

WORKSHEET 10 · CHAPTER TEN · HORMONES MATTER

Understanding Emotional Earthquakes

Emotional earthquakes rarely begin the moment the ground cracks open.

For a long time, I thought my emotional collapses came out of nowhere.

One bad week.

One hormonal crash.

One moment when I couldn't cope anymore.

But eventually I realized emotional earthquakes rarely begin the moment the ground cracks open. The pressure has usually been building quietly beneath the surface for years.

This tool is not about blaming yourself for struggling. It's about learning to understand what your body, brain and emotions may have been carrying all along.

STEP 1

Identify Your Tectonic Plates

The Earthquake Model is built around three constantly shifting areas of emotional health. None of these exists separately from the others. When one shifts, the others respond too.

LIFE STRESS AND EXPERIENCES

Loss, trauma, grief, chronic stress, caregiving, illness, relationships, financial distress, fear, survival mode.

THE BRAIN AND NERVOUS SYSTEM

Mental health history, trauma responses, anxiety, depression, neurodivergence, sleep deprivation, burnout.

HORMONES AND PHYSICAL HEALTH

Menstrual cycles, pregnancy, postpartum, perimenopause, menopause, cancer treatment, surgeries, chronic illness, inflammation, pain.

Write what has been happening in each category for you lately. Not just the major events — the smaller stressors count too.

STEP 2

Look for Your Tremors

Tremors often precede earthquakes. So do emotional collapses. Tick the warning signs you recognize.

- ☐ Trouble sleeping
- ☐ Irritability
- ☐ Brain fog
- ☐ Panic
- ☐ Fatigue
- ☐ Withdrawing from people
- ☐ Crying easily
- ☐ Feeling emotionally numb
- ☐ Snapping at loved ones
- ☐ Hopelessness
- ☐ Physical symptoms flaring

What usually happens right before these appear?

STEP 3

Notice What You've Been Pushing Through

Many of us become experts at overriding ourselves. We tell ourselves:

I'm fine.

I need to push harder.

Other people have it worse.

I don't have time to fall apart right now.

But ignored stress does not disappear. It accumulates.

What have I been surviving that I haven't fully acknowledged yet?

You may discover grief, fear, anger, loneliness, exhaustion, or trauma that has never had space to breathe.

STEP 4

Build Reinforcements Before the Quake

You cannot prevent every emotional earthquake, but you can strengthen the support around you before the pressure becomes unbearable.

What actually helps my body and mind feel safer, steadier, or more supported?

This might include: therapy · rest · medication · hormonal support · nutrition · movement · time outside · spiritual practices · asking for help · less stimulation · more sleep · boundaries · connection · quiet.

Small forms of care matter more than most people realize.

STEP 5

Stop Fighting Your Body

One of the hardest lessons I learned was that my body was not betraying me. It was responding to everything it had lived through.

Sometimes symptoms are signals. Sometimes exhaustion is information. Sometimes anxiety is the nervous system begging for safety. This does not mean every feeling should control your life. But it does mean your body deserves curiosity, not shame.

What changes when I stop seeing myself as broken and start seeing myself as overloaded?

A Gentle Reflection

Emotional earthquakes do not happen because you are weak. They happen because human beings can only carry so much pressure for so long before something begins to crack.

Understanding your tremors does not erase the pain. But it can help you respond with compassion instead of confusion.

You are not dramatic. You are not weak. You are not failing to adjust. You are a woman whose body has been through something enormous, and whose hormones are trying to tell you something true. Listen.

This worksheet accompanies Chapter Ten of *Reluctant Warrior: A Memoir & Breast Cancer Emotional Survival Guide* by Dr. Christina Hibbert. It is a reflective exercise, not therapy or medical care. If it brings up more than you expected, that makes sense — please consider bringing it to someone who can sit with you in it.