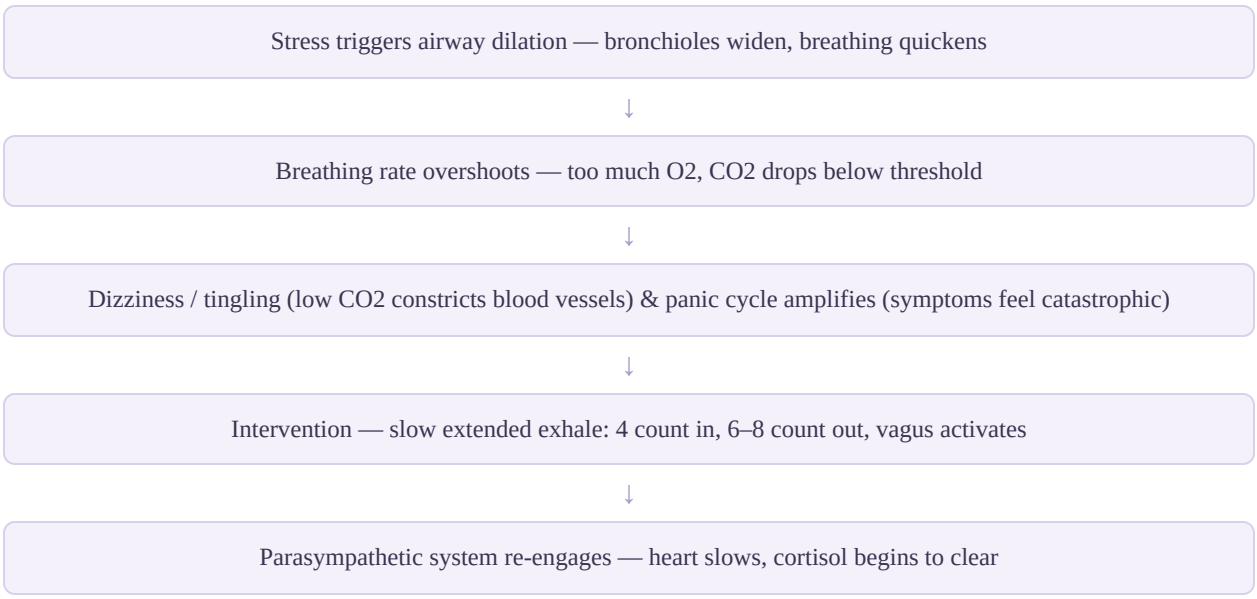
The reverse is also true

Slow, controlled breathing — particularly with a longer exhale than inhale — activates the parasympathetic nervous system. It tells the body the threat has passed. Heart rate slows. Muscle tension decreases. The prefrontal cortex comes back online. This works whether or not you believe it will.

The practice

Inhale 4 counts, exhale 6–8 counts. Repeat 3–5 cycles. This is a direct physiological intervention on the vagus nerve — the main highway of parasympathetic recovery.

CASCADE FLOWCHART



Solution Focused questions

"If this was the point that things started to improve, what would be the first thing you would notice?"	**Q.98**
"What would you do next — after that first breath of relief?"	**Q.56**
"What does that progress do to your thoughts about the future?"	**Q.99**

Living food connection

- Anti-inflammatory foods (turmeric, ginger, berries, flaxseed) — reduce airway inflammation
- Adequate hydration — keeps mucosal membranes moist and functional
- Magnesium — supports bronchial muscle relaxation

Stress First Aid focus: Calm step — 4-count in, 6–8 count out · cold water · diaphragmatic breathing

POST 6 · INTEGUMENTARY SYSTEM · AUTONOMIC NERVOUS SYSTEM · OXYTOCIN PATHWAY

Skin in the Game

What your body's largest organ tells you about stress

The integumentary system — skin, hair, nails, sweat glands — is both a readout of internal stress and an active participant in the stress response. Cold, clammy, pale skin is among the first visible signs of acute distress, as blood is redirected away from the surface. This is classic shock presentation, observable in severe emotional distress just as in physical trauma.

The chronic picture

Over time, chronic stress disrupts skin barrier function, worsens conditions like eczema and psoriasis, slows wound healing, and can contribute to hair loss. The skin is not vanity — it is a window into systemic health.

The biology of connection

Human touch — a hand held, a shoulder steadied — activates oxytocin, reduces cortisol, and signals safety to the nervous system. The body learns safety through skin. This is why the Connect step in Stress First Aid is not soft — it is physiologically informed. Contact with trusted others changes the body's chemical environment.

CASCADE FLOWCHART

Stress reaches the skin — vasoconstriction, blood leaves the surface

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Pale / cold / clammy skin (classic shock presentation) & sweat glands activate (thermal regulation disrupted)

↓

Chronic stress damages skin — barrier breaks down, healing slows, hair loss

↓

First aid — the connect step: touch raises oxytocin, cortisol falls

↓

Living food — repair and rebuild: vitamin C · omega-3s · collagen support

Solution Focused questions

"Who in your life was not surprised to see you managing as well as you are?" **Q.40**

"How do you show the people in your life that you care about them?" **Q.32**

"What would the closest person to you say is their favourite thing about you?" **Q.31**

Living food connection

- Vitamin C (bell peppers, kiwi, citrus) — essential for collagen synthesis and skin repair
- Essential fatty acids (avocado, olive oil, nuts) — maintain skin barrier integrity
- Silica-rich foods (cucumber, oats, leafy greens) — support hair and nail regeneration
- Hydration — the most foundational skin support available

Stress First Aid focus: Connect step — touch · trusted presence · oxytocin as physiology

POST 7 · ALL 13 SYSTEMS · PREFRONTAL CORTEX · LIVING FOOD · STRESS FIRST AID ARC

The Miracle Question Meets the Body

Imagining wholeness from the inside out

Suppose you went to sleep tonight and something shifted. The pressure didn't disappear — but your body was different. Your shoulders weren't braced for impact. Your breath came without effort. Your stomach settled. What would you notice first?

The physiology of the question

The miracle question is not asking you to pretend the problem doesn't exist. It invites you to describe, in sensory detail, what life would feel like in a body no longer drowning in chronic stress hormones. When the prefrontal cortex describes a desired future, it activates planning and hope circuitry. Threat signals begin to reduce. Cortisol starts to clear.

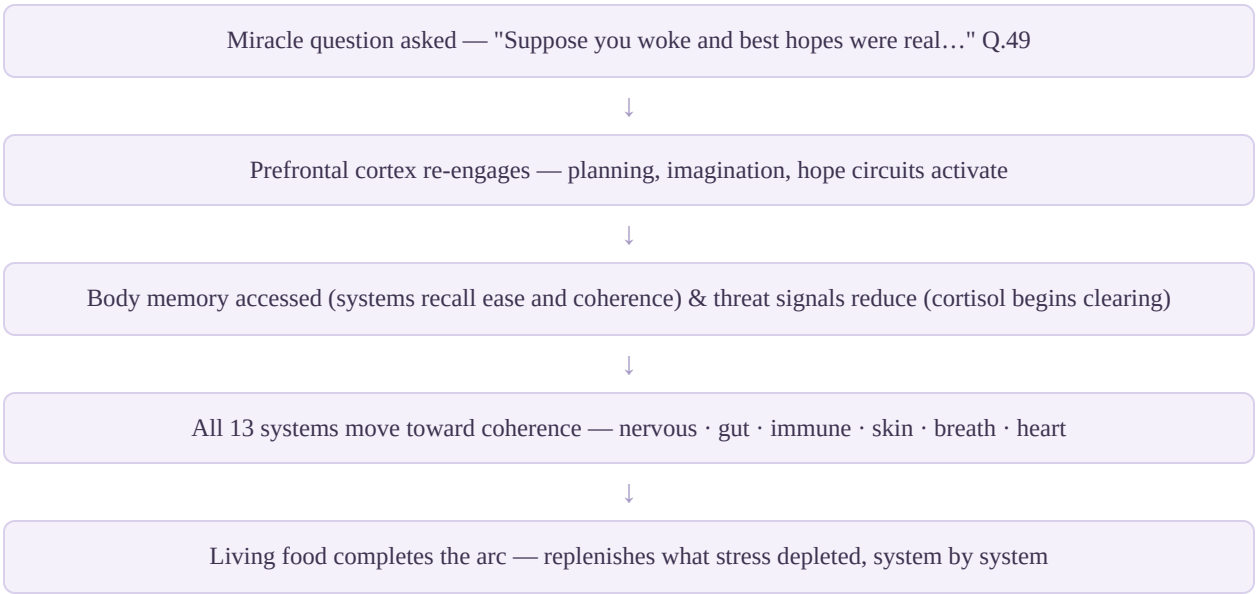
The body remembers

When all 13 systems are in relative balance — nervous, endocrine, cardiovascular, digestive, musculoskeletal, integumentary, immune, respiratory, lymphatic, reproductive, urinary, skeletal, muscular — the body has a felt sense of coherence. We know it when we're in it. We've been there before. The gut remembers ease. The lungs remember full breath. The skin remembers warmth. The heart remembers a steady rhythm.

The full arc

Living food feeds that memory. It returns to the systems what chronic stress depletes — minerals, antioxidants, prebiotics, phytonutrients, enzymes. Not as a cure, but as a continuous act of care. And the questions — the 101 questions — are the compass. They orient you toward what you want, remind you of what you've already survived, and reconnect you to the people and qualities that have always been yours.

CASCADE FLOWCHART



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Stress First Aid arc complete — Cover · Calm · Connect · Competence · Confidence

Solution Focused questions

"Suppose you went to sleep one night and a miracle happened. What is the first thing you would notice?" **Q.49**

"If you knew that the changes you are experiencing were only going to continue, what difference would that make to you?" **Q.100**

"Was this change a big surprise or a little surprise?" **Q.101**

Living food connection

- Every system has a corresponding nutritional need — chronic stress depletes them all
- Living food as a continuous act of care, not a cure
- Minerals · antioxidants · prebiotics · phytonutrients · enzymes — system by system replenishment

Stress First Aid focus: Cover · Calm · Connect · Competence · Confidence — arc complete

Resources and references

Frameworks used in this series

Stress First Aid (SFA) model
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, PTSD National Centre — ptsd.va.gov

101 Solution Focused Questions
The Solution Focused Universe, 2025 Edition — thesfu.com

AMA Steps Forward — Stress
AMA Ed Hub — edhub.ama-assn.org/steps-forward

Understanding the Stress Response
Harvard Health Publishing — health.harvard.edu

Stress and the Body
University of New Hampshire PACS — unh.edu/pacs

Crisis resources

If you or someone you know is experiencing acute distress, the following resources are available:

- Veterans Crisis Line — call or text 988 (US)
- 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline — call or text 988 (US)
- Crisis Text Line — text HOME to 741741

This resource is for educational purposes. It is not a substitute for professional medical or psychological care.

MANAGING LIFE'S CHANGES

Let's Continue the Conversation

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