

# **THE MODEL HEALTH SHOW**

**EPISODE 593**

## **The Mind-Blowing Benefits Of Eating With Friends & Family**

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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. Right now, we're on a mission to transform the health and well-being of our society, including our world family. But specifically, here in the United States right now, recent estimates show that diet-related chronic diseases cost the United States economy a staggering \$1 trillion each and every year. Now, this isn't uniquely a United States issue. Diet-related diseases have become a global issue. In fact, a massive meta-analysis recently published in The Lancet titled 'Health Effects of Dietary Risk in 195 Countries' examined the links between poor diet and the skyrocketing rates of chronic diseases in our world today.

The scientists determined that poor diet kills 11 million people around the world every year. The researchers stated, "Our findings show that sub-optimal diet is responsible for more deaths than any other risks globally, highlighting the urgent need for improving human diet across nations." The researchers stated that poor diet is responsible for more deaths than any other issue around the world. But what are we doing about it?

Processed food manufacturers with the assistance of government regulations that allow them to perform as they do in our societies, in our communities are flooding our communities, flooding store shelves with disease-causing foods. Creating an atmosphere where we're inundated, we're surrounded by the very foods that cause the diseases that, again, this is the number one risk for death globally, is from these low-quality foods. Now, today we're experiencing an interesting phenomenon where more people are dying from the overconsumption of these foods than from not getting enough food to eat. There's been a change that's happened in our society just within the last couple of generations, where we're dying from excess rather than not enough.

But again, it's the quality of the food that matters more than anything, and also understanding the industries and entities that are leveraging this. That are taking advantage of this. And again, providing our families with really low-quality food and making that normalized. Because the truth is, food can be a powerful tool for healing and for happiness, but it can also be a powerful weapon for degradation and disease. It really depends on what we're eating. But today's episode is looking at something very interesting. It's looking at stacking conditions in our favor to make healthier choices automatic. Because as mentioned, we're inundated, often surrounded by low quality choices. But we're going to address a practical lifestyle intervention that all of us can make right now at this very moment and create a layer of protection against diet-related diseases for our families. Because the truth is, we might be under the illusion that

we're making the choices of what we eat by ourselves. We're like, "I'm a big boy. I'm a big girl. I make my own choices."

We might be under the illusion that that's taking place, but the reality is, and as the research clearly indicates, our environment and more interestingly what you're going to learn today, whom we're eating with has a huge impact on our diet and health outcomes. Our thoughts, our beliefs, our actions, how we associate with the world around us is heavily influenced by our environment. Again, our environment and the people within that environment. And we've quickly shifted from a species that prepared and ate food together for thousands upon thousands of years to today, frequently eating in isolation with processed foods and mind-numbing media. What's the real impact of this shift that's taken place, just within the last couple of generations? Did eating together actually help protect human health in some way.

Well, several studies have now demonstrated how much the simple act of eating together as a family can influence the outcomes of our food choices. For instance, researchers at Harvard University recently uncovered that people who consistently eat dinner with their families frequently consumed more fruits and vegetables and significantly less processed food and soda. Their data analysis also showed that increased frequency of family dinner was also associated with higher intakes of several key nutrients that support human health and defend the body against numerous diet-related diseases. Specifically eating together as a family increased the consumption of calcium, of iron, of B vitamins, vitamin C, vitamin E, lower the glycemic load of the food that they were eating, and also lower the intake of trans fats.

What! How crazy is that? That the simple act of eating together as a family has all of these benefits as far as what we're taking in in a beneficial fashion and what we're avoiding from a detrimental perspective. Who knew that the conditions in which we eat, and specifically the people that we are eating with could have such a profound impact on what we're actually eating? I know that I didn't. In the environment that I grew up in I had no idea that this was even a thing. But it makes sense if we're looking at human biology and how we evolved as a species.

And if we're constantly trying to target the food choices themselves, telling people, "Don't eat that stuff, that's bad. Shame, shame, shame, I know your name. Don't eat that. Eat these things." If we're constantly trying to target the food choices themselves without addressing the environment and the family culture around eating, then we're really missing the point. Because this is more of a foundational component that's determining the food choices rather than trying to treat the symptom of the food choice itself. As the data indicates, having a family ritual of eating together makes it easier to eat better things. According to the data published in the Journal of the American Medical Association Network and the journal

pediatrics, children and adolescents are at vulnerable stages for the development of environment-fostered obesity.

The researchers uncovered that eating together as a family more often provides an added layer of protection against obesity and several other health conditions. Their data revealed that children and young adults who share family meals three or more times per week are more likely to be in a healthy weight range and have a healthier diet and eating pattern than those who share fewer than three family meals together. Additionally, and this is incredibly important as well, these children were far less likely to engage in disordered eating. This is another epidemic that isn't getting a lot of press, which is the rampant increase in disordered eating amongst our children. This is one of those insulators against these behavior patterns, is eating together more often as a family.

Now, these three meals per week together as a family appears to be the minimum effective dose to create this insulation. So, adopting this, putting this in your back pocket. We'll talk more about this, and we'll get into some specific application later on the show, that making an intention to make this the barometer at which we're operating by, again, that three meals per week together as a family can create real health insurance. That, again, it's affirmed repeatedly in the data. Now, this is very, very special to me because, again, rather than trying to treat the symptoms of disordered eating, the symptoms of poor diet choices leading to diet-related illnesses, which is the number one cause of illness in our world today. Rather than treating the symptoms, we're addressing the core issues around our behaviors. And a lot has to do with our environment.

I grew up in a family with a strong history of obesity, and I can literally count on my two hands the number of times that we sat down together with our nuclear family, my mother, stepfather, brother, sister, and myself. I can count on my two hands the number of times that we actually sat down together as a family and ate together. We would often eat at the same time, but it was more like a free for all. We'd grab and go. Grab, find a spot, usually in front of the TV or something. Some kind of separation takes place. I would eat with my brother and sister often, but just our family culture wasn't constructed in such a way that we even knew that this was important in the first place, but this wasn't something that we were able to take advantage of because we simply didn't have the environmental input or the education that it even mattered.

Because with these pieces of data, it can be very easy to point the finger at our families, at our caretakers for our personal habits. Because we are indeed a product of our environment. But the truth is, you're not just a product of your environment. And I've said this many times before, we're also creators of our environment. Humans are unique in that we can consciously, intentionally change our environment to change our outcomes, to change our influences. We

have the ability to create an environment that makes health easier. We have the ability to create an environment that is more affirmative for our health and well-being, for our mental health, for our physical health. Or we can unconsciously... And this can also happen unconsciously, we can create a healthy environment. But we can unconsciously, oftentimes, today, create an environment where health-detracting practices are normalized.

And so again, it's easy to place blame on our personal behaviors, on the behaviors that we picked up from our parents, from our caregivers, but that's not what this is about, because we simply can't blame our eating behaviors on our parents because it's a cultural phenomenon. Our parents oftentimes are doing the best that they know how to do with the knowledge that they have at that time. And I have a unique experience because I also have other childhood experiences where I did have more structure and routine and a sense of certainty from the kindergarten age to second grade, from kindergarten to second grade, I lived with my grandmother, and I was pretty much the only kid in the house a lot of the time. Sometimes my cousin, Candy would be over, and maybe one of my other cousins would be over. But for the most part, it was just me and my grandmother and my grandfather. And at this time my grandmother cooked pretty much every day, and we had a structure. We had a morning routine; we had a bedtime routine. And in that time, funny enough, I ate more fruits and vegetables and far less processed food. It's not that I didn't have processed food.

One of the most iconic McDonalds was just a couple of blocks away. I literally had my birthday at that McDonalds. We had that stuff as well, but because of this time that we spent together, sitting down, eating together as a family unit, it just tended to influence my behaviors far more than when I went back to live with my mother and stepfather, and there was a lot less structure there. There was less structure as far as, again, the times that we're eating, the times that we're eating together. Sometimes we didn't even have much to eat in the first place, which that is a whole other conundrum that we had to deal with in this environment. Many times, we had to get food from these charities, these charitable organizations.

One of them was called the Hosea House, and it was a couple of blocks from our house, and we'd go there to get free food. And so sometimes not having much food, you just kind of put it together, you do whatever you got to do. And a lot of times, me being at a age where now I'm out and about, I'm roaming the neighborhood with friends. I'm just picking up and grabbing and eating wherever I can, whenever I can. I didn't have any concept of what healthy food was. I just wanted to eat stuff. Eat stuff that tasted good. And so those patterns of education around what I'm eating and the fact that it matters. Those things are going to be normalized or cultivated, ideally within the construct of our families eating together. Within the construct of our families even preparing food together. Getting an education, getting a connection to the food that we're eating, that is so often lost in our culture today. Oftentimes we just see the end product. We're so far removed from where our food actually came from, and especially if

we're talking about the processed foods that were consuming. Right now, 60% of the average Americans diet is made of ultra-processed foods. Again, so far removed from its origin.

When you see a Crunch Berry, it's not a berry, it has nothing to do with the berry. There's zero berries included in the ingredients. It is so far removed from its origin. You have no idea that at some point way down the line, it might have come from a little sprinkle of some corn skin. We don't have any association to where that food actually comes from, let alone who's preparing it, the processing, the distribution. We're so removed from that. And we can, of course, upgrade our connection and get a little bit closer to our food. We can even start to get our hands in the soil in some aspects. But that might not be your lot in life. Alright. And I'm not claiming to have a green thumb up in here either. But there's been this movement towards more farmers markets, and people talking with and spending some time with learning from the people that they're buying their food from. Or making better choices when we go to a conventional grocery store on the foods and we're purchasing. Getting some more insurance on the food being prepared and grown in a certain way that has more efficacy. There's a bigger demand for those things while simultaneously, simultaneously because there's two trains right now.

There's another one where rampant health issues and obesity, chronic disease has absolutely exploded. It's never been worse than it is right now. There are these two simultaneous realities occurring at the same time. And it really just depends on where we're deciding to punch our ticket, which train we're going to get on. And hopefully we can make the health and wellness train a bigger train. We can make it the love train or the soul train. Alright, we can up-level this to normalize health and wellness, because right now it's not normal. Right now, the disease train, the diet-related disease train is absolutely filled. It's filled to the brim. Here in the United States right now, we're knocking the door of 250 million United States citizens being overweight or obese. We're looking at somewhere around 40% of United States population being clinically obese. Is this our lot in life? What are we going to do about this? Is this normal? Are other countries experiencing the same thing? Yes, many are.

But then we look at a culture like Japan, for example. They have a 4% rate of obesity. So that's possible too. And so we have the opportunity to create a culture where those things are not the norm. Where it's the exception and not the rule. Right now, it's the rule. But again, today's episode is about, let's address some of the foundational environmental inputs that determine what we're eating in the first place, rather than trying to beat people over the head and try to force them to make a change with what they're eating. Let's create a condition to where healthier choices are simply easier to access and enjoy. Now, while living with my grandmother most often, I remember eating breakfast together with my grandfather at the table, and my grandmother. That's what I remember. That specific meal more often because during dinner, I also had my own little table sometimes. And my grandmother would let me sit in my own

little table. I had a little tiny little red chair. Cartoon Express. I didn't get that all the time, but that was on. It was on USA. It was a TV station called USA.

I don't even... Does that even exist anymore? Or is it Cartoon Express? It had the Monchhichis, it had The Flintstones. It had Pac-Man. All of these vintage vibes. And so, for dinners, a couple of times a week, I got to sit and vibe out like that. But for breakfast, we had that consistency of eating together as a family. And again, I reiterated this point, I did eat more fruits and vegetables during those times. And this is also echoed in the research. A study cited in the Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior, found that children who ate breakfast with their families at least four times a week were more likely to consume ample amounts of fruits and vegetables. It's the structure involved.

If you're wondering, why is that. How is this a thing? It's the structure involved. It's the intentional meal planning involved. It's the elimination of distractions. These are just some of the reasons why this shift of eating together as a family unit can have such benefits with our health outcomes. The study went on to report that children whose TV was never or rarely on during family meals were significantly less likely to consume soda and chips. And children who consumed breakfast, lunch, or dinner with their family at least four days per week, ate at least five servings of fruits and vegetables, the vast majority of days each week. Now, what's specifically interesting about this study is that it was incorporating data from minority children who would generally be living within the construct of low-income communities, like me.

This is the environment that I came up in. And so, this shines a subtle but hopeful light on the fact that even if we don't have access to a lot of money or access to the best food options, creating and sustaining a new family ritual of eating together as a family more often can dramatically improve the health outcomes of our children, and of course, the parents as well. Now, despite our economic status growing up, if we had known that we can protect our family from the chronic diseases that we were experiencing, my mother and stepfather venturing into obesity. My sister venturing into obesity, experiencing eczema. My little brother, chronic asthma, where he was constantly hospitalized. Myself, asthma, hospitalized, every year I had my little puffer.

Alright right, that was my...My reality. Alright, I'm out there, I got to bring my inhaler to track practice. Right, that was just how it was. We didn't know that, of course, number one, I had no idea that food mattered, that it made a difference. Because I had to believe that fitness was health. I looked fit. I was the fastest kid in my school. I had the youthful six-pack. Now, I'm saying... I got to have a preface with this because when you're a teenager, your six-pack doesn't count for real. I mean, it's kind of like a factory setting.

You know what I'm saying? So, to even say that. But I was about that life. I was training. This is a true story as well. My mom's friend worked at St. Louis Legend Pizza Spot, Imo's pizza. Alright. Is about an 800-meter go away from our house, and whenever an order wasn't picked up or somebody... You know what I mean? Somebody placed an order, and they didn't get their pizza. My mom's friend, Mary, would hit up the line, the hotline would bling. She'd be like, "Shawn, we got a piece up here." Guess what? Boom out the door, 800 meters doing it. Right? But I used that as a training opportunity to go get some processed foods, alright? This is a true story. But for me, I'm training, I'm about that life. So that's the dichotomy. But regardless of our economic status, had we known that simply eating together more often as a family would help to defend our family from disease and improve our health outcomes, we could have taken advantage of it. We just didn't know. And that's why I'm so grateful to be sharing this today, so that more people can know this. So that you can know this. So that you can leverage this and teach this to the people that you love. This is how we create a shift in our culture, but it starts with us.

Now, all of these studies that we are going through, it can be an arduous process to go through the data and to pull out the really valid and valuable pieces that we can implement in our lives. But all of these studies are summarized and featured in my latest book, *Eat Smarter*, which I'm grateful to say it was the number one new release of all books in the United States when it came out, and it's the top 10 audiobook in the United States on Audible as well, USA Today, national best seller, all those great things. But the bottom line is, there's nothing more powerful than an idea whose time has come. And this book provided something different. Not just the run of the mill nutrition information. We took that to another level. We looked at how our food actually controls our metabolic health. How our metabolic health works in the first place. Really demystifying how our hormones work. How our hunger and satiety hormones work. How our "Fat-burning and fat-storing" hormones work. We broke that down in which nutrients specifically influence all of these processes. Which foods are abundant in those nutrients?

But the heart of the book, and to be 100 with you, the reason that I wrote the book was to address our social connection with food and how we relate with each other based on what we're eating. How our food affects our emotional intelligence. Our ability to perspective take. To have patience. To problem-solve. Our cognitive ability. And specifically, what are the things that we can do socially to help to stack conditions in our favor. To help us to stack conditions so that we can be the best version of ourselves. And one of those huge inputs, seen again, and again in the data, is the practice of eating together with people that you love. Eating together with friends and family.

Now, what about for the adults? A study cited in the journal *Family and Consumer Sciences* disclosed that sitting down to a family meal helped working parents reduce the tension and



strain from working long hours at the office. The research has found that even if test subjects had major stress at work, if they can make it home in time to eat dinner with their family, their employee morale stayed high. However, as work increasingly interfered with the ability to eat dinner with their family, levels of dissatisfaction at work began to creep up. This study found an interesting association between eating with our family and a reduction in stress. And stress being, and we'll put the study up for everybody to see.

Right now, our latest data indicates that upwards of 80% of all physician visits are for stress-related illnesses, coupling with, and so when we hear that, we think, "Oh, it's some invisible, it's a ghost, like, tickling my stress buttons." No. We have an overall stress load. Our diet. We know that diet, poor diet is the number one driver of chronic diseases in our world today. We've affirmed that again, and again. So is now saying, stress is driving people to see their physicians. It's because it's diet-induced stress. It's a stress response of the body when we're putting low-quality things into our bodies.

And so, to hear that this can be a buffer against stress, eating together with our loved ones regardless of what's happening with our work, stress is an incredibly powerful leverage point. But the reality is not eating with our family is becoming more and more normalized, the landscape has changed because making it home for dinner, making it "home for dinner" was once a social norm, but another recent change has kind of helped to usher that in, it isn't just the isolation and the screens and that kind of thing, it's the social structure itself has changed, and this isn't about good or bad, it's just change.

One of those changes is, according to the Center for American Progress in 1960, about 20% of mothers worked. Today, 70% of US children live in households where all adults are employed, so parents working has become another family barrier for family meals, but the research has made it clear that this isn't a sex issue, it doesn't matter which parent is home to cook and to prepare food for the kids and to eat together, it's when all adults are working, again, single or with a partner, that there's a huge hit to the physical and emotional health of the family. Again, this is something that simply didn't exist, our children evolved for thousands and thousands of years eating with their caretakers. Today, it's become normalized that that doesn't happen very often. In fact, despite all of the psychological and biological benefits of eating together that's been seen in the studies, according to data cited by researchers at Harvard University, only about 30% of families managed to eat together regularly. Okay, it's the exception, not the rule. Only about 30% of families eat together on a regular basis, so now it's looking at it, okay, we know that there's been a shift in work dynamics, environmental dynamics, but what else happened, what created this tapestry, this chemistry that would have the experiment go in such a way that it is what we're experiencing right now, which is a lot less family interaction around food.

Well, one of those other issues does have a lot to do with technology. America literally invented the concept of the TV dinner in the 1950s. Alright, the "TV dinner". Now, there they were pre-packaged, ready to eat, heat eat meals prior to this, but America, American advertisers packaged up the idea of the TV dinner, in fact, the ads showed happy families huddled up by the television with their frozen dinner trays freshly reheated, so they're beaming, they're happy, they're looking at, I don't know, Groucho Marx or whatever on the TV, Lucille Ball, they're looking at their TV, happy with their food, they're together, but not together. They're in the same room, but they're now... Their focus is input, it's just a screen input, they're kind of leaving that room and going into this device. And now, obviously today, this has been expanded to a degree that we couldn't have foreseen it, we all have access to all of these screens, these different devices that take us out of the world around us and put us into this virtual reality, so oftentimes people are doing two or three at the same time.

Alright. They're watching TV and they got their iPhone; they're watching TV while they're on the laptop, some people swing three at once. They're doing the menage with their devices. Alright, it happens. Okay, I've seen it done. But I've seen it done. So, we're going to look at some of the outcomes in the peer reviewed data from having our devices and its association with our nutrition, we're going to do that shortly, but just the isolation, what's the data show about that? Well, a peer-reviewed study published in nutrition journal in 2018 found that the people who eat alone tend to have poor diet quality and lower intake of essential nutrients than people who eat with others. Now, this is a fact, but this does not mean, of course, we can't eat healthfully while we're by ourselves, this does not mean that at all, but for the average person, again, this is an unconscious phenomenon where we're creating these scenarios where we are isolated and we, especially in the context of where we are making poorer food choices, and this could be based on lack of education, accessibility, a drive to create healthier foods when one is alone, there are many reasons why this can be the outcome, but the bottom line is eating alone does not mean that we can't eat healthfully, however, for the average person, it does lean in that direction.

And let's not forget when we and the ones that we love, get a little bit older, a recent study revealed that eating together promotes healthy eating for senior citizens, the research found that seniors who regularly eat alone are often at higher risk for a variety of health issues, especially malnutrition, as the researchers indicated this is partly because we naturally tend to eat more around others while simultaneously making better food choices. Often, senior citizens feel that cooking a larger healthy meal for just one person is unnecessary and turn to pre-packaged foods instead. Plus, an overwhelming majority of seniors in the study around 85% of them say that having someone to share their meals with makes their mealtimes more satisfying. It's a gift that we take for granted. So, for our little ones and our elder ones and everyone in between, part of healing our health struggles as a society is being more intentional about eating together more often. The dinner table truly does act as a unifier, bringing us

together. Sharing a meal is a perfect opportunity to catch up, to communicate, to create a space for sharing, for learning, and being able to connect with those who matter most.

It's cool, absolutely, that we have our hustle muscles flexing in our society today, we've got a lot to do. We got a lot of things to sort out and to address for sure, but it's also absolutely critical for us to decompress, and for us to connect. We are a social species. Our genes expect us to connect with other humans for a healthy expression. And connecting along with eating some really delicious food can absolutely change our reality. Now, I want to make this clear that it's not just about eating with our nuclear family, the nuclear family being the parental figures and their offspring and/or children who are under their support, under their care. So that's the nuclear family unit. Then we have extended family, and we also have our friends and our friends' circles.

And so, it's not just eating with our nuclear family, although that's where most of the data is pointing because this is what we've done the longest, but also having times because at the end of the day, with so much going on in the world, we've got to get it scheduled, we've got to make it intentional on when we're doing these things. So, we might be in a situation where we're single dangle, where we're doing the bachelor thing, and we don't have the nuclear family set up. So, making it intentional to eat with our friends or our family more often. So, this is something that I've learned to do more recently, because with an introverted tendency, we could kind of withdraw from spending time with friends and/or eating together with friends.

And so, we need to put more intention into that because it tends to be so much more fruitful. And again, looking at the data, so much better for our health outcomes. So, I've made it a consistent part of my life to, just about twice a month, to schedule a dinner or a lunch with friends. And so, this can also be a great opportunity to stack conditions, so maybe it's a whole vibe, maybe you get the friends together, it's the new upgraded version of the Friends cast. Shout out to Matt LeBlanc. So, for example, in a couple of weeks here, I've got a dinner schedule for myself, and Drew Pruet, who's been a guest on the show, he's the host of one of the top podcasts out there, Max Lugavere, Dr. Casey Means.

My wife's going to be there, Drew's wife. It's going to be pop. Alright? And so we have the opportunity to get together, to eat together, to collab, we're really dope people. And again, so that's the fruitful aspect, but what's happening underneath the surface, is this insurance against poor health outcomes. There's something really unique that's not pinpointed in the data that happens when we get together. And there is some data indicating this, but it's not going to be the commonality because unfortunately, scientists studying this stuff, they're not thinking in these terms. So, what is that underlying... What is that intangible quality about it?

And for me, and it is again, based on some peer reviewed data, but also just acknowledging how the human body, brain, nervous system, endocrine system works, there's going to be a shift that takes place with our nervous system overall. When we're around people that we love and that we care about and that we vibe with, we're going to have a reduction in that fight or flight sympathetic nervous system. It's going to alter in a positive way how we're assimilating and digesting the food that we're eating, period. Because a deactivation of the sympathetic fight or flight nervous system comes coupled with an activation of the parasympathetic, also known as the "Rest and digest" nervous system.

Sympathetic deactivation, parasympathetic activation when we are hanging out, eating with people that we care about. Also, the beneficial protective hormone cascade, whether we're talking about serotonin or oxytocin, these are all going to lead to better health outcomes. And this is one of those things that a little... In a way, supersedes the food quality. This doesn't mean that we're all just going to get around and knock down a bunch of Olive Garden bread sticks or whatever. You know what I'm saying? That's not the vibe, but we kind of understand that there's something... It's not just the food itself, because your brain and your tissues, your body determines how food affects you.

And again, this is cited in a lot of peer reviewed data now, but one of those really interesting connections is seen with the human brain and the gut. The gut is often referred to as the "second brain". And they're constantly in communication. The vagus nerve is really a popular term right now. It's one of the major connections between the brain and the gut. But based on the data that is being fed back and forth between your gut and your brain about your caloric intake and your nutrient needs, your brain can literally tell your gut to down-regulate the assimilation of the calories that you're consuming, or it can tell your gut to increase the assimilation and intake of the calories you're consuming.

Literally, calories can just be expelled that would normally not be expelled simply based on your body's perception of your state of need. This is an epicaloric controller that again is not often considered in nutrition circles that are just simply focused on calories in, calories out, what's controlling what calories do in our bodies. So, our psychological state, our environmental state has an influence in how our body associates with the food that we're eating, how our bodies associate with the calories that we're consuming. So, I was recently just having lunch with a group of friends and one of them asked me... 'Cause I was sipping on my agua, alright, it's my vibe. Sipping on my agua. They're like, "Shawn, I know that you don't dabble in the sodas and the whatnot, but what did you used to drink? What was your go-to back in the day when you were unhealthy?"

And for me, I didn't really go for sodas as often as people around me. Like my mother every single day, every day, she sent me to 7-Eleven to get her a Big Gulp, and then a Super Big Gulp,

and then the Double Gulp came out. The Double Gulp, the carton, the container for the soda was so large that they didn't have them pre-made. Alright. The package was folded down, so you pull it out, it's basically like a sheet of paper, a sheet of cardboard, and you fold it yourself in the store and they fill it full of that high fructose goodness. And her drink of choice? Pepsi. Alright. She was camp Pepsi. For me, I didn't really like it. For me, I think it was like the burning. That...

That little... That little burn that when it hits your throat, I just... Aah. It wasn't vibing with me. But of course, on a hot summer day, STL, a nice Sunkist, or we drank Vess a lot because it was a cheaper soda, so it was a little bit more kind of off-brand vibe to it, the grape soda, the fruit punch. I was definitely more the fruitier, tuttier-fruitier vibes. But ultimately, oh man, the juices, that's what got me. So rather than the fizziness, give me the sweetness without the fizz. Enter Hawaiian Punch. I'm pretty sure not a single person from Hawaii had anything to do with that formula. Alright. It's one of those things where it's like 1% juice in the juice, or whatever it is. It's a very low amount of actual juice being in this concoction. And that was just what I drank and it's such a big jump. And I don't think people understand this often, to go from Hawaiian Punch to drinking a fresh pressed green juice, or to go from Hawaiian Punch to just drinking water, and that being the staple rather than this sugar-filled thing that's influencing my brain chemistry and making me addicted to it.

And so, what are some of the upgrades that we can utilize today that can be a bridge to get from here to there? This is the power that we have today. Because for my kids, my youngest son doesn't know a thing about Hawaiian Punch. We've elevated that punch dynamic. And the Red Juice that he gets is a combination of low-temperature processed red and blue-ish kind of hue super fruits like Acai. Acai has an ORAC value of 103,000. That means that it's about 10 times more antioxidants than the fruits that you find in a regular produce aisle. On top of that, the Red Juice formula that we utilize and my kids drink, it's also... And also, myself as well. A study published in the Journal of Agriculture and Food Chemistry found that acai actually raised participants' antioxidant levels. So, this demonstrates it isn't just, oh, we know that antioxidants are in here, but the human body has a resonance with it that it actually assimilates and utilizes these antioxidants.

Also in the formula is blueberry. Researchers at the University of Michigan published data finding that blueberry intake can potentially affect genes related to fat-burning. Also in the formula, beet juice. A study published in the Journal of Applied Physiology showed that drinking beet juice boosts our stamina up to 16% during exercise. Pretty cool stuff. And these are just some of the nutrient-dense super foods that are found in the Organifi Red Juice formula. Go to [organifi.com/model](http://organifi.com/model). You get 20% off their Red Juice formula, which I'm a huge fan of. Organic, no binders, fillers, or high glycemic sugar, sweeteners, anything of that nature, all done the right way. Again, go to [organifi.com/model](http://organifi.com/model). That's O-R-G-A-N-I-F-I.com/model. You

get 20% off their incredible Red Juice formula. Also, their Green Juice formula, if you listen to the show, you already know I'm a huge fan of that as well. Head over there and check them out, [organifi.com/model](http://organifi.com/model). So, when my friend asked me what I used to sip on, I was about that juice life, but now just having the opportunity to upgrade those things and to share them with other people and just to hear the stories of people like, "I got my kids off of, fill in the blank, and now they're sipping on some kombucha, they're doing the Red Juice." Man, their health outcomes for our families, just making pivots.

This doesn't mean like you can't have this thing but reducing the low-quality inputs and upgrading the inputs of nutrient-dense foods, man, it just makes it so much easier today. Because again, simultaneously, we have these two trains and one of them is just cultivating and stacking conditions with more processed foods and low-quality ingredients and there's this new robust market right now where people are demanding higher-quality ingredients and we can leverage and take advantage of that as well. Now, to circle back to another new phenomenon that's causing this separation with our families eating together and reaping all of those wonderful health benefits is this new experience of eating with a screen in front of us rather than natural scenery or another person. Alright. So, what does the data show as far as eating with a screen?

A study published by the CDC, by the CDC, titled 'Effect of Media Use on Adolescent Body Weight' found that increased use of screen devices like smartphones and tablets is associated with increasing the risk of obesity through a variety of mechanisms, including insufficient physical activity and increased calorie intake while using screen devices. Again, this is an association, this is a correlation, not causation, but we already know that something is awry. The researchers also noted that after-school screen time, having expanded after-school screen time, is associated with increased size of evening snack proportions and overall poor diet quality in adolescents.

Another study, and this was cited in the International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health noted, "Children who use social media more are at greater risk of sleep disturbance that leads to obesity." And they reported a 40% decrease in obesity in children whose parents limit their screen time than in children without such limitations. So, as we've covered many times on the show how sleep deprivation leads to poor health outcomes as well when it comes to our diets, our diet choices and also the impact of food on our bodies. Because one of the first things that we see with sleep deprivation is an increase in insulin resistance. So, there's a whole cascade here. And also, just being tired. It might pull you away from making healthier environmental choices with taking the time to have a family dinner and the like.

Because I know, again, growing up in my environment, part of the reason that we would eat processed foods so often is my mother was tired. Like we were struggling. She would literally

sell her blood to get money to put food on the table in addition to the work. She worked overnight for a stretch of time at a convenience store, and just so many odd jobs and experiences trying to make ends meet. It can be a lower tier... You're just trying to get food in the kid's belly. So, understanding that, even our association with our devices, lowering our physiological, our cognitive energy the next day, that can be stacking conditions against us as well. But specifically, as data indicated, being on the devices tends to alter our food intake or our food choices in a nefarious way. Now, I've got a question for you, and I'm talking to you, I want you to ask yourself this question. When was the last time that you ate a meal at home or at a restaurant by yourself without occupying yourself with a screen? It was just you and the food.

When was the last time you just sat without a screen and ate a meal? Alright. Now, for some folks, this might be something that, "Yeah, I do this frequently, or I can pinpoint the last time." For many of us, it's going to be really stretching and digging around in our mental rolodex, into our memory bank to try to find when this has happened, just because of the accessibility. This is not... I'm not Mr. Perfect. I'm not Kurt Angle, alright? That's not me. Oftentimes, for my lunch, I'll throw on... I might... There's a lot of great content pieces out there right now, so I might... A lot of times, honestly, I'll be doing research while eating, which is probably not the most optimal thing to do, but... Or I'll throw on... I just watched the documentary on George Carlin, for example, while having a meal. But there are also times where I literally, purposefully, I'll go and sit outside in the sun and have my tea or coffee, or just purposely go and just sit with my wife, she's usually working away somewhere in the house and just grab some food or make us some smoothies or whatever and just take a moment and kind of wrangle her off of her device and then we'll just hang out together.

But it's just asking ourselves, when was the last time we did that? Because chances are, we're often, if we do find ourselves in a situation where we are by our lonesome, we're going to be pairing ourselves up with a device. Now, this doesn't mean that we can't eat healthfully when we're on a device. And this is not about good or bad. This is about self, a self-assessment, self-regulation and leveraging things for our good. Because the question should be, why do we do this? Why do we have to distract ourselves? Why can't we just be? And part of that is boredom. This word gets a bad rap, alright? Because the word Boredom is just creating a label under lack of stimulation. And so our society today, we've been indoctrinated with so much influx of data and so much scrolling that our brains have essentially been programmed to be easily distracted. We're literally teaching our brains to be far more distractible, to be easily pulled off of our focus, and also creating a condition where we constantly need very big stimulation. Our technology devices really, really work on our dopamine pathways that are driving us to seek out more.

And also, as we're seeking out, we're getting those little nuggets back, we're getting the likes back, we're getting the next post that we're scrolling to, we're constantly seeking things, which is the driver of dopamine, but then we're finding little nuggets of reward. So, boredom. And in that... Even with dopamine, by watching an episode of our favorite show, why does it feel good? Why does it feel so good? We're living at the golden age of television. Again, this is not an advocacy for us to not park ourselves in front of our television and enjoy a great show or enjoy a movie. We can definitely do that. But when this becomes the rule and not the exception and we're chronically not leveraging the benefits of eating together with our family, maybe we want to make an alteration, a slight shift in this behavior. Because again, we're living at the golden age of television. Writers are competing. They're coming with their A-game, creating incredible storylines, the tech to be able to create the cinematography, the costumes, the acting, there's so many things that are coming together all at once that's creating just like, "Man, there are so many great things for us to indulge in."

But why is it that it feels so good to watch these things? Dr. Renee Carr, clinical psychologist, says something really poignant here. She says that it's due to the chemicals being released in our brains. When engaging in an activity that's enjoyable such as binge-watching, your brain produces dopamine. She explains, "This chemical gives the body a natural internal reward of pleasure that's reinforced continued engagement in that activity. It is the brain signal that communicates to the body, 'This feels good. You should keep doing this.' When binge-watching your favorite show, your brain is continually producing dopamine, which is driving us to go on, to keep finding out what happens to go to the next episode." There's a little parenthesis there. And she says, "Your body experiences a drug-like high. You experience a pseudo-addiction to the show because you develop cravings for dopamine." According to Dr. Carr, the process we experience while binge-watching is the same one that occurs when a drug or other types of addiction begin. She says, "The neuronal pathways that cause heroin and sex addictions are the same as an addiction to binge-watching."

Ooh, that is strong, Dr. Carr. She explains, "Your body does not discriminate against pleasure. It can become addicted to any activity or substance that consistently produces dopamine." So, if you're wondering why, because oftentimes, again, we're doing this unconsciously, if you're wondering why, it's such a ripe, enjoyable thing to binge-watch a series or to park ourselves in front of the TV, dopamine has a lot to do with it, especially when we get to that... They're so great at creating these open loops, so you got to find out what happens, you got to go to the next episode. And also, with the intelligence that's coming into creating the programming, programming of now the diversity of the cast, so intentionally putting in folks that we as us, as an individual, can identify with in that series that we're watching. Have you ever had that where you tend to be more identified or understanding, or relate more to a certain character than other characters in the cast? So, giving you someone to identify with intentionally.



So we are, in a way, living vicariously through these characters. And also, this is really cool too. At the same time, it can be a little bit scary if it goes too far, but it's also really cool because our brains code all experiences, whether they are watched through a television or whether they're experienced by our own hands and our own bodies in the real world. It's very difficult. And this includes books as well. We're living vicariously and our brain is coding these experiences. It's very difficult for our brain to say this is real and this is not real. Also, this comes into play, our mirror neurons, and so witnessing things and our brains simulating us doing what we're witnessing or what we're reading, or what we're hearing. As we're hearing things, there's a part of our brain that's simulating us being the one who's talking. So, as we're witnessing what's happening through our devices, whether it's social media or whether it's through our favorite show, we are automatically tied into it, even if we don't consciously realize it. This is why we feel the feelings that we feel. This is why we might feel the same joy that we're witnessing in the character, or the same sadness, the same anxiety, the same fear, the same connectivity.

So, we're not in our lives experiencing it, but we're witnessing it. This is the interesting thing about humans, we're able to witness these things, and it connects so deeply with us because it is influencing which hormones are getting produced, which neurotransmitters are getting produced, so dopamine being one that we were just recently talking about, but there's so much more to it, we're just now... Science is just now beginning to target and identify what's going on here? Why are we so into this stuff? Not good or bad, but it's what is. And it's for us to be more cognizant of this happening and be more intentional in this so that it doesn't take over our lives where we're constantly living vicariously through others instead of living out our own story, which is what we're here for. Alright, so to put all this together, we've got the dopamine connection with our screens. You know what else releases dopamine? Food.

Alright, that drive towards delicious-ness. Dopamine is a motivator towards getting tasty things to eat. You got a meal of tasty-ness and a binge-worthy show. Ooh, it's going to be hard to eat with your kids. It's going to be hard to eat with them. Alright, it's stacking conditions against this behavior. Same thing with our kids if they got their little... They're camped out watching Ninja Turtles, by the way, you might be like, "Ninja Turtles was our generation." Nah, they've redone it like four times.

Alright, with the upgraded animation and story lines and the whole thing. They got legit actors playing the roles, the whole thing. And so, they got that with their delicious snacks, it's creating a neuro association. When I was growing up, this was like a treat. So, I remember very vividly, my grandmother going to the video store and getting the Karate Kid. The original Karate Kid. And shout out to Mr. Miyagi. And us having snacks and watching the Karate Kid was like an event. I'll never forget it. But for my son, my youngest son, a memory like that is not going to be as vivid for him because of all the movies he's had access to and all the social dynamics

changing, but for me, it stands out like I can feel the feelings, I can taste the taste. It's just such a vivid thing because it was a treat, it was a rare occurrence. Where again, our brains get acclimated, and it keeps wanting more. Alright. I hope that makes sense.

So again, this is not to say good or bad, the TVs are the villain, but we have to be aware of these inputs. We have to take back control of our own minds and bodies. And if we want to engage in these things, we do it intentionally, but also, we leverage the power of relationship, but also, we leverage the power of connection and really investing in the people that matter most. We got to take back control of our time and attention and just add this in, and you're going to find it's so much more fruitful for not just a pleasure trip, but for real, lasting joy. There's a difference between pleasure and happiness. So, overriding, continuous connection and happiness. This is tapping into what our genes expect of us in having healthier expressions and just overall better relationships and better health outcomes.

So, we've gone through a tremendous amount of information today, but how do we put all this together? What are some tips that we can utilize starting right now? Number one, put family dinner nights on your schedule. Schedule it. Today, more than ever, if you don't schedule it, it's not real. Choose a couple of days each week, and as the research indicates, three meals together with your family is that kind of minimum effective dose to get some of these protective benefits and improving our health outcomes as a family, especially for young children. So, this can be maybe Monday, Wednesday, Sunday, maybe you have Sunday dinner, maybe you have dinner Monday and Wednesday, maybe you make it an intention to have breakfast together on a more consistent basis, because as other studies indicate it doesn't really matter which meal it is, but three to four meals a week is ideal, specifically three meals is that minimum effective dose. And if you can make this an intention, it might be a little bit of a struggle period in the beginning, because if it's something that you haven't been consistently doing, your brain is literally getting adjusted to this practice, but when you do that and you create this on a consistent basis, and have those specific days, your brain will come to expect it and it will create a shift in your family culture, you have the ability to create new family traditions, you have the ability to shape the culture of your family.

It doesn't matter what happened in the past, you have the ability to start to influence that now. Now, within that new tradition, maybe you add in some other little cool things. Alright. So, we just had dinner together last night. I could not have dinner the night before I recorded this. So, we had dinner last night. Afterwards a rap battle took place, alright, and this is a true story. It was me, my wife, my oldest son Jordan, 21, my youngest son Braden, 10 years old. Alright, rap battle, you already know who won the battle, you know who dropped the best bars, okay?

Now they might say otherwise, but they're not here, so I won. But it's not about win or lose, it's just about a vibe. We had a good time and preface with good food, and we just made it a vibe. One of the other things that we do is that before we have a meal together, we do our grateful three, so we all go around and say three things that we're grateful for from that day. It just starts to spark some communication and seeing where the person is at, looking at what's happening in our inner space, being able to express ourselves and so many cool benefits from that, which they were not intentional, it was just an idea and a tradition that we've created. So even when friends come over, we often do that as well. So, there are some insights and also it doesn't have to be a meal, by the way, in some instances, this could be sitting down together and having... Many cultures have, you have tea, we have coffee together. And so, every morning, I actually, even this morning, I made my wife's cup of coffee, my youngest son, Braden, his hot cocoa, it's organic reishi mushroom infused hot cocoa and I make myself a cup as well, and then we just have our vibes. So, this is a part of our day, and we don't always sit down together and have this, but this is just part of our daily routine. But it's always the coolest thing, we all sit down together and just have our hot beverages and chop it up. And if you're wondering about that reishi-infused hot cocoa, which...

We got multiple peer-reviewed studies now affirming. One of them found that reishi mushroom has a remarkable influence on improving our sleep quality, decreasing sleep latency. So, helping people to fall asleep faster and improving the efficiency of sleep. So going through the sleep cycles more efficiently. So that's one benefit of reishi. Reishi has also been found to be an immuno modulator. So, helping the immune system to ramp up when need be when... In the face of an infection or something of the like. Basically, training your immune system to be more intelligent and also decreasing immune activity if it's running too hot, like being over reactive. And in addition to that, my wife and I, we're not just having any old run-of-the-mill coffee, we're having lion's mane and chaga, medicinal mushroom infused coffee. Organic coffee as well. Both of these are coming from Four Sigmatic. So, I've been utilizing Four Sigmatic for years, every day.

It's our thing. I absolutely love it. You can blend it with your favorite fats or for my youngest son, we do a little bit of whatever kind of milk you're into. So, it could be almond milk, it could be conventional milk, whatever the case might be. But conventional, even when I say that I'm talking about dairy. I'm talking about not organic. Alright. So, we can blend together some grass-fed butter, or some MCT oil, or some ghee, whatever the case might be. Maybe add a few drops of your favorite Stevia. There's many different vibes that you can create. Today I added some cinnamon into my coffee and... Yeah, so this is another area that we can upgrade things and create better health outcomes for ourselves and our family. Stepping away from the conventional garbage out there that's just riddled with pesticides and herbicides, we're talking about coffee. It's crazy. Toxic molds and all of these crazy sweeteners. It's bananas what people are getting out here. Upgrading this practice so that it's overflowing with health

benefits. Go to [foursigmatic.com/model](http://foursigmatic.com/model), and you get 10% off everything they carry. That's F-O-U-R S-I-G-M-A-T-I-C.com/model.

Check them out. Huge fan of Four Sigmatic. So, this could be getting together, having coffee. I love making coffee for my friends that come over or making them some tea as well. So, these are just vibes. And in addition to that. So, number one, we put the family dinners on the calendar. Schedule it or it's not real. Number two, make it a mandate to make it a phone free zone. Again, that screen, data shows that even having a phone in your line of vision, even if you're not on it, it pulls away your attention because you've got such a neuro association of picking it up frequently. And you'll probably notice even if you're not getting on your phone, you still picking it up and checking it frequently. Alright, so make it a phone-free zone. Don't even bring that bad boy to the table, alright. Maybe for some folks, they need to leave it in the car. They need to leave in another room. So, make it a phone-free zone, you'll be alright for the span of a meal. Alright. It's a distraction. It pulls away from the family dynamic.

Number three, we can take it a step further and not just eat together, but prepare food together, cook together. That's such a gift that we can give our children today that's becoming less and less of a cultural norm. So, all of my family knows their way around the kitchen. They know how to prepare food. Alright. So, my oldest son, Jordan, he's a phenomenal cook. He's just... It's outrageous. My wife just, I mean... That's how we got married. I got to be honest, it definitely was a big check mark for me. The food was so good. And you know, I throw it down too. Actually, true story, when we first got together, because I was a little bit neurotic, I was making all the food. I didn't know if she could cook or not. I didn't care.

But she would come to my place in Ferguson, Missouri, my little rinky-dink apartment. And I was preparing the food. I was doing the thing with the ingredients, I was shopping at Whole Foods, the whole thing. I had upgraded things and I had my standards. I didn't know what she was on. But then eventually my trust opened up and I'm grateful that it did because it's a wonderful gift. And so sometimes when we're busy, when we are... Maybe we're just stressed, we might not want to take the opportunity to prepare food with our kids. I know many times I've brushed off a request where my son might be like, "Hey dad, can I help? Can I do this?" Now he likes to do... We got a hand frother for the hot cocoa, so I'll have him add some ingredients in, even make his cocoa, know how to do it. But even if he doesn't, even if I prepare everything, he comes over and he's like, "Dad can I do the frother?" And I could be like, "Nah. Not this time bud." I'm just trying to get out of here. But now it's just like, whenever he does that, I catch myself to make sure that I say yes. If he's offering to help in the kitchen or to get involved, we got to be able to say yes more often and also to invite them in.

So, cooking together. You could take it to another level. It doesn't have to be all the time, again, but just making it an intention. And one more tip here to leverage what we've learned today

from all this peer-reviewed evidence on eating together as a family is we're not going to cook all the time, and we're not going to prepare our own food all the time, but that's okay. Even if we order in, if it's on one of our scheduled days to eat together as a family, we can still sit down together and eat our takeout. Eat our DoorDash, or our Postmates meal together. Because it's not just the food itself, it's the act of eating together with the ones that we love. So even if you order in, sit down, and eat with each other on your scheduled days, to make sure to reap these benefits and create a new family culture.

I hope that you enjoyed this episode. This is one to share out with your friends and family for sure. If you could, you could take a screenshot of this episode and share it out on social media. You can tag me. I'm @shawnmodel on Instagram. S-H-A-W-N model on Instagram and on Twitter too. I pop in and do a tweet from time to time. Well, most often we're on Instagram hanging out, and also, we're at The Model Health Show on Facebook. And of course, you can send this directly from the podcast app that you're listening on, to share the love, share the education, share the empowerment. We've got some amazing guests coming up and some powerful master classes. So, make sure to stay tuned. Take care, have an amazing day and I'll talk with you soon.

And for more after the show, make sure to head over to [themodelhealthshow.com](http://themodelhealthshow.com). That's where you can find all of the show notes, you can find transcriptions, videos for each episode. And if you've 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.