



EPISODE 426

# COVID-19 & Mental Health

With Guest Dr. Daniel Amen

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**Shawn Stevenson:** Welcome to The Model Health Show. This is fitness and nutrition expert, Shawn Stevenson and I'm so grateful for you tuning in with me today. This is such an important episode. One of the biggest issues that we're dealing with right now in response with COVID-19 and the big economic, social impacts, health impacts, is a strain on our mental health. And the ramifications are really just starting to unfold. And this is something we have to do something about right now. And so I wanted to bring on the best person in the world to give us some insights about this and to talk about some of the solutions.

Right now, our family structures have shifted dramatically, our social structures, economic structures, there's a lot of stuff that's fluxed up, they're in flux. And I think today you're going to be able to see things from a new point of view. And, again, we've got the best person on the planet to talk about mental health today. It's just such a gift. I'm so grateful to have access to him and for him to share his wisdom. He's worked with tens of thousands of patients over the years, and it's just such a wealth of knowledge. But he's looking at it, it's not just about mental health, it's about where does our mental health stem from? And it's the health of our brains.

And right now, again, with so much being in flux, We're all trying to get adjusted. We've got some different issues we're dealing with, whether it's disconnection from loved ones, physical disconnection, physical separation, whether it's this shocking increase in social media use. I just saw a report yesterday, it is unbelievable. But then for you, you're probably like, yeah, my social media time is gone up quite a bit. We just got, for many of us, more time on our hands, and there's not just necessarily... Some people it's not more time on their hands, but more things to look for to scare the crap out of us, right?

And also a lot of people have their kids at home right now, and here in California, the schools are not opening back up for kids to go back to school this upcoming school year. So people are adjusting to that. At some point, it's just like, your kids, you got to have something for them. And also, summertime is not the same. My summertime as a kid, I'm going down to my grandma's house in the "in the country", and we're swimming in the river, we're fishing, we're doing all that kind of stuff. And so for a lot of kids, they're sheltering in place and they've got a small kind of area where they're able to even go right now. So what do you do? We're leaning more on our technology.

And I was just talking to my son, Braden, my youngest Braden, who is about to be nine years old. It is so crazy. But he's got his favorite little cartoon that we let him watch on his iPad. And I was just talking with him, I was like, "Do you really understand how fortunate you are? There's 24/7 access to cartoons now." 24/7. New variety, so many different cartoons to watch. When I was a kid, we had after-school cartoons, there was maybe like 90 minutes or two hours after school. You got just some GI Joe, you got a little Transformers to throw in there. That's it. The rest of the time, it's like Wheel of Fortune, Murder She Wrote, Magnum PI. It's grandma stuff. Alright, that's what we had.

And then we had the holy grail of cartoons, which was Saturday morning cartoons. You get a bowl of that cereal. You get a bowl of that colorful joy and watch Saturday morning cartoons. What was your favorite? I don't know why, but Muppet Babies was my jam. Then there were random ones that would come and go. There's Slimer and the Real Ghostbusters. There was one, it was like some all-stars, it might have been called All-Stars, but it was Michael Jordan, Wayne Gretzky and Bo Jackson were cartoon characters. I thought that cartoon was lit. But it was like here today gone today.

Anyways, Saturday morning cartoons, you got your couple of hours in, then random stuff starts... Drag racing, pottery shows. That's all you got. You got to live with it. Can you imagine the mental fortitude that developed for us, for our generation, our ability to have delayed gratification? What happened to delayed gratification? We could use a little bit more of that.

But anyway, so how do we manage today's environment when technology is ever-present? There's so much to consume, there's so much to keep us imprisoned in fear. How do we manage all this stuff? And that's one of the things we're going to address today, plus so much more. And before we do, again, a really, really important thing for us to utilize right now when so much of the buying behavior for our food has shifted to delivery services. How can we do this and still not spend a fortune? How can we do this and save money? How can we do this and improve our health? How can we do this and actually support businesses that are doing things the right way? And helping those who are truly in need?

And this is why, my family and I, we buy so much of our food, personal care products, and even home cleaning products, non-toxic, from Thrive Market. Thrive Market, you're able to get all of the same things that you'd get at Whole Foods. Your favorite nut butters, your favorite chia seeds, and sprouted quinoa. Your favorite, cooking oils, your coconut oils, your favorite paleo mayo, it's one of my favorites. Toothpaste, non-toxic personal care products, which would be paying for at Whole Foods, you get for 25% to



50% off at Thrive Market. Delivered right to your door. Huge, huge opportunity. And also right now, Thrive Market is giving away a free gift, up to \$22 value gift, this could be food, this could be a personal care product. It's going to change depending on how quickly you take action on this, but you get their one-year Thrive Market membership, which is going to save you hundreds of dollars every year, at least. Right now, in addition to that, when you get your one-year Thrive Market Membership, you get a free gift. Go to [thrivemarket.com/modelhealth](http://thrivemarket.com/modelhealth), that's [thrivemarket.com/modelhealth](http://thrivemarket.com/modelhealth), together as one word.

Automatically get 25% to 50% off your favorite non-GMO, organic, vegan, Paleo, gluten-free, whatever health category is most important to you, that's all curated from the best companies. You get 25% to 50% off those things already. Plus, you get a free gift right now. So head over to [thrivemarket.com/modelhealth](http://thrivemarket.com/modelhealth). They also take a percentage of the purchases and they are giving back. They're giving memberships to those in need. They've also started the Thrive Market COVID-19 Relief Fund to provide grocery stipends to families facing health or financial hardships due to COVID-19. They've raised over half a million dollars already. It's a company doing a lot of good. They're also saving you a lot of money and getting you the healthiest products for yourself and your family. [Thrivemarket.com/modelhealth](http://Thrivemarket.com/modelhealth). And now let's get to the Apple Podcasts review of the week.

**iTunes Review:** Another five-star review titled "Warm and Intelligent Insight" by Terri C. "Shawn represents a podcast that is intelligent, informative and entertaining. I find this podcast addictive due to Shawn's warm personality, intelligence and well-vetted information, which is all topped off with a great sense of humor. Especially in these uncertain times, full of media hype and propaganda, I find myself tuning into his grounded voice. Listening to his show, I'm soothed by the feeling that I'm getting sound advice from a reasonable friend, thanks to this show."

**Shawn Stevenson:** Awesome. This is a testament, there is such thing as a healthy addiction, by the way. Thank you so much for leaving me that review over on Apple Podcasts. And listen, if you've yet to do so, pop over to Apple Podcasts and leave a review for the show, I appreciate it so much. And on that note, let's get to our special guest and topic of the day.

Our guest today is Dr. Daniel Amen. And he's a double board-certified psychiatrist and 10-Time New York Times best-selling author, with such blockbuster books as Change Your Brain, Change Your Life, Change Your Brain, Change Your Grades and Change Your

Brain, Change Your Body. And his most recent book is The End of Mental Illness. He's also the founder of Amen Clinics, which has eight locations across the United States, and Amen Clinics has collected the largest database of brain scans related to behavior, totaling over 160,000 SPECT scans on patients from 121 countries. And his team has published more than 17 scientific articles, and he's the lead researcher on the world's largest brain imaging and rehabilitation study on professional football players.

Dr. Amen has also hosted 14 national public television shows about the brain, which have aired over 100,000 times across North America, and that's where I first heard his voice and saw his face, is on one of those specials. And it was a PBS special, it was the only station that I can get at this rickety hotel that I was staying at. I was trying to get dressed to go to a meeting and I was stopped in my tracks. I was so captivated by his message, by the information that he was sharing. And from there, I just began to learn from him, read some of his books, and today he's a friend. He's somebody that I'm so grateful for, to have in my life, and have access like this for all of us today at a time when we need him most. I'm just eternally grateful. So let's jump into this conversation with the amazing Dr. Daniel Amen.

Dr. Daniel Amen, one of my favorite humans, and we need you more than ever right now. When we last talked, like I said, the world was very, very different. And I remember I heard you say before that mental health is just as important as physical health. And so I really want to talk today about why is caring for our mental health really more important than ever right now.

**Dr. Daniel Amen:**

Well, Shawn, it's just such a joy to be with you again, I'm so grateful for what you do in the world and how you're serving people, so to have you as a friend is very important to me. So when you asked, I said, "Yes." The pandemic started for me on March 10th. My new book, The End of Mental Illness came out March 3rd. And I started a book tour. But when I went to Tampa, the new cases in Tampa were there. And then I went to Atlanta, and the new cases in Atlanta were there. And then I came home for a few days. And I was headed to New York to do the Mel Robbins Show. We'd scanned her and they were going to do the whole show on my book, and her brain. But as I was in my bathroom, getting ready to go to the airport, the producer called me and said, "Don't come, we're closing the studio." And I was sad for the book, but I was sort of glad not to get on a metal tube, a plane, with COVID-19, at the epicenter, which was in New York City. And that night, I wrote down, "Mental hygiene is just as important as washing your hands," that we need to disinfect our thoughts.

I call it, "Kill the ants," the automatic negative thoughts, that is just going to steal our

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happiness. And that was prophetic. I sort of had a sense the incidence of anxiety, depression, addictions, post-traumatic stress disorder, were going to skyrocket, and indeed they have. We need to be better. And it's just not mental health, it's sort of the point behind *The End of Mental Illness*. I'm not a fan of mental illness, I hate the word, it's demeaning, demoralizing, stigmatizing. If you call somebody mental, that's not a good thing. Yet, on the other hand, if you call someone a brain, that's an awesome thing, and what we've learned from our imaging work is get your brain right and your mind will follow. That mental illnesses shouldn't be called mental. Get rid of that term. They're brain health issues that steal your mind.

And one of the most interesting things during the pandemic, and I figured this out really early on, your best defense against COVID-19 is not going to be a vaccine, or hydroxychloroquine, or Remdesivir, or whatever. Your best defense is your immune system and your decision-making. And so in order to get your brain right, you got to get your body right, that they work as partners, and we can't separate it. I haven't told you this, but just two days ago, I published the world's largest imaging study on how weight impacts the brain. So on 35,000 scans, and what we found, as your weight went up, the function of your brain went down, almost in a linear fashion. And so who's vulnerable for COVID-19? People who're overweight or obese because their fat cells produce too much of a receptor that sort of grabs on to the virus. Getting your body right is essential to getting your mind right.

**Shawn Stevenson:** So powerful. And there's another big component that I was just talking about, is the inflammation component as well, when we're talking about obesity. And what COVID-19 really is, it's a hyper-inflammatory condition that generally, we see it as targeting our lungs, but what makes us more susceptible is inflammation. And it's so funny that this isn't talked about, but neuroinflammation is a big, big concern right now for so many different health issues. So can you talk a little bit about what neuroinflammation is?

**Dr. Daniel Amen:** So when you have low levels of omega-3 fatty acids, or you eat a lot of processed foods, or you have gum disease, or your fat cells, where you have too many of them and they're too big, they produce something called inflammatory cytokines. The damage, we're seeing, every organ in the body, and they can disrupt the blood-brain barrier and then cause inflammation of brain cells. And then you have brain fog, and you can't think, and you're more likely to have strokes and seizures. There's another mechanism we're learning with COVID-19. So inflammation's really important, but COVID-19 is disrupting platelets, and when we look at the first autopsy reports, and they dissect the heart, liver, lungs, kidneys, brain, what they're finding is a myriad of little tiny blood clots that are causing organ failures. And so making sure you have a healthy omega-3 fatty acid level

is really important, because it'll thin your blood just a little bit, and it seems like now that's probably a good thing to do.

**Shawn Stevenson:** So one of the things that we should all be aware of by now is that probably our biggest risk factor is having a pre-existing chronic illness. So obesity, hypertension, type 2 diabetes, are the three major ones that we've seen already. I think it was published in JAMA. But these are all going to go hand-in-hand with how our immune function is going to respond. So this is what I'm hearing. So really focusing on getting our immune system healthy is one of the most important tenets, but also understanding how our brain interacts with our immune system cannot be overlooked. And I think we're getting into this conversation of psychoneuroimmunology, and how our thoughts and how our perception and how the health of our brain impacts our immune system. Is that a good container to state where we're at right now?

**Dr. Daniel Amen:** It's funny, when you bring up psychoneuroimmunology, that's what got me into psychiatry. I had someone I loved who tried to kill herself. But I remember before I went to medical school, I was reading books about how your thoughts, how laughter actually had positive impact on immune system. And then I'd read about treating cancer by using guided imagery, which I thought was just fascinating, how to activate your immune system in a healthy way. And so I've been interested in this topic for a long time. One of my favorite books of all time is called *The Anatomy of an Illness* by Norman Cousins, who was the editor of a very famous magazine, and he had a condition called ankylosing spondylitis, where his immune system was attacking his spine, and it was incredibly painful, and none of the medications were helpful. And he's like, "Okay, to heck with the medicines," locked himself into a room for 500 hours with Laurel and Hardy tapes, and Charlie Chaplin, and other comedians, and at the end of those 500 hours his pain had been cut in half, and over time, his auto-immune disorder went away.

So we can impact our immune system. Some of the simple things to do is you should know and optimize your vitamin D level because that... I really think of it as the immune vitamin/hormone. It's so important, and 80% of the population has sub-optimal levels. Zinc is absolutely critical, vitamin C, mushrooms. I'm a huge fan of lion's mane because it can help your immunity but it can also help your brain. And it sort of looks like a big brain. Yes, it looks like a lion's mane, that's why the name but if you're like me and you're a brainiac, it's like, "No, that looks like a brain, it's so cool."

**Shawn Stevenson:** Yeah, so awesome, so awesome. And I'm just so grateful to be able to talk with you about this because you saw this coming, you saw the ramification coming. And both you and I, we're dedicated to try to help as many people as we can to avoid the fallout



because we have the ramifications from COVID specifically, and infecting people and causing health issues, but we have the ramification of the societal shutdown, something we've never seen before in our lifetime, where we have quarantines, we have shelter in place, we have social distancing. These are all new phenomenons for so many of us, and the fallout of that, which is something that... Right now, we know that about 40 million people are unemployed. So what are we looking at as far as some of the things we need to be on guard about? When so many folks are out of work when we've been distanced from each other, what are some of the issues that can come from that that we're already starting to see?

**Dr. Daniel Amen:**

Anxiety disorders. They were a third of the population before the pandemic, I bet now it's 50%. The incidence of anti-anxiety medications, antidepressants, sleep medications has just skyrocketed since March. In fact, the FDA said we're going to have a shortage of Zoloft, one of the good antidepressants. For every percentage point, unemployment goes up, opioid addictions go up 3.4%. And so unemployment was 3% when this started, as of today it's 11%, and so you just think addictions are going to go up. I figured out the one question you should ask yourself before you propose to your sweetheart, and the one question you should ask yourself is, "Can I live with this person during a pandemic? Where they're the only person I see, where I can't get five hours on a golf course, or go to the mall, can I live with this person?" 'Cause what I said early on, they said divorces are going to go way up because people are like, "Oh, no, can't do this with the pandemic."

And babies are going to go way up because people have more time, they're not having to spend all that time getting ready for work, and driving to work, and dropping the kids off, picking them up. The issue of trauma is going to go up, the people who've lost loved ones, lost their jobs, lost their sense of certainty. I have a new book I haven't told you yet, but I'll send it to you. I have a new book coming out in March called, "Your Brain is Always Listening: Tame the Hidden Dragons That Control Your Happiness, Habits, and Hang-ups." And I talk about the dragons from the past that breathe fire on your emotional brain, and there's 13 from the past, and one of them is the death dragon. If you have a parent who dies when you're young or a sibling, death is always with you. Well now, death is always with everyone. Whenever you pop on your computer or turn on the news, we've lost 150,000 people in the US, and more than 5 million people had this.

We've just been inundated with the idea of death and uncertainty. Now, you were going to die before, and the world really was uncertain before, and you just had the illusion that there was certainty. You can get hit by a car at any time. But to calm the death





dragon is one, you have to make friends with it 'cause he's coming, or she is coming. And I started keeping a list of all the good things about dying, like, I'll never have to have my teeth cleaned again. You're going to have somebody put a sharp, metal object in your mouth for an hour just to scrape your teeth, I'll never have to have a root canal again, all the internet haters will... I won't care about the internet anymore. And so find 10 things about death that are going to be okay with you.

**Shawn Stevenson:** Wow, I love that reframing. Oh, so powerful, so powerful. So one of the big things that I've already taken away from this is that, number one, our thoughts really do control our physiology, our thoughts create chemistry in our bodies, and that can create a cascade of positive or negative effects. And also, we're all going, or to varying degrees, we are going to experience post-traumatic stress syndrome from this experience. And it just made me think about my neighbors next door and their daughter, she's 11 years old, and she, like you said, death is such in the forefront of her mind now where it didn't even exist before. And she's obsessed with protecting her family right now, and it's an invisible thing that she's in fear of. And how do you operate in a world post-this? And I think that, again, you and I both and what our lives are going to be dedicated to, is how do we help as many people to find some solace, to find a new life, or a new way of adapting to these changing conditions? When truly, I think... And I don't know if you agree with this, but as it is now if we don't do something, we can lose millions more lives from the fallout of how our society has been changed so much.

**Dr. Daniel Amen:** Oh, I think there's no question about that. And there'll be a lot of people talking about mental health, but not many people talking about brain health. And I always think of my patients in these four big circles, is you have a biology so we have to talk about brain health. Underneath anxiety, depression, addictions, ADHD, PTSD, there's a biology to that. Yes, there's a psychology or your mind, so think of it like hardware and software. There's a social circle, how you're connected to your wife, to your babies, to the people you work with, so think of that like network connections. And then there's this spiritual connection, which is why the heck do you care? What is your deepest sense of meaning and purpose? And so for us to deal with, let's call it post-pandemic stress disorder.

To deal with that, we have to really work on optimizing our brains and our bodies, physical health. Not believe every stupid thing we think "kill the ants". Work on our relationships. And one of the things with your 11-year-old is this quote I love from Elisabeth Kübler-Ross who wrote one of the best books on death and dying. She said, "It is partially that the denial of death is partially responsible why people live empty meaningless lives. Because when you believe you will live forever, you don't take care of the relationships you need to take care of today." And so with her fears, like I



understand, because I always want you with me, but we all die which means we have to make today count, we have to make today special. And both you and I know part of mental health is being able to live in the present with joy, while at the same time planning for the future.

**Shawn Stevenson:** Yeah.

**Dr. Daniel Amen:** And too often people get their present is infected by the past because they never worked through those dragons, and it just disrupts their ability to have joyful meaningful lives.

**Shawn Stevenson:** Yeah, I totally agree. And also future casting, all of them fall out as well.

**Dr. Daniel Amen:** Let me just expand on it a little bit where you bring your attention just like you said, determines how you feel.

**Shawn Stevenson:** Yeah.

**Dr. Daniel Amen:** And so I have these rituals that I would be honored if you'd adopt, or the people listening would adopt, every morning I start the day with, "Today is going to be a great day." As soon as my feet hit the floor, "Today is going to be a great day." And it's on the top of my to-do list. And we have breakfast with the kids. Why is your day going to be a great day? Because when you do that, your unconscious mind will begin to find why it's going to be good. When I go to bed at night, I have another ritual, I say a prayer and then I say, or I ask myself this question, what went well today? And I have to find three things. And so tonight, you're going to be one of the three things as we got to hang out, and that makes me happy.

People have habits. You have habits. They're either good or they're bad, they serve you or they hurt you, it's not that hard. You just have to do it for a couple of weeks and then you'll always do it. And the day my dad died, so you and I had talked about during this pandemic, it was not easy for me. My mom, my dad, my sister got COVID. My mom and dad were in the hospital, I couldn't visit them, and I take care of their medical stuff, and five days later they came out but my dad really never got better. And a month later he died. And the day he died, I'm getting ready to take them to the doctor. And my mom calls me, he stopped breathing, so I race over there, call the paramedics, and I did that exercise the day he died when I went to bed that night. And it helped me so much, 'cause you go, "What would go well on the day you lose your dad?" I must have gotten 500 texts from my friends, from his friends on how much they loved him, and I got to

be there for my mom. There were several funny sweet moments and I'm never going to forget it.

**Shawn Stevenson:** Yeah.

**Dr. Daniel Amen:** But that's because I have the mental discipline to have the right habits because I know where I look will always determine how I feel. And so you can train your brain to look at the haters, or you can train your brain to look at the people who bring you up. And you don't want to be a hater of yourself, that's abusive, right? And so when I hear my patients talking, I'm like, "Would you ever talk to your children like this? This is like really bad." It's like, you need to talk to yourself like you'd talk to someone you love because if you're not loving yourself, you're going to have a heck of a time with other people.

**Shawn Stevenson:** Yeah, yeah. That's abusive relationship you can't get away from, you can't hide from yourself. That's so powerful. And thank you so much for sharing that. I kind of got choked up. Just that process, because I don't think a lot of people realize this. And I've talked about this before in the show, but my grandmother was like, she raised me, she instilled a sense of value in me, a template of unconditional love, all of these wonderful things, and losing her in a very abnormal condition, so many of my family ended up breaking down. In some ways, didn't recover from losing her. Being on medication, being... Just kind of trapped. And people ask me, "How are you able to smile? How are you able to move on? How are you able to feel so good when you talk about her?" And just literally, in that moment when it all happened, I had a moment of pain. But I quickly shifted and I just thought about all of the beauty that I had access to, all the gifts that she gave me, all the incredible messages that she instilled in me that I get to live on and represent for her.

It literally boils down to our perception. And right now, we're all experiencing a massive and massive upside-down world right now. But I think... And I'm so grateful for having this conversation because I think that we can really get through to people today on how important it is to guide your mind where you want it to be and how you are perceiving what's happening right now.

**Dr. Daniel Amen:** Yeah, now, that's beautiful. And it's just... It's a practice. And so many people will try it once and it doesn't work, say, "Don't try it again." And I'm like, "Let's see. If you need to lose 50 pounds, you're going to have one salad. And because you don't lose 50 pounds, you won't develop a discipline around eating." It makes no sense at all. It takes discipline. That's why I call it mental hygiene or mental discipline.



Another discipline is whenever you feel sad or mad or nervous or out of control. Write down what you're thinking and then just ask yourself if it's true, right? Once you get your brain right, you then have to program it, and along with that is turn off the news. Because the news is not the news, the news has changed in our lifetime to clickbait. That they're looking... Breaking news. You've seen this, right? CNN, Fox, whoever, breaking news, it's always breaking news. Stop it, you said this for three days now. But they do it because they know the neuroscience of clicks and it goes with fear. And so if you watch the news, they're going to do nothing but scare you and make you feel bad. And so I maybe spend 10 minutes a day with the news, so what happened today? Kanye's running for president, something interesting, and I'm like, "Alright, let's focus. We have Amen Clinics and Brain MD and I have children. Let's focus on doing the right thing."

**Shawn Stevenson:** When you just said Kanye running for president, I immediately thought, "I wonder if this is going to age well when people listen to this episode in five years."

So another new thing that we're all experiencing is this social distancing. So, what does social distancing mean for our brains? Can we talk about that a little bit?

**Dr. Daniel Amen:** Well, it's a bad term. Words matter. We should absolutely not be socially distancing, we should be socially more connected than ever. You should be physically distancing because you don't want to spread a virus that is infectious before you have symptoms. So physically distancing, that's important. To be smart, right? Your best defense against this virus is your decision-making. When you go out, wash your hands, don't touch people you don't know, be careful, be thoughtful. But at the same time, isolation is really bad for your brain. And so, now we have tools. We can FaceTime, we can Skype, we can Zoom, we can text, we could be connected.

And one exercise I like is... A lot of people talk about the research on gratitude. I actually like appreciation better because appreciation is gratitude squared. So we have a website I like called BrainFitLife, and one of the exercises on it is, "Who am I going to appreciate today?" And if you can just find one person a day and then send him or her a text or an email or call them and just say, "Hey, I was thinking about you today and I really appreciate you." What you're doing and why I call it gratitude squared is you're building a bridge to another person so you're giving it away, which means you're helping their day be better.

**Shawn Stevenson:** I love that. It just made me think of the statement, "What you appreciate, appreciates."

**Dr. Daniel Amen:** I like that a lot.

**Shawn Stevenson:** This is just mind-blowing stuff. We've got so much more to come, everybody. Sit tight. We got to take a quick break. We'll be right back.

For years, people come into my office wanting to get programs designed for improving their health and wellness and accomplishing their goals. But the biggest question that people would ask me is, "Shawn, what can I take for more energy?" Now, what I first expressed to them is that humans don't necessarily get energy. We create energy through our interaction with food and nutrients and also through our movement. Even as I'm moving now, I'm generating something called piezoelectricity. It's a form of energy. It's kind of a current in our bodies that we're all capable of when we are simply moving our bodies. So again, humans don't get energy, we make energy.

But the things that we are interacting with our nutrition can be paramount to our experience of having energy. And today, when people are looking for energy because of these crazy things that we have access to today, we're chugging down these "energy drinks" that are causing more harm than good because they're hitting on one channel, just being a nervous system stimulant. And that's okay in some small doses, but when we're doing that over and over... Because what generally happens is we get a correlating crash. We take something that spikes our nervous system, then when it starts to calm down and cool down, it goes even lower than it was before and we need to take something else again. So whether it's an energy drink or going ham at the local coffee shop over and over again, we start to actually lose the resilience of our receptor sites for this caffeine, and our body doesn't even use it as good as it once did.

And many people have had that experience where one cup of coffee, that first experience was life-changing. Right? It was like... There was a... The music came on, and you fell in love like, "Oh my gosh, this exists." But then after that, you need two cups, three cups. And we have to have a better strategy because I'm absolutely a fan of coffee and of caffeine because of some of the benefits it has. For example, on human metabolism. Studies show that caffeine can increase your metabolic rate by upwards of 11%. That means your body's ability to burn calories. And a study published in the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition found that most of the increase in metabolism from consuming caffeine is from the increase in burning of fat, so it is triggering your body to burn fat.

So that might make some of us run out and want to take a bunch of caffeine. But there are a different versions of caffeine. The source that you get it from matters a lot



because there are dirty versions. There's dirty caffeine, right? But we want to go for the clean stuff. There's clean... There's a big clean eating movement. We need to be more intentional and clean in our sources of things like coffee as well because dirty caffeine... Because what good things in life come with the word dirty attached to it? We got dirty clothes, nobody likes dirty clothes, dirty bulking, dirty looks. Nothing good comes with the word dirty attached to it, except maybe Christina Aguilera's 'Dirty'. That was pretty hot when it came out.

But bottom line is this, we want to get clean sources of caffeine. So organic coffee is the way to go. So we're not consuming pesticides and herbicides or rodenticides that do in fact influence our microbiome because they're meant to destroy small organisms. And guess what our gastro-intestinal tract is made of? These small organisms. And they can damage our endocrine system and also our nervous system as well. So organic is definitely paramount. But also, I want to see a reduction in the amount that we're taking by balancing it out with something else that provides the human body a natural source of energy production that happens within ourselves.

And there was a study that was published in Medicine and Science in Sports and Exercise that looked at 30 healthy people for six weeks and recorded the effects of cordyceps medicinal mushroom on their performance. The group that added cordyceps to their daily regimen had twice the oxygen intake of the control group who didn't get the cordyceps. And this oxygen by the way, when we're talking about energy, this is the number one thing that we need. Oxygen is the most important thing, far more important than anything else. You can only last a few minutes without oxygen and oxygen is essential in our cells in providing nutrients to our cells. So this is really important.

And another study that was conducted with the same researchers found that consumption of cordyceps medicinal mushroom led to a 9% increase in aerobic activity from taking cordyceps. It helps you to perform better, it directly influences your stamina, and it doesn't have these weird crazy after-effects of having you crash. Alright, so this is why I love the blend of cordyceps medicinal mushroom and organic coffee that you get with Four Sigmatic. Alright, and I highly highly recommend checking it out. I absolutely love it. It's what I had today. It's [foursigmatic.com/model](http://foursigmatic.com/model), that's F-O-U-R-S-I-G-M-A-T-I-C.com/model, and you get 15% off all of their incredible mushroom coffees, mushroom hot cocoas and mushroom elixirs as well.

If you're not a fan of coffee, you can get cordyceps by itself. You can get Reishi and Chaga all from great sources, and they're dual extracted which sets Four Sigmatic in a



league of their own. This means it's a hot water extract and alcohol extract to give you all of these nutrients that you're hearing about in these studies. You're making sure that you're getting everything. Alright, so head over there and check them out, [foursigmatic.com/model](http://foursigmatic.com/model). And now, back to the show.

Alright, we're back and we're talking with Dr. Daniel Amen. And we know that there are a lot of people who are feeling disconnected right now, who are feeling lonely right now. Obviously, this social distancing could mean isolation. Can just being in those states, can that affect our immune system?

**Dr. Daniel Amen:** Well, if we think of all the people in care facilities where their families can't visit, it will kill those people early because of the heartbreak that goes with loneliness. And if you have someone in a care facility, make appointments on a regular basis to call them, to reach out to them, to face-time with them. It is just critical, the lack of touch, the lack of connection is going to damage their immune systems and make them more likely to get sick with the virus. Yeah, we know isolation is just terrible for developing brains, but it's terrible for any brain.

**Shawn Stevenson:** Yeah, and also just because you're at home with your family does not mean that you don't feel alone or you can't feel alone. So what are some things that people can do within the context of their nuclear family right now? Because I know at first it was cool, it was like, "Oh, we're just all... It's like we're all indoor camping for a couple of weeks." But then it turned into this. So what are some of the things that people... That you've been seeing need to focus on in keeping connection and feeling that sense of anti-loneliness within the context of their own household?

**Dr. Daniel Amen:** Well, it's so important to develop routines and rituals. And one of the things I did early on... So I have this mantra in my head that I can handle whatever happens. And so before we go on vacation, I tell myself 12 things are going to go wrong. Like when we went to Europe. I'm like, "12 things are going to go wrong, and I'm not going to be upset until the 13th thing goes wrong." And that has served me so well, and it's rare I get anywhere close to my expectation of things going wrong. And so when the pandemic started and my 16-year-old had a fit, 'cause she just got her first job, just got her driver's license. Independence was hers. And she had a fit. And I said, "Okay, there's going to be a rule in this house. Everybody gets a tantrum a week. You have one tantrum a week. Nobody's saying anything to you. Hopefully, you're smart enough to apologize.

And now we're at week 21. No one's had 21 tantrums, so it's sort of okay. So grace is really important. And this is a historic time to put back the American family. The



American family has been under assault for the last three generations. Here in California, 90% of mom's work outside the home. And children have been raised by other people, by systems rather than by their own family. And I know, I get hate mail when I say it, I don't think that's in children's best interest that we have three generations of tired women. And half my organization is women, so I'm not saying women shouldn't work. So don't get that. But hear what I'm saying, 'cause I'm also a child psychiatrist. The bond between moms and dads and children has been strained by the fast pace in our society. Eight families out of 10 report they're closer to their children. Use this historic time to fix your relationship with your kids. And on Facebook, my wife and I did this. Okay. Parenting during a pandemic, and it's super simple. Know what you want. What are the goals? What goals do I have for my kids? And what goals do I have for myself as a parent? Write it down. Post rules.

Society needs rules. And my favorite rule is don't make a problem. No more than five rules. I had an OCD patient once, who posted a 108. No, don't do that. Notice what you like more than what you don't like. I mean, that's how we train animals, right? We don't beat them. We train them by noticing what we like. And one of my favorite rules is if you have a tantrum to get your way, the answer's no. It's always going to be no, no matter what you do. Go ahead and have a tantrum. And if you can enforce that rule, you will not raise entitled spoiled children. You'll have a greater sense of peace at home. And so many of the ADD kids, parents have been in denial that the child has ADD because the parent has ADD too. And they're like, "Oh, the teacher is bad, the school's bad." Now they're seeing the child really does have ADD because they're doing schoolwork with them, get them assessed. And it doesn't necessarily mean medication. There are all sorts of natural ways to get on top of that. But undiagnosed or untreated ADD in households, it's chronically stressful in those households. And so learn about your kids, fix your relationship or optimize, and you'll make this pandemic the most important time in the development of your children's lives.

**Shawn Stevenson:** That's so powerful, so powerful. Now with that, and it's a great opportunity, as you said if we take advantage of it. Something else that's been skyrocketing, that could be another potential... Because before it was time and busyness, now social media time has skyrocketed. I just saw a report yesterday before I sent you a message, and I want to talk about that. Because during this time of social-economic shut-down, like I said, social media time has filled the void for a lot of people. What kind of effect does that have on our brains when we shift from our busyness of our day-to-day to more social media time? And what can we do right now, by the way?

**Dr. Daniel Amen:** Well, I think some social media time is good 'cause it helps us stay connected. Too much





will melt your brain. It's not good. And in my new book, *The End of Mental Illness*, I talk about the evil ruler. If I was an evil ruler, how would I create mental illness in America? I would let companies like Google and Facebook... They're going after mind share in your children. I used to get after Coca-Cola and McDonalds because they're going after stomach share for your children. They're actively marketing to children like Juul did. We have to be very careful with gadgets, gadgets that follow us, that know our preference, that feed us, ads based on what we look at. We need to be really thoughtful and careful that the gadgets don't make us dumb over time. So I think supervising yourself... What I want you to do with your free time is new learning. So if you find something... A lot of people go to these games that just steal hours and hours and hours. Whether it's a language, or music, or gardening, or cooking, I want you to spend this time learning something that you've never done before because that grows brain cells.

**Shawn Stevenson:** Awesome, awesome, and there's so... We have so much access right now as well. There's so many wonderful... You could learn from the best person in each field on how to do that particular thing. If you want to write a script, this is the time to do it. If you want to learn how to cook better, Gordon Ramsey will teach you. There's so much access we have. It's just where is our time going to be devoted? Is it into learning something new that can add value to our lives in so many different ways or is it going to be to the gossip which is... You could get a little smidget of the gossip, just like a smidget of the news, but this is a great opportunity to grow yourself. So with that said, obviously, they're... A big percentage of this is folks passing the iPad over to the kid and trading in one thing for another. And again, I want to make this very clear. There is definitely room for that. Sometimes you just need a break. Let the kid have the iPad, watch a show, whatever, play video games, and also to be able to connect. That's another thing my son has been doing. He's been playing Roblox, I think it's called, with his friend. I'm not a Roblox expert, but he gets on there online with this friend and they have a great time and interaction, and they're going to these different worlds.

And they're talking about coding and building their own stuff. It's really... It's cool. It's a cool way to interact. But we also need to be aware that... And I want to ask you about this. At a time when, especially in elementary school, there's so much mental, emotional, social development with kids being able to interact with each other. That's not possible right now, especially here in California for kids to be face-to-face and interact in that social paradigm. So what are some of the things that... Because it's going to be a concern for a lot of folks. What are some of the things that we can create or encourage with our kids right now? And I've already seen these messages. A lot of parents feel... They're more worried about their child than anything else as far as them being able to get access to learning, getting access to other children to be able to "play"

and just to "find some normalcy" right now. So if you could, what are some things that we can employ to create some normalcy for our kids?

**Dr. Daniel Amen:** It's funny, while you were talking... You're actually from the Midwest, right Shawn?

**Shawn Stevenson:** That's right, I'm a transplant here. It's only been a year. It's been so crazy.

**Dr. Daniel Amen:** Yeah, I remember when you just came. And I was just thinking of my friend Earl, who grew up on a farm in Minnesota, and he's just one of the most balanced people I know, and had lots of alone time growing up because his city where he grew up in... Not city, but the county was small. And being on a farm, he just had a lot of alone time. Alone time's not the problem. The problem is how are the parents doing? If mom and dad are doing okay, children are like violins, they play the mood states of their parents. And so really having enough time for yourself so that you manage your moods, you manage your anxiety, you're not drinking and acting dumb. That's really the most important thing you can do for your child. This period of time, it's going to be over. Now it might not be over 'til the end of 2021 but it's going to go away. Are you going to be proud of how you acted between now and then? And that's what I asked myself. I was an army psychiatrist, so I understand war and we're clearly at war with COVID-19. And you understand, wars have their own courses. They don't just go away when you want them to. And ultimately if you end up being a prisoner of war, it's your mindset that gets you out, that gets you home.

And so I'm like, "Well, I can do anything for a year. Let me do the right thing." And if I model healthy behavior and healthy thinking patterns, guess what? You're the one teaching these kids now, it's not the other kids. I've been a fan of homeschooling for a long time, because in homeschooling, who has the most influence? It's not a teacher that I don't know and can't even control, which of the teachers my kid gets in school, I'm going to have the most influence over them, and I sort of like that.

**Shawn Stevenson:** Yeah, I love it. I love you keep shifting it back to opportunity, and this is just a testament to who you are, all the work that you've put in, and all the people that you've served. And I love talking with you. Right now, I feel more empowered and I feel more capable. Because again, this stuff affects all of us. And, I know that you said that you just released this new report, correct? So, is this study... So, what was the underlying result, when we're talking about obesity in relationship to the brain? Or, is the brain... I would imagine the volume of the brain itself might be affected?

**Dr. Daniel Amen:** Well, other people have published studies that basically said as your weight went up,



the size of your brain went down. Which would just scare the fat off anybody. If you're overweight, so think of BMI, normal is 18.5 to 25, 25 to 30 is overweight, over 30 is obese and over 40 is morbidly obese. So it's basically a measure of height versus weight. And for people who are overweight, they had 4% less volume in their brain and their brain looked eight years older than normal-weight people. For people who were obese, they had 8% less volume in their brain and their brains looked 16 years older than healthy people. So I published two studies before, one on our normal population and one on our NFL group. I did the largest study on active and retired NFL players. And what we found was, as their weight went up, blood flow to their brain went down.

But we got a grant from a family in Hong Kong, we'd helped like 40 people in the family, and we put all of our scans into a searchable database. So now the database, that's got 70,000 scans in it. And, when we were able to get BMI in there, I went, "Let's look at normal weight, overweight, obese, morbidly obese in 35,000 scans". So it's the largest imaging study ever done looking at brain function and weight. And there was a linear correlation, as your weight went up, the function of your brain went down in very important areas of the brain. Areas that put you at risk for Alzheimer's disease and for mental health issues like depression. And it was published in the Journal of Alzheimer's Disease, and George Perry, who's the Senior Editor, the Editor-in-Chief, he wrote, "We are starting to learn that Alzheimer's disease, is a disease of aging. It's a lifestyle disease. We're not going to find one pill to fix Alzheimer's disease, because there are many different roads to it, and one of those roads, Dr. Amen has just shown, is being overweight or obese."

Now, why should we care? It's the biggest brain drain in the history of the United States. 72% of the population is overweight, 42% of us are obese, and if you actually look at... Cause I know COVID has been hurting African-Americans more than Caucasians, they have a significantly higher percentage of overweight and obesity. I think of that as racism, that if we're not taking care of all of our population, and that many African-Americans grow up in food deserts, where they don't have access to healthy food at a reasonable cost, that will just keep them down and that shouldn't be okay with anybody.

**Shawn Stevenson:** Yeah, he's so right. I for one I was born into it, and I didn't know that there was anything outside of that. And it's a big mission of mine as well, to help people get educated, to get people access. But what would be your ideal book? Because now we know that this is obviously our risk of severe symptoms and also our mortality rate goes up if we're not physically healthy if we're overweight. But now we're also getting another affirmation of what this does to our brain. And you've shared conclusively that our brain



health is our biggest defense against COVID and the way that we perceive all what's going on, how we manage ourselves within a construct of COVID, it's so important. So, Change Your Brain, Change Your Body? Would that be one for everybody check out?

**Dr. Daniel Amen:** Yes, or I think 'The End of Mental Illness' is the best thing I've written. And it really teaches you how to get healthy. There's a great chapter in it called 'Food Made Insanely Simple'. And I talk about the connection between food and mental health issues and what's the ideal brain diet. And the ideal brain diet question is when you go to eat something, "Is this good for my brain, or bad for it?" And if you can answer that with information and love, love of yourself, love of your spouse, love of your children, love of your mission, you're going to start eating better. And people go, "Oh, but I don't like any foods that are healthy for me." That's a lie. My nephew has Tourette Syndrome, and I put him on a very specific diet and he came to stay with me for four days and he said, "I don't like any of those foods." And I'm like, "Is that true?" So I made it our mission to find 20 foods he loved that loved him back. So I don't know, Shawn, if you've ever been in a bad relationship with anyone, I certainly have and I'm 66, there's no way I'm doing that anymore. And I'm damn sure not doing it with food. So I am only going to be in love with foods that love me back. And at the end of the four days, we'd actually found 50 foods he loved, that loved him back. And now he's well over 80 foods.

**Shawn Stevenson:** Amazing. Amazing. The End of Mental Illness is one of the best books of the year by far. Everybody should have that in their library. Before you even came out, you shared with me is the most cited book, you've had the most research going into it, but it's just enjoyable to read. You're so good at this. All the incredible books, all the incredible New York Times Best Sellers. And it's just such a gift. You're such a wealth of knowledge for everybody, and I'm so grateful to have this conversation. Thank you for sharing your time with us today. I'm grateful I could be able to reach out and to get you in here. We need you right now. So please keep it coming. I want everybody to follow Dr. Amen on social media as well. What is your Instagram handle?

**Dr. Daniel Amen:** @docamen.

**Shawn Stevenson:** @docamen. And also, we want to direct people to... They could find your book where?

**Dr. Daniel Amen:** Facebook. Facebook too, Dr. Daniel Amen. I have been on 75 times, doing Facebook Lives. So, sort of before I went to bed, I'd go live and go, "Let's talk about the pandemic". They can learn more about the clinics, we have eight, soon to be nine clinics, we're going to open Dallas in October, in the middle of a pandemic. Amenclinics.com, so Amen like the last word in a prayer, clinics.com.

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**Shawn Stevenson:** Perfect. Dr. Amen, I appreciate you so much.

**Dr. Daniel Amen:** Thanks Shawn.

**Shawn Stevenson:** Awesome. Alright everybody, thank you so much for tuning into the show today. I hope you got a lot of value out of this. So many takeaways from this episode. Today, you get a tantrum permission slip, alright? One a week, you could flip out if you need to, but just know that that is not the way to get what you want, but sometimes we just got to express ourselves. Whether you need to get yourself a heavy bag, whether you need to just get a room you could just go and just run and just... You know there's these places you can go where you could just break stuff? Did you know that? They're probably closed right now. But, what a fantastic idea. But just understand that you have the right to be upset, right now. Our lives are so dramatically different, but at the end of the day, it's up to us to choose how we respond to what's happening. It's up to us to choose how we perceive what's happening. We have to be empowered within our own lives, within our own psyche, before we can empower others and help to shift where all of this is going, because we're going to need all of us collectively to do that. And I appreciate you so much for tuning into the show, make sure to follow Dr. Amen on social media, he's always dropping good stuff.

And also pick up the End of Mental Illness, it's a super important book right now, it's so funny that that book would come out like a week before the shutdown. Yeah, I don't think that's an accident at all. But I'm just grateful for you and hopefully this provided some new tools and insights that you can add to your life as the story continues to unfold. And I appreciate you. I want to continue to inspire your greatness because nothing that's happening right now is going to stop you from becoming the person that you are meant to be. As a matter of fact, all of this I believe, is helping to evoke the gifts and talents and capacities that you have within you. Alright, this is the time right now. So, let's employ some of these little things we picked up today and help to transform our own worlds, the worlds of our families, and then we can stretch and reach out to our communities at large. I appreciate you for tuning in today, take care, have an amazing day, and I'll talk with you soon.

And for more after this show, make sure to head over to [themodelhealthshow.com](http://themodelhealthshow.com). That's where you can find all of the show notes, you could find transcriptions, videos for each episode, and if you got a comment, you can leave me a comment there as well. And please make sure to head over to iTunes and leave us a rating to let everybody know that this show is awesome. And I appreciate that so much. And take care, I

promise to keep giving you more powerful, empowering, great content to help you transform your life. Thanks for tuning in.

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