

THE “NUMBNESS TAX” AUDIT

A Worksheet for Inspecting Your Foundation

The **Numbness Tax** is the accumulated mental, physical, and relational cost of refusing to deal with feelings when they arise. You were likely taught that “real men” push through pain and stay silent. But emotional repression doesn't eliminate pain; it just delays it, adding heavy “interest” in the form of anxiety, irritability, and exhaustion.

IDENTIFYING THE SYMPTOMS

Check any of the following “tax payments” you have noticed in your life recently:

**THE
BACKGROUND
HUM:**

A constant, low-grade sense of anxiety or “threat” even when things are technically fine.

THE LEAK:

Small things (a slow driver, a dropped glass) cause you to feel intense irritability or “leak” anger in ways that surprise you.

**EMOTIONAL
FREEZING:**

Feeling “flat” or numb—not just to the bad stuff, but to joy and connection as well.

**THE “I’M FINE”
WALL:**

When people ask how you are, your default is “I’m fine” or “nothing,” even when your body feels tense or heavy.

PHYSICAL ARMOR:

Chronic tension in your shoulders, jaw, or gut, or struggling with sleep and immunity.

NAMING TO TAME

Research shows that putting a specific label on a feeling reduces its intensity in the brain. Use the “Numbness Tax” Reframer below to move from generic “bad” feelings to precise diagnostics.

THE DIAGNOSTIC CHART		
If you feel...	It might actually be...	Which is a signal that...
Aggressive	Anger	A boundary has been violated; a line was crossed.
Stuck	Frustration	You are blocked from a goal you want to achieve.
Heavy	Sadness	You have registered a loss (a person, an opportunity, a dream).
On Edge	Anxiety	You feel unprepared for or overwhelmed by a future threat.
Defensive	Shame	You feel fundamentally “bad” or unworthy as a person.

THE AUDIT REFLECTION

Choose one specific moment from the last 48 hours where you felt “off” or “numb.”

Where did you feel it in your body? (e.g., Tight chest, clenched jaw, heavy gut).

Using the chart above, what is the specific name for that feeling?

What was the “Warning Light” telling you? (e.g., “I’m sad because I missed that deadline” or “I’m angry because my roommate ignored my request”).

THE BUILD STEP: SMALL PAYMENTS

You can pay the Numbness Tax in small daily installments or wait for the “engine to seize” later.

Today’s commitment: The next time someone asks, “How's it going?”, pause for three seconds. Instead of “Fine,” try to name one specific thing you are actually navigating.