



EPISODE 1024

The Downsides of Biohacking, Prioritizing Your Life, & The Truth About Endurance Exercise

With Guest Ben Greenfield

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SHAWN STEVENSON: Welcome to The Model Health Show. If you were to ask me what person in the health and fitness space does the absolute most, who pushes their body to the limit and lives to tell the story? Who's biohacking, hacking the hack? Whose self-quantification and managing and measuring all these different metrics are their North Star for how they live their life?

I would say that that person is Ben Greenfield. Now, what I just described, is that somebody that most people would want to aspire towards living a lifestyle like that? For most people, not so much. But for many of us, we're going to see that as a source of inspiration, as a guiding light for us to see what's possible, and that's what Ben is focused on with truly challenging his body and his mind in ways that are astronomical.

And now here's the big question. Is that approach truly sustainable? Is it something that we all can model and find great benefit? Well, I'm here to tell you, absolutely we could take pieces and parts to create our own model of health and fitness. But we have the man here himself today, the one and only Ben Greenfield, to share his recent revelations about health and fitness and how those extremes actually caused damage that he would have never thought to be possible.

Now, at first glance, you might think that this is from the physical domain. Sure, he's broken his body down and repaired it a thousand times over, but it's the emotional and the spiritual repair that you're gonna hear about. When we are doing these things in the name of finding that ultimate health and fitness, what's the cost?

And so he's gonna really open up today and share these incredible insights. And also, of course, he's a big-time science guy, so we're gonna hear some really incredible insights on biology and the impacts that those extremes can have on our cardiovascular health, for example. And also, please know that this is not any avocation away from challenging our bodies and to be great and to compete. It's actually the opposite.

This is an advocacy for us to do this with much more intention and purpose so that we feel that sense of fulfillment at the end of the day as well. And so without further ado, let's dive in with our special guest and topic of the day. Ben Greenfield is a health consultant, speaker, coach, and New York Times bestselling author of 13 books, including *Boundless* and *Beyond Training*.

Ben was named one of the world's top 100 most influential people in health and fitness, and has competed in some of the biggest triathlons, Ironmans, and elite endurance events. After years of competing and biohacking, Ben has shifted how he defines health and discipline. After years of competing and biohacking, Ben has shifted how he defines health and discipline, and these insights on balance are going to be a game changer in your life.

Let's dive into this conversation with the one and only Ben Greenfield.

Icon alert. The one and only Ben Greenfield is here with us

BEN GREENFIELD: Icon. Uh, isn't that the little, like, thing that appears in your browser tab when you're surfing the internet? Sometimes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Sometimes. Yeah. But sometimes it's a person. Yeah. You know? And you are one of those people, man. And you are one of the most-

BEN GREENFIELD: Uh, by the way, thank you for not calling me an emoji.

SHAWN STEVENSON: I... Never mind. I'll save that for later. But you are one of the most running-est, most endurance training human beings that I've ever met by far.

BEN GREENFIELD: Yeah, I got a little carried away.

SHAWN STEVENSON: And I wanna ask you about the other side of the equation, because we aspire towards, you know, this kind of cardio-driven movement- Mm-hmm

for our heart health, right? Great heart health, cardiovascular health.

BEN GREENFIELD: Yeah.

SHAWN STEVENSON: But is there a point at which those benefits can reverse and we can actually- Yeah ... see some of the things that happen with people who do none of it?

BEN GREENFIELD: Yeah. Uh, and not just that, but also, uh, gym culture, self-optimization culture, looksmaxing culture.

Like, beyond what I'll share with you about cardio, you could take just about anything that we are doing in the body-brain optimization sector, which is a lot of, like, the world that you and me live in, and you can find a lot of people who are sad and sick and unfulfilled and have, you know, torn relationships and broken families because of what we kind of, like, consider to be laudable in society.

But that is very easy to take too far if you have any element of a desire to control, any element of, like, a dopaminergic response to the forward motion that you get from running or the, the, the rush that you get from lifting. I mean, there, there's a lot that goes on behind the scenes in our industry that now we're seeing taken to the extremes.

Like, you know, people breaking bones and smashing jaws and, you know, taking testosterone when they're 14, you know. The, all, all of these things kind of trickle down from that. In the case of cardio, um, to directly answer your question, yeah, there's certainly a law of diminishing returns. I mean, I was, you know, I was Ironman Triathlon for 15 years.

I did literally thousands and thousands of additional miles of adventure racing and obstacle course racing and, uh, you know, open water swim racing and cycling and marathoning. And just from a pure- biological standpoint, right? Right. Relationships, time, social life, all of that aside, um, the research pretty clearly indicates that once you exceed about 150 minutes a week of that type of activity, right, what we might call chronic cardio, uh, you see increased arterial stiffness, increased risk of atherosclerosis.

Um, the calcium scan scores that you see people getting, uh, actually that's one of the reasons I'm in town. I actually just got one yesterday. Uh, you tend to see higher depositions

of calcium in the arteries due to the constant cardiovascular inflammation that occurs from those sports, not to mention what happens to the joints over time.

Now, I think a lot of people might push back on that and say, "Well, that's like primal, right? Aren't we supposed to move all day long, right? Hunting and fishing and gathering and planting and foraging and building fences and hauling rocks and doing whatever our ancestors did There is a stark difference between, you know, and anybody who's maybe, like, gone out for a day of the hunting, for example, could tell you this, uh, so could anyone who spent a day in the garden, right?

There's a big difference between those activities, which do qualify as, like, low-level aerobic physical activity spread throughout the day, and semi-running from a lion for hours on end, which is what triathlon/marathon/ you know, insert endurance sport of your choice here does. So from a primal standpoint, yeah, we should, like, move at, at low-level physical intensity throughout the day, but that doesn't mean, like, pounding the pavement every morning or, you know, riding a bicycle hunched over on that hard seat, you know, with the hip flexor shortened and the glutes turned off for hours on end.

Um, the, the, the difference in terms of what happens to the body and what happens to the hormones and what happens to the joints is much, much different between those different ways of moving throughout the day.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yeah. Thank you for that. And also, to just backtrack a bit, you really helped to illuminate something that is very insidious, you know, just the addictive qualities of a lot of this stuff, even with the, you know, it's something that's much more, uh, what appears to be advantageous and even aspirational- Right and, you know, inspirational and all these things.

BEN GREENFIELD: David Goggins baby. Let's go.

SHAWN STEVENSON: But, you know, right now we're, we're seeing the emergence of balance.

BEN GREENFIELD: Yeah.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Right? And this is just kind of the, I think is a natural reaction of anything in nature. You know, nature finds a way, where we have this, you know, this g-massive, quick, uh, very fast-growing, uh, sedentary culture, and then we have people who swing to the other extreme.

And, you know, for, for, and you don't know this, but you're usually my example. You know what I mean? Mm-hmm. When I'm talking with friends, when I'm talking, you know, here at the studio about who's that person, self-quantification, ultra-endurance, all of it, it's, it's you. Right. Biohacker. I, I, I refer to you. Love that word, biohacker.

Yeah. Yeah. You know? Yeah. And then we've got people at the other end of the, of the spectrum who are just like, "None of it," you know? Just- Yeah. And so where you are is somewhere that I always felt that you would be, and there's something that is very noticeable when I saw you today, you are much lighter.

And I'm not talking about from, like, a physical...

BEN GREENFIELD: Yeah ...

SHAWN STEVENSON: perspective. I'm talking about, like, a, kind of like a spiritual energy. You know

BEN GREENFIELD: Yeah, I did take a couple shots in the Uber on the way over.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Shots of what, Ben? But, you know

BEN GREENFIELD: Yeah. I think that one of the things that, um, that, that comes to mind when you're saying this is that you tend to see that endurance sports, that type of harmful chronic cardio that we're talking about, attracts people with addictive personalities.

I would much, much rather see someone doing an Ironman triathlon, or a series of them, or marathons, or whatever else, than I would see them on a hard drug or, you know, using heroin or, or, you know, uh, or being an alcoholic or anything like that. But we do have to admit that at the end of the day, it's, like, either escapism or constant forward motion or something that pulls people with that type of tendency into an activity that can become harmful if it's not mitigated.

Uh, there are many, many people who do need to hear the message, like, uh, eat less, move more, right? And then you and I both see in our world people who move way too much and especially now that Ozempic, et cetera, is around, eat way too little and are, are very much enabled to do so, and it's a problem

SHAWN STEVENSON: I remember we actually stayed at the same house in Austin for a brief period.

Yeah, I remember, yeah. It was Aub- Aubrey Marcus's-

BEN GREENFIELD: Yeah ...

SHAWN STEVENSON: place, and I think I was doing a book signing there, and you were there in town doing some stuff as well. But I didn't, I think maybe I bumped into you maybe once, but we were staying at- Yeah ... the same house. And I remember, it's one of those moments of like, "Yeah, that's, uh, some super Ben Greenfield shit," was instead of you getting, like, a rental car, you tweeted out to your community, "Who, who has a bike?"

BEN GREENFIELD: Yeah.

SHAWN STEVENSON: All right? "Who has a bike?" And you bicycled all over Austin doing all the things that you had to do, right? Yep. So now for, again, it's It's amazing. It's, like, super aspirational, and it's just, like, human capacity. But for me, I'm curious, is this something that you would do today? Yep. Like, when you landed here in LA-

BEN GREENFIELD: I totally would.

Yeah. You do? I totally would. Um, I've, I had three different Ubers scheduled yesterday, and I canceled them all because every single Uber was going to a location that was two and a half miles or less, and I walked instead. I, I rucked- Mm-hmm ... with my heavy backpack. When... Yeah, I, the good memory, I did tweak that out.

I remember I got, like, five different offers for a bicycle, and I just chose the one that, that looked best, and I rode all over the place. When I arrive in a city, uh, and there's a grocery store within a couple miles of the hotel, I'll walk to the grocery store and, you know, get my groceries and ruck them back to the hotel.

If, if we wanna dig into the nitty-gritty of this, when, when you look at the idea of human-powered commuting, uh, as an alternative to sitting in a car, I think that the pros vastly outweigh the cons. But when you, like, if you were to, let's say, so, like, bikes for example, like the crankshaft on a bike, you can put a power meter on it now, and you can see, like, how much power you're actually producing when you're turning over the cranks.

If you were to put me in, you know, any, any city, let, let's say Los Angeles, and I was going around and I was, like, maybe riding my bike to this podcast and grabbing some groceries, uh, and, you know, riding to a lunch meeting, whatever, I might be averaging, like, 200, 250 watts max. Contrast that with Ironman, where, you know, you're averaging typically around, like, 275 to 325 with multiple 500 to 600 watt surges throughout until you're completely drained, usually in the heat with no breaks in between.

We're like, we're not talking about, like, riding a bike 20 minutes to the grocery store and walking around and grabbing your groceries and, you know, maybe, you know, having a drink and checking some stuff on your phone and getting back on your bike. So I would actually classify, like, human-powered commuting as something that more people should do, and it, it doesn't reach the level of intensity or, or nonstop volume that competing in an endurance sport does.

So, so yeah, I mean, the short answer to your question is I would absolutely commute, and I do whenever I can.

SHAWN STEVENSON: I love this. Yeah. With my body. This is a great breakdown of where you are and what... It not only seems logical and, and very kind of health affirming, but this is something that's been s- kind of taken away From our, what our genes expect us to do as far as movement, right?

Right. Human-powered commuting and just thinking about that, I can't tell you how many times, you know, again, I'll be at a hotel out of town and, you know, I'll look on the app and it's just like, okay, here's where the Whole Foods is, and it's like a mile. Yeah. And then, you know, if, if I'm by myself, I'll do it, you know?

Yeah. But with my wife, she's like, "I'm not walking a mile. Da, da, da, da, da." Yeah. Yeah. And just trying to find that kind of happy medium with these things where this is something very logical and it's a great way to get in more movement. And, but, and it has a purpose behind it. It has a purpose. Right. You're going to get your food, or you're going to the movies, or you're going to, you know, what I was gonna say, g- rent a video, which is what I used to do with my son.

Yeah. We would ride the bikes to go get it.

BEN GREENFIELD: You're, you're, you're dating yourself. Yep. Go walk out to the mailbox, get the DVD that Netflix mailed to you. Yeah.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Man. Yeah. But, you know, we have that, and then we have the other, you know, extreme. And also on the ... Again, we gotta look at the other extreme of I would probably rather see somebody training for a triathlon and doing a couple of those than doing nothing-

BEN GREENFIELD: Absolutely

SHAWN STEVENSON: ... and just sitting on the couch as well. Absolutely. Yeah. And so we have so much in the middle. This is where th- this is where the sustainability resides. Yep. And also the practicality. We can really tap into the practicality of things, and we don't just have to do things for the sake of doing them. We can do them with more of a purpose

Yeah. And that's where I really see your work has shifted as well. There's s- there's more purpose behind it. Again, it's a very visceral thing when I can experience like your spirit being lighter and seeing that there's like a, a change in the way that you are perceiving reality and also teaching. And so I wanna dig in more into this because this is where

You m- you already ... You said these things aside, first of all, just looked at, because that was my question of course about the cardiovascular downsides of doing too much.

BEN GREENFIELD: Mm-hmm.

SHAWN STEVENSON: But in the process of doing too much and doing all those types of things- What happens with those other things? Yeah. You know? And so is this a- Yeah

part of the reason your, your perspective has changed as well, your family?

BEN GREENFIELD: Yeah. It's a big reason. And, and I'll tell you that story. A c- a couple of things came to mind as you were just talking. Um, and the, the, the first is that the... You used the phrase mentality. We do have the mentality that you need to be in a special box or enclosed space to move your body, and I don't think that does people a lot of favors, right?

The gym, the club, whatever, would've been relegated to the realm of the Olympian or the soldier or the gladiator, you know, anything about 100-plus years ago. And it wasn't until the post-Industrial Revolution when we were forced to, or I guess blessed with the ability to be able to work indoors, that we had to fabricate ways to actually move and load our bodies.

Uh, and that results in a lot of people having the mentality that you just sit all day long and then you go to a box with things in it that you pick up and set down or with a bicycle in the corner that you ride really hard, and that's how you get your movement in during the day. And, and, and technically from, like, a primal standpoint, that's, that's somewhat unnatural.

Um- Artificial. Yeah, yeah, it's artificial. Now, now it's better than nothing, right? Of course. Again, it's better than the alternative. Uh, in an ideal scenario, very similar to human-powered commuting, you would engineer your day such that you're moving throughout the day

anyways, right? You're taking Pomodoro breaks, and I told you before we started recording, like, I do pushups all day long and, and, um, and, and, you know, stop for breaks all throughout the day And a lot of times I try to make sure, 'cause I work from home, that my kids can see me doing that so they get up and, and move around as well.

Um, so, so just that mentality that you have to go to a special place to move your body is something that I think paints people into that corner of not fabricating movement throughout their entire day. Now, there's also the practicality side of things, right? You also said, like, the reason that we do some of these things, um, can be practical.

When I used to go do Ironman World Championships down in Hawaii, you know, you, I'd, I'd swim and bike and run, and that'd be like, you know, a, a nine or 10-hour race, uh, you know, creating all of the biological blowback that I was talking about earlier. And then I discovered bow hunting. And it actually turns out that that very same island, Kona, is a, like a bow hunting and hunting mecca.

And I transitioned from, like, you know, donning spandex and, and, you know, and swimming and biking and running down there and doing all this damage to my body to trekking around the base of volcanoes, you know, with my bow and sneaking and bear crawling and, you know, stepping over logs and sometimes, like sitting motionless for two hours and then, like, sprinting up a hill and, and doing, in the very same location, physical activity that felt far more primal.

And I would feel, like, refreshed after a day of that. I mean, you're still tired. You're still pushing yourself. Uh, same thing with swimming. Like, I used to freaking, like, go to the YMCA and, you know, jump in the pool and stare at that black line for, you know, sometimes up to an hour a few times a week, and now I like to free dive and spearfish.

And there's a big difference between, like, you know, hanging out on a boat for a day and jumping in the water, and yeah, you're still cold, you're still swimming around, you're still burning calories and moving your body, but you're, like, freaking, like, getting fish to make

ceviche with later that night. And it, and it just feels different and it's m- it's a more refreshing way to move your body.

Um, you, you asked, uh, about, you know, other things that might happen from that obsession with endurance sports or exercise, or you might even say just, just anything, you know, biohacking, looksmaxing again, any of these things that tend to pull us away with increasing volumes of time from our family or our social life or, you know, our career or other hobbies.

Um, that was certainly something that happened to me. I mean, th- this, you know, I'm in town to screen this new film, and the film is that journey of how I nearly got divorced and was very distant from my sons for, like, the first six years of their life. And, you know, things that I knew were important like, you know, relationships and, you know, family dinners and community events, all of that was kinda pushed to the side for me primarily for business, for exercise, for competition, for a lot of self-optimization type of activities, and that, uh, uh, that got pretty empty and pretty unfulfilling, and, uh, it nearly cost me a lot of the stuff that, that, you know, is the most important in life.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Our special guest today knows a thing or 20 about athletic performance and really fueling his body, and one of the things that he utilizes every single day is the powerful electrolytes from LMNT. Now, here are four specific ways that electrolytes impact your exercise and athletic performance. Number one, optimal muscle function.

Electrolytes like sodium and magnesium are essential for nerve signaling, allowing your muscles to contract and relax properly, which prevents cramping and fatigue. Number two, fluid balance and hydration. Sodium helps your body and your brain to retain proper fluid balance. Inadequate hydration can lead to cardiovascular strain and decreased strength and power.

Number three, energy and endurance. Replacing your lost sodium improves blood flow and helps transport nutrients into your cells, sustaining energy levels during long duration and

high-intensity workouts in particular. Number four, mental sharpness. Good electrolyte balance helps to maintain cognitive function and reaction time during competition.

And scientists at McGill University found that sodium functions as a, quote, "on/off switch in the brain for specific neurotransmitters that support optimal function." Now, here's the problem. We know that this is all true when it comes to electrolytes and our performance. But for decades, the Gatorades and Powerades of the world have been dousing our bodies with crazy amounts of sugars and artificial colors and all these different shady ingredients, and LMNT stepped in and said, "No more.

No más. We're gonna deliver science-backed ratios of these key electrolytes without the added sugar, without the artificial colors and the dodgy ingredients, and we're gonna do this in a way that today LMNT is fueling some of the greatest athletes and high performers in the world, including Team USA weightlifting, NBA and NFL teams, Navy SEALs.

The list goes on and on. And right now, you get to take advantage of the world's number one electrolyte supplement when you go to drinkLMNT.com/model. That's drink L-M-N-T.com/model. And not only that, with every electrolyte purchase, you're going to get a free sample pack of their most popular electrolyte flavors.

And to top it off, you get to try all this risk-free with their no questions asked refunds if you don't absolutely love the way that it makes you feel. Again, head over to drinkLMNT.com/model right now to take advantage. My favorite flavors right now, grapefruit is popping. Lemonade. The lemonade salt is incredible, especially if you're doing anything where you're sweating a lot, that lemonade salt hits different.

So again, head over there, check them out. DrinkLMNT.com/model, and now back to the show.

Yeah. So it's, it's not just the physical toll that these things can take. It's the emotional-Mm-hmm ... toll. It's the spiritual toll. It's the, you know, the mental toll. So what, how is a better question. How did you find your, your way back to the things that you value most?

Mm-hmm. You know, because, because again, this is the thing. You're s- you're still about that life, and I love that. Like, literally, I came out the studio and you're utilizing these fitness tools- Mm-hmm ... out here.

BEN GREENFIELD: Yeah, I love this studio. You know? You got the massage gun, you got the foam rollers.

SHAWN STEVENSON: And you're, you're a guy who's, again, dropping down and doing a couple hundred pushups every day in between all the other physical amazing activities that you do, but you have directed everything in such a way that you've unified, you know, your relationship.

Like, your, your, your sons are coming out to join you tomorrow-

BEN GREENFIELD: Yep ...

SHAWN STEVENSON: you know, for this screening. You know? So how did you get from there to that place where you were feeling this emptiness to the fulfillment that you're experiencing today?

BEN GREENFIELD: Yep. I think, I think it's- I'd say three things. Um, priorities, boundaries, and then a, a, an actual realization of what's truly fulfilling for us as human beings.

So when I say priorities, uh, my big five order of priorities is number one is my faith and my relationship with God. Number two is my spouse. Number three is my kids. And if you don't have a spouse or kids, number two and three could just be, like, community, right? Your, your other relationships. Uh, number four is health, and number five is business.

And for me, for a very long time, health and business were, like, the top two, and then family and faith kind of followed after that, uh, which is the case for a lot of people. Um, now, uh, in the morning, before there's any workout or any business, I've got my time with God. You know, I'm, I'm reading the Bible or listening to the Bible.

I'm praying. I'm taking care of my spiritual health. I am gathering the family every single morning for this big family huddle where we talk about our day. And, uh, I typically read to the family, and we pray together, and we plan out the day, and we joke, and we laugh, and sometimes we just have a big dance party.

I'll put on a song, and we'll traipse around the living room or the patio if the sun's out. And we do the same thing in the evening, right? We all gather together as a family in the evening. Uh, and by, by baking those kind of things into the day, along with things like, you know, one-on-one date nights with the kids, one-on-one date nights with my wife, um, things that I never really even thought about calendaring or prioritizing the same way I'd calendar or prioritize my workout session or work or anything like that. That's number one, is, is you need to identify your priorities and I, I recommend your priorities in the approximate order that I've just described if you, if you wanna get started off on the right foot.

And then the next part is the boundaries, and what I've just explained is kind of a part of that, right? So if I know that I have a designated scheduled family huddle that everybody knows that they're gonna be at at 7:00 a.m. every morning, I can't be in my office. I can't be scheduling zooms then. I can't be scheduling a podcast then or business or even a workout, right?

Like, that is family time and I've committed myself to show up every single morning and my family knows, like, if I'm not there, like, something's wrong. Like, I'm sick. Like, there have been occasions, um, uh, I mean like this, this film thing, right? Like, I've got a PR agency that I hired and the PR agency has come to me twice in the past couple weeks and they're like, "Yeah, yeah, this big interview and it's a big...

You gotta do this one, bro. It's like this newspaper and, and they're really big and they have this reach and they can do it at 7:15 a.m." And I'm like, "Well, shoot." And then I'll tell my family the day before. I'm like, "You guys are on your own for the family huddle. Dad's gotta do this interview." It's very few and far between though that I'm doing stuff like that anymore.

Um, and so there's that boundary and then there's also the big family gathering that happens at 7:00 p.m. I know this stuff's right up your alley, right? Like, that's when family dinner technically starts, so that's when I'm bringing my f- my sons through the father-son book club that we have. So every night we talk for 10 minutes about a book that we're all reading together and then I take out my guitar and I'll play a song with the family and usually that means...

So we eat at like sometime between 7:00 and 7:30. I'm usually kinda like done with a lot of my work stuff sometime between 6:00 and 6:30. It's usually like 6:30, 6:45 I'm in my office with my guitar like picking out a song and making sure I know all the chords and everything. So it kind of forces me to, to grow musically also.

Gather the family, uh, we sing the song, we pray together, and then we all take out food for the night and we bust out a bunch of card games and board games and just like have these awesome family dinner/parties every night. That's another boundary. Like I'm not taking 7:30 p.m. Zooms or doing 8:00 p.m. emails because I've baked that in.

So you got priorities, um, you got boundaries. Another big boundary is, is I always have the one day of the week for me that's Sunday that's just like completely off. It's like a totally different day in our house. Like people are just hanging out, having fun, nothing scheduled. It's just a, a, a total relaxation day.

Like that's our rest day. That's our Sabbath. And then the last part is that understanding, right? So It's the understanding that all of, all of this goes away. Like I know you're, you're getting old like I'm getting old, Shawn. We've been doing this a while and, you know, you get out of bed sometimes and a joint hurts or you don't recover from a workout as fast as you thought, and that's, that's all happening, right?

Like, until we're 70 or 80 or 90 or whenever we kick the can, all of this is just like degrading, right? Like our bones are becoming porous and our muscles are atrophying and our, you know, our, our brains are developing tangles. And th- this is all finite. And then if you look at the things that truly bring happiness and fulfillment, they're infinite, right?

They're infinite and, and that's other people and, um, and, and if you're a person of faith, that's God, right? And so once you understand that the pursuit of fitness and the pursuit of endurance and the pursuit of strength and the pursuit of a better jaw or hairline or whatever people are focused on now is ultimately very unfulfilling, and you instead fill that hole in your soul with something that's actually eternal, um, that's, that's where you really start to feel like you, you don't have as much of a tug towards your identity being rooted in self-optimization.

And that's just more of like a, like a, a wake-up moment, and it, it's kind of like jumping off a cliff. 'Cause if you're used to, I don't know, if you're like a triathlete and you're used to doing two hours of endurance training or you're a bodybuilder and you're used to just like, you know, just living in the gym or you're somebody who's got like your four-hour elaborate morning routine with your hyperbaric chamber and your red light and your sauna and your cold plunge and y- you decide that, okay, well, I'm, I think I am gonna spend time with the family more and I think I am gonna do, you know, some gratitude journaling and some spiritual stuff and some meditation in- instead of all this other stuff as the priority of the day, you do have to kind of like take that leap of faith that you're still gonna be okay.

Like, you're not gonna get sick and die if you cut like, you know, you know, whatever, like 30 minutes out of your 90-minute routine every day or something like that. So there's kind of like that realization too, and tho- those were a few of the things that helped me, helped pull me out of the, like the hamster wheel of self-optimization.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Wow. Thank you for sharing that, man. Thank you so much. You know, I'm q- I'm really curious what you think, because this is very common, you know, for- individuals, especially who have aspirations and who, you know, want to do things in the world, to find themselves kind of wrapped up in those things that at the end of the day they won't have that sense of fulfillment, right?

They might f- have that sense of feeling empty. Like again, another thing to change my body or my looks or, you know, th- kind of these superficial things. W- why do you think that we do that? Like w- what's so- ... seductive about those things?

BEN GREENFIELD: Evolutionary biology, baby. I mean, like, uh, uh, I'm, I'm laughing just 'cause we were having...

You know, before we started recording, we were talking about like, you know, uh, men and, and women and, and how, how certain guys you wouldn't expect to get the girls. And, uh- Shout out to Mr. Beast. Yeah, shout out to Mr. Beast. And, um, you know, we, we do have this fear of being ostracized or being excommunicated or, you know, it's, it's the same place that the fear of public speaking arises from, right?

Like, if you're in, if you're up in front of a bunch of your peers or the village or the community or where- wherever else would've existed in our ancestry, and you mess up or you look bad or you stick your foot in your mouth or you've got pie in your face, then you might slip in the rung of the social ladder, right?

You might slip down a few rungs, and that might affect Maslow's hierarchy of needs, right? It might affect the type of mate you get. It might affect the type of money that you're able to make. It might affect whether or not people take you seriously. And so we still have that urge to just, like, look good and present ourselves as looking good to whoever else that, that we happen to be around.

We do that a lot on social media, of course. It's so easy to do now with, you know, filters and AIs. Like, you can be perfect, you know, un- until somebody actually comes over to your house and sees that you're actually like a, you know- ... messy, messed up person like a lot of people actually are. Uh, but there is a pull towards being that type of person who's either got it all figured out or who looks like you are hard to kill, better able to provide, right, better able to, um, to be a, a protector or a procreator or anything of that nature.

None of that stuff is, like, wrong per se, inherently. That's part of who we are. That's part of how we're wired up. But because we have that tendency, if we don't check ourselves and we aren't aware of that, then we can take that to the extreme. I mean, even, like, physical attractiveness, for example, right?

Social media and magazines and modern health culture would have us to believe that veins in your abs and, you know, a 12-pack and rock-hard glutes and, you know, a certain typically extremely lean and, and ripped physique is something that is going to really make you stand out as far as, as being at the top rung.

If you actually look at ratings of attractiveness, et cetera, it's closer to, like, 15% body fat for men and, like, 20% to 25% for women. And so I think even our modern idea of what it actually takes and how much we need, uh, it's pretty skewed. Um, I think some of that can be a little bit shallow, too. Like, like just basing our meaning to the world and, and our identity on how we look.

I'm not saying you totally throw that out the window and become whatever, just like a fat slob. But it's, it's important to understand that you will have a pull, and especially once you get sucked into the world of, like, exercise and nutrition and eating healthy and, uh, whatever, like derma rolling, microneedling, clay masks, red light helmets, like all the things, um, it gets easy to get pulled into that stuff pretty quickly.

And when you combine that with some of the other stuff that we were talking about, right, like addictive tendencies, um, need for control, and it, it is very easy to control when you are in charge of your exercise program or your diet, right? That, that's where things like body dysmorphic disorder and, and anorexia and bulimia, you know, tho- those arise from that, that tendency to control.

But when you combine all these clusters of factors together, it, it becomes a very, very easy downward spiral to fall into if you don't check yourself and if you don't put other things into your life, like those things that I was talking about that are much more fulfilling and in the long run, more meaningful.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yeah. Wow. You've mentioned the term looksmaxing a couple of times.

BEN GREENFIELD: That's a new one.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Can you enlighten people who haven't heard of this yet?

BEN GREENFIELD: Okay, so you're the first person to ever ask me that on a podcast, and, uh, and I don't even know if, if I've actually fully wrapped my head around what it is. I first became aware of it when I saw this social media influencer you may have seen named Clavicular.

Mm-hmm. And this was, like, a young man who's been on testosterone, I, from what I understand, since he was, I think 14 years old, which in and of itself is an issue because, uh, unless you've got some serious biochemical knowledge going on, and even then it's tough, you're gonna nuke your fertility. Uh, and so, you know, the ability to propagate the human species, that kinda gets thrown out the window, and that's, that's a pretty important part of life.

And then, it delves from just the hormone and biochemical piece, right? Like using testosterone, using human growth hormone, uh, using other steroids, you know, um, nandro, whatever else, uh, along with all the peptides that people are now injecting, to, uh, from what I understand, certain facial exercises like mewing, for example.

You've probably done podcasts about how good mewing is sometimes for, um, for nasal breathing or for jaw alignment, but these people are taking it to the extremes, using like jaw exercising machines, you know, to, to actually make the jaw look better. And, and I guess like even like hitting and striking certain bones, including the jaw, to make it, like, respond with osteoblastic, you know, tissue formation, like, like bone cell growth to help the jaw look better.

Um, the exercise piece is of course a given, like lots and lots of time in the gym carving the body, along with implants, right? You can get calf implants. You can get ab implants. Uh, you can get arm implants, and people are actually doing these things as well. So it's, it's, it's-

SHAWN STEVENSON: Now don't forget the appetite suppressant, crystal meth

BEN GREENFIELD: Tell me about this one

SHAWN STEVENSON: This is one of the things that he mentioned at utilizing is crystal meth for appetite suppression.

BEN GREENFIELD: Wow. Yeah. Wow. I mean, I, I don't know why you wouldn't just- ... use, like, Red True Tide or something. Um, but yeah, that's that whole world. I would actually love to just, like, interview one of these people sometime and, and get into their head and take a deep dive into what actually happens in that whole industry.

Uh, 'cause I, you know, I obviously haven't studied it that intensively, but that's kind of, like, the idea is, is, you know, as the name implies, you're, you're maxing as much as you can, uh, primarily your aesthetics. And I mean, in my, in, like, in Boundless, you know, we've, we've done a podcast about that book before, and there's a whole chapter about, like, beauty and symmetry and aesthetics and the importance of posture, the importance of vitamin K and vitamin D and adequate minerals for bone growth, the importance of, like, hygienics and, um, and, like, oral care and dental care and hair care for not just your overall health, but also confidence, right?

And the way that you carry yourself in the, in the world. You could say that that's, like, kinda sorta a form of looksmaxing, but just like, you know, the, I guess you'd call the exercise maxing that we were talking about, right? You have to know where to draw the line. And I think it's okay to, like, make sure that you're taking care of your teeth and you're taking care of your hair and, you know, you're taking care of your bones, but trying to literally, like, change the way you look as your main focus in life is, you know -

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yeah

BEN GREENFIELD: Call me crazy- ... but I think it's just potentially a little unhealthy.

SHAWN STEVENSON: We talked about the two extremes and the middle being, you know, and i- it's often referred to, like, in a, in a process, the messy middle.

BEN GREENFIELD: Mm-hmm.

SHAWN STEVENSON: But when we're talking about- sustainability and practices and habits, we're talking about the miracle middle.

You know, this is where, this is where so much good can be found. And, you know, I really wanna lean into this idea of sust- sustainability, you know, because crystal meth, for example, isn't going it's not gonna be a sustainable habit. You're hammering your face, you know? And again, it just, how, when does it stop?

BEN GREENFIELD: Yeah.

SHAWN STEVENSON: And what are you looking for? And that's the thing at, underneath it all is like you're helping to enlighten, again, what are the driving forces behind the desire to do these things? Are these truly, um, efficacious and health-affirming reasons, right? Being able to self-assess and to understand what's going on with your psychology, right?

If you can't do that, should you even be able to make decisions like that?

BEN GREENFIELD: Yeah.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Where is the guardrails on this stuff as well, you know, where, where a kid who's 14 years old is getting access to testosterone.

BEN GREENFIELD: Yeah.

SHAWN STEVENSON: You know? And in reality, again, this m- idea of maxing, that's not actually what it is. Maxing first, well, let's call it the ultimate tier, is maxing what you already have.

BEN GREENFIELD: Mm-hmm.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Right? Yeah. Through the most time-tested means that humans have been utilizing forever. Let's max that stuff and then-

BEN GREENFIELD: Yep ...

SHAWN STEVENSON: Let's get into what you can add into the mix, you know, with the hormone therapies and the, you know, the potential, you know, the surgeries and this kind of stuff so many people are so far from maxing what they have.

Right. So far from it, and then these things become the superficial supplements.

BEN GREENFIELD: Yep.

SHAWN STEVENSON: And there's this huge gap in the middle of where their growth is, because a lot of the things require growth to achieve.

BEN GREENFIELD: Yep. So

SHAWN STEVENSON: what do you

BEN GREENFIELD: Think about that? Yeah. And that, and that's like, you know, not that I wanna throw the entire industry under the bus, but that's some of the failure of the biohacking industry, for example.

There's a lot of shortcutting in that industry. There are a lot of people looking to pop a pill, uh, for, let's say, uh, I don't know, like, like enhancing growth hormone release during sleep instead of lifting weights, you know? Or taking testosterone instead of making sure that micronutrients like vitamin D and magnesium and fish oil and creatine and zinc and some of these precursors are taken care of.

Or, you know, spending 20 minutes with the red light panel instead of just, like, carving out some time to, like, go outside and visit the beach and swim in the water. Uh, or, you know, doing PEMF mats instead of going outside barefoot. Or, you know, getting in the hyperbaric chamber instead of just, like, learning how to breathe properly while you're checking emails during the day.

There, you know, uh, there's, there's a lot of value from both a character and a physiology standpoint to actually doing the hard work. I got lucky in that sense in that, like, I started off in the realm of athletics and exercise physiology. That's my formal background. And then just because I'm a hyper curious guy and kind of a, a, a geek at heart, like, I really liked the idea of all these different technologies and self-quantification methods that I was finding to get the most out of the body and the brain, but with the foundation of the hard work.

So that's part of it, is understanding, I think as you were just alluding to, that a lot of the good things in life, especially from a physical standpoint, don't come from the shortcut, but come from actually getting in there and doing the work. Yeah. And then I think another important part is, um, you know, back to the idea of boundaries.

Um, and I was just thinking about this as you were talking. Like- Metrics are pretty important. Meaning if you look at guys like, let's say like, like people in the industry who I would look up to and re- and respect in the physical culture sector, like, um, let's say like physical culture or health sector. There are like metrics. It's like can you get up and down from the ground using as few limbs as possible? Um, you know, can you get like a 150 or plus on a hand grip dynamometer? Can you hang from a bar for, you know, 90 seconds or two minutes?

Can you, you know, deadlift your, your body weight plus 50%, et cetera? There's no, like, in my opinion, perfect list of metrics from any of these people. You could probably choose, choose any of them. And I've, I've thought in the past about, like, putting my own whatever, like, Greenfield metrics out there. But understanding, like, okay, so if I can hit these metrics, if I can just, like, sit down and stand up using as few limbs as possible and hit that for grip strength, and I can walk 8,000 steps a day, and, um, you know, I have, I have a certain level of strength and can crank out a certain number of push-ups or body weight squats, it's like, I'm good.

Like, I've, I've gotten to that level. But if it's murky what you're actually going for and what your metric is, I think that's another thing that can, that can suck you into this idea of, well, you know what? More is better, and I've got the time, and, uh, uh, you know, I, I can, I can take a little bit more time away from family, or away from family dinners, or away from

relationships, or away from, you know, my faith practice or anything else just to keep on getting better and better with no actual defined metric in sight.

Mm. I ran into this a lot in the Ironman Triathlon community. I was guilty of this myself. You do a, you do a race. You do your Ironman Triathlon, and a lot of people think, "Dude, congratulations. You did it. You, you, you got the medal. You got the trophy. You know, you checked the box." And, uh, you know, I'd do a triathlon, and be standing in line to register for the next one the next morning while I was still just, like, you know, sore and hungover from the one that I'd done before because it was just, like, never enough.

Like, I could do faster, I could go more, I could get more miles in, I could train more. Um, so I think, like, healthy boundaries in the form of metrics is pretty good as well. Like, yeah. Like, you wanna do a marathon? Don't convince yourself it's the healthiest thing in the world to do. But if you wanna do it, and that's your personal Mount Everest, go do it.

But you don't have to do 10. And you don't... You know, much respect to the people that do stuff like this. You don't have to do 50 in 50 states in 50 days. Like, or one on every continent. Like, um, I th- I think that having healthy bound- boundaries and understanding when enough is enough is a good idea. And that, that paints into the training piece too.

We started off, you know, talking about 150 minutes of moderate intensity aerobic exercise is more than enough per week. Uh, so is around 120 minutes of strength training. It's a couple hours, right? It's not the gym for an hour six days a week. It's pretty reasonable the amount of physical activity that you actually need to stay fit.

And I would even say, like, aesthetically, um, let's just use the word, like, aesthetically pleasing enough to have the confidence that you want. And, uh, it's, it's also pretty easy to exceed that, you know, when there's a gym on every corner, and, you know, a lot of social media convincing you that you need to do more and more, and yet another toy or tool or tactic or biohack that you can use.

So, um, you know, a big part of this, I feel like I keep coming back to this, is just, like, freaking, like, self-awareness. Like, understanding when enough is enough and, and what's really important in life.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yeah. Man, I wanna circle back to the very beginning really quickly because when it comes to heart health, cardiovascular health, again, looking at this extreme and what can happen by, you know, e- extreme endurance aspirations, like constantly living there.

When we think about the hardening of arteries, I know most people think about it, that's because of diet, right? Right. It's cholesterol.

BEN GREENFIELD: Right.

SHAWN STEVENSON: You know?

BEN GREENFIELD: Cause I didn't bring my I'm allergic to seed oils card to the restaurant enough times. Yeah.

SHAWN STEVENSON: How, how on earth can that happen as a result of doing this cardiovascular, um, you know, uh I, I don't even know the word.

Yeah, yeah. Just, uh, feasting

BEN GREENFIELD: Yeah, intense voluminous cardiovascular exercise. Yeah. Um, so if, if you look at calcium deposition in the arteries, or particularly in the, in the vasculature in the heart, it's typically a response to inflammation, right? You're, you're laying down a protective cap across an area of vasculature that's been damaged.

Very, very similar to how you might s- build, you know, a scab to repair tissue. The heart works pretty hard, uh, during a lot of these activities and, and it has to recover. And if it's forced to just pump and work the entire time, you are creating some amount of

inflammation, and that inflammation does require some amount of calcium infiltration to actually lay down that protective cap.

If you look at, uh, like I mentioned, a CT angiography, right? That was what I did yesterday where they actually injected a radiographic dye and visualized the entire heart, and you can see not only where blockage might be occurring, but whether the plaque, which is comprised, you know, partially of calcium, is stable or unstable.

Now, the nice part is that with endurance athletes or athletes in general, you know, 'cause, 'cause you see some heart issues in, for example, bodybuilders also. For them, a lot of times it's like an enlarged heart, cardiomegaly, more than it's arterial stiffness, but you still see heart issues. Uh, the plaque in an endurance athlete tends to be more stable, less likely to rupture, break loose, you know, cause an issue, cause, God forbid, you know, a widow-maker or complete blockage or something like that.

But it's still there and it's still an issue when it comes to proper blood flow. And then when I think you stack that with cartilage damage, with, uh, thyroid hormone deficiencies, which tend to be very common in the endurance sports world, typically due to over-exercising and under-eating. Hormonal deficiencies simply because, uh, the way that I think is easiest to think about it is the body tends to down-regulate fertility when whether or not you want to produce offspring, it is under the impression that you're in a time of famine or war or starvation.

And if you're just, like, going to town every single day with any form of exercise that would be considered over-training, you will tend to down-regulate hormones of fertility because nature doesn't want to bring babies into the world in a time of stress. Not to mention you're also depleting a lot of the nutrients that are necessary for things like testosterone and progesterone, et cetera.

So we've got thyroid, we've got the endocrine system, we have the joints, we have the heart, and, uh, I would also say, I feel like I'm really throwing endurance sports in particular under

the bus, but I, I could, I could do this with a lot of the different sports that people are doing. You know, CrossFit, HYROX, bodybuilding.

We could, we could go through the list of the issues that each produce. Um, you also tend to see, like, biomechanical issues, right? Like if, if you look at, I don't know, the body of a marathoner versus a sprinter and do a Google image search for that, you're gonna see two entirely different bodies because a marathoner or a long-distance cyclist, they tend to have weaker glutes.

They tend to have tighter hip flexors. They tend to have a little bit more of a lordotic curve of the spine. They tend to have a forward head posture. They tend to have a lot of the things you would expect from someone who's just, like, hunched over with forward motion for very long periods of time. Um, and, and you could find really healthy examples or healthier examples of triathletes, um, even of marathoners, especially fast ones, of HYROX athletes, of CrossFitters, um, bodybuilders here and there.

Like, you can do some of these sports without overtraining and without overdoing it, and, um, I'm, I'm painting with a pretty broad brush here when I'm talking about the biological blowback of overdoing it. Um, but yeah, like, y- like, you do see issues. And again, my goal here is not for people to stay on the couch, but it's just to, to ask yourself, "Okay," like, "just based on what we know scientifically, am I overdoing it and asking too much of my body?

Or am I doing just enough to, like, stay fit, like, look, feel, and perform relatively well and still have time left over for the things in life that are really important?"

SHAWN STEVENSON: I love it. Makes sense. You're here for a screening of your new film, and as of this recording That time has passed, all right? So I wanna know if people can get access to the film, but also as of the release of this episode, folks that are listening right now, if you're in Austin or you wanna go to Austin, you'll have a screening at towards the end of August- Yep

2026 as well. So tell us a little bit about the film and when people are gonna be able to see it.

BEN GREENFIELD: So I take no credit for the film besides I was the subject matter. Uh, my... Actually, the guy who, who, uh, is the CEO of my company, Caleb Applegate, comes out of the film industry, and he directed, uh, the film, which is called Boundless: The Man Who Became Human, and it tells the story of me seeking, uh, you know, money and fame and, uh, exercise acumen and all these things that we've been talking about at the cost of all in life that I held dear.

And in, uh, in, in a very visual and in-your-face manner shows what happens when things go wrong and how I went about by the grace of God fixing that. And there's a lot of, like, sexy, edgy biohacking stuff in there, too. Like, there's some, you know, it's rated PG-13. Like, there's a lot of stem cells and blood and guts and hacks and even sex talk and, you know, all, all that's in there.

Um, and, uh, so Caleb had people following me around with a video camera, and I wasn't quite sure what he was up to, but, you know, I, I had interviews that I was sitting down and doing that I hadn't done before and, and I was being forced to be very raw and vulnerable with a lot of this stuff. And about six months ago, I sat down, and he had rented out a small theater, and I screened it along with, uh, the executive producer, Zac Efron, who's also very into, like, the whole, like, biohacking health scene.

And, uh, we loved it, and we were like, "Dude, like, we need to show this to people." So yeah, we're on a tour, like you mentioned. Like, right now we're... I'm in LA, uh, at the time of this recording, and then we're going to Austin the end of August, uh, New York City at the beginning of August. Uh, I think we go Miami, London in September.

Uh, and, and then eventually it'll go to streaming. But the whole idea behind it is basically, uh, hopefully a wake-up call to a culture that can take the whole pursuit of health a little bit too far, what happens when that goes wrong, and what to do about it.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Amazing. Amazing. Well, just so people can stay up to date on when the streaming will be available where can they follow you, connect, all that good stuff?

BEN GREENFIELD: This one, uh, would be boundlessdoc.com, like boundless D-O-C.com.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Gotcha. Gotcha. And the social-

BEN GREENFIELD: Uh- For you ... it's just me, Ben Greenfield, uh, life, Ben Greenfield fitness, whatever tags were available. I don't know. Just Google. Just G- Google or Claude or GPT or whatever people are doing these days. Yeah.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Icon alert.

All right. So going back to the emoji, is your, your ph- is your phone isn't in here, which I love, by the way.

BEN GREENFIELD: No. No.

SHAWN STEVENSON: I'm curious of what your most-

BEN GREENFIELD: Detracts from the quality of social conversation, Shawn.

SHAWN STEVENSON: I- Yeah. I'm curious what your most used emojis are right now. Do you know?

BEN GREENFIELD: Oh, I mean, like, my wife and I have a great relationship, so the eggplant's up there.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Eggplant.

BEN GREENFIELD: Uh, um- Easy call ... honestly, dude, like I'm, I'm pretty basic. I'm like a winky face, uh, um, a hearty icon, and I like the, uh, I like the prayer one 'cause it covers a lot of bases. Yes. Right? Am I saying thank you? Am I saying I'm praying for you? Am I saying please? Like, so- It fits- ... sometimes if I don't know what to do, I just throw that one in 'cause it's a real feel-gooder.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Fits almost all the time. Yeah. Yeah. Any occasion. Yeah. It's good for some prayer hands.

BEN GREENFIELD: Yeah, prayer hands plus an eggplant, that's a great one to your wife.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yeah. Well, man, I appreciate you so much truly, and congratulations with the film. And, you know, I'm here, man. I got your back anytime. Cool. Appreciate

BEN GREENFIELD: you.

Thanks, man. I appreciate you.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yeah. The one and only Ben Greenfield, everybody. Thank you so much for tuning into this episode today. I hope that you got a lot of value out of this. If you did, you already know what to do. Share it out with somebody that you care about. Send this directly from the podcast app that you're listening on, or of course, you could take a screenshot and share it on socials.

Tag me. I'm @ShawnModel, and tag Ben Greenfield as well. Share the love, share the inspiration, share the insights. This can be truly helpful for people who are aspiring towards improving their health and fitness, but also the vets, the veterans who might be doing the most, who might be doing a little bit too much.

And also for those who are seeking more fulfillment in their fitness ventures. So there was so much. It was a very rich conversation. And again, I hope that you enjoyed it. We've got some epic masterclasses and world leading experts coming your way very, very soon. So make sure to stay tuned. Take care.

Have an amazing day, and I'll talk with you soon.