

THE MODEL **HEALTH** **SHOW**

EPISODE 660

5 Ways That Love Affects Your Health

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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 to me today. On this episode, we're going to be talking about five clinically proven ways that love affects your health. We're going to kick things off right at number one with love having massive benefits for our cardiovascular health. Cardiovascular disease is the number one cause of death in our world today. Specifically, here in the United States, it is responsible for one in every four deaths. As a matter of fact, nearly 700,000 people die annually from this killer. Well, as strange as it may seem, love actually has clinically proven protective effects against this leading killer. One of the primary risk factors for heart disease is high blood pressure.

On the study that was published in the peer reviewed journal, Psychosomatic Medicine, took over 100 adult test subjects and equipped them with ambulatory blood pressure monitors. These are monitors that you can track throughout the day, and they removed the kind of white coat effect that can happen when people are getting their blood pressure check in the doctor's office. Just the action of going to the doctor can raise people's blood pressure. So, this is thought to take that confounding factor out of the equation, so it's tracking it throughout the day. And so, they were using these ambulatory blood pressure monitors to examine the effect that interactions with their significant other had on their blood pressure.

After compiling the data from this one-week study period, the researchers found that study participants' blood pressure tended to be lower and more normalized while they were interacting with their significant other than when they were alone or when they were interacting with other people. Nobody lowered that pressure quite like being with the person that they love the most. Additionally, they found that this blood pressure normalizing effect held true regardless of gender, regardless of race, or regardless of the quality of the relationship. Alright? This just wasn't because the person had a stellar relationship being with their significant other, being in the presence of their significant other lowered and normalized pressure more so than being alone and more than being with other people.

Now, another study. This is a meta-analysis of 35 studies published in the Journal of Women's Health, it reviewed cardiovascular health data on over 1.2 million men and women and found that being married was associated with significantly lower risk factors for heart disease, even in the presence of many other confounding factors. So even in the presence of things like smoking, of drinking alcohol, of being sedentary, there was something really remarkable, according to these researchers, about being in a marriage with another person. There's a protective factor here in this recipe of love. And again, I just want to reiterate this point, we're not talking about the quality of relationships yet, because there's a spectrum, and we're going

to talk more about that throughout this episode, but just to kick things off, really starting to open our eyes to the fact that being in a relationship, having a significant other, having a partner, has really remarkable protective effects for the human heart and cardiovascular system.

Now, let's talk about in the context of that relationship how sex might impact cardiovascular health. On a 16-year study published in the American Journal of Cardiology, conducted with over 1000 male participants, they were ages 40 to 70, they found that men who had sex at least twice a week were almost 50% less likely to die from heart disease than men who had sex once a month or less. Alright? Now, of course this is going to start to bubble up some perspectives, right? So, is this saying with the fellows just being like, "You know what? This is for my heart. This is for my heart, boo. You care about me, right?" We're not talking about leaning into that... In that framing. But according to the data, it is true. It's good for your significant other's heart. And by the way, what about women? We're not going to leave that out. We're going to talk more specifically about remarkable benefits seen with women and sex coming up in an upcoming portion of this episode, but I just wanted to share this data that being in the context of a healthy relationship and healthy sexual activity, especially when we're talking about in our senior years, is incredibly protective for cardiovascular health.

Now obviously, this can come from a myriad of different things, the physical activity itself, right? And also, all of the chemistry that the body incites and releases in the act of being in a sexual relationship, right? So, there's a chemical cascade that's released, from oxytocin to prolactin and other kind of feel-good neurotransmitters and hormones that are really protective and help to reduce stress and inflammation. And the list goes on and on and on. There's a reason why. It's not just about the hanky-panky, alright? It's about the cocktail of chemistry, the immense biological changes that can take place when we're in the context of a loving, healthy sexual relationship as well. And so, again, this is just to kick things off and looking at the benefits of love and relationships on the human heart.

But the question might arise, can the loss of love do the opposite? Can the loss of love damage the heart? Is a broken heart truly a biological thing? Is it a real thing? Well, there's a fascinating entity called "broken heart syndrome." Cardiologist and bestselling author, Dr. Sandeep Jauhar, shared data that the heart actually changes shape in response to acute emotional disruption such as the break-up of a romantic relationship or the death of a loved one, known as, and this is a scientific term for this phenomenon, is called a "stress-induced cardiomyopathy." And this condition strikes, according to the data, mostly women are affected by this, and it occurs when the heart is stunned by sudden acute stress, and your heart's left ventricle begins to weaken. Now, instead of contracting into its normal arrow-like shape, because the left ventricle has this kind of arrow vibe to it, the left ventricle fails to function, creating a more rounded pot-like shape.

Now, this was first described in 1990 in Japan. A broken heart looks strikingly similar to a Japanese octopus' trap called a "takotsubo." And so, doctors began calling this condition "takotsubo cardiomyopathy." And if you're watching the video version of the episode, you can see it here on the screen. Now, this speaks to something that we might experience in our lifetime, the true ramifications when we say a broken heart. If we go back in documented human history and great thinkers and philosophers and physicians, and even folks like Aristotle believed that our consciousness really was our heart, and this was kind of the seat of the soul and the place where our perception of reality were living from our heart. Although again, we tend to take in our environment, our senses, up in this head space, but great thinkers throughout time really felt that the heart is a main driver of this. And we're going to talk more about that throughout this episode, but this is laying the understanding for us to really honor the fact that our hearts are more than just this organ that's pumping and beating blood throughout our bodies. It has a deep connection to our emotions and to our relationships.

And so having a broken heart is essentially a real phenomenon, not just biochemically, but literally having an impact on our hearts. And so, does this mean that we should run away and shy away from love and the possibility of a broken heart? Absolutely not, because with this information, it's a call to action for us to really appreciate love while we have it, for us to give thanks for the love that we may have lost, and also most importantly, remember that our hearts have the capacity to heal. Our hearts have the capacity to love again. And that's actually seen in the broken heart, in the data, getting back into its normal shape and healing up. So really fascinating stuff here already to kick this off, in this episode, looking at five ways that being in love affects our health, number one, love is remarkably protective for the human cardiovascular system. Now, I'm going to move on to number two here on our list of five ways that being in love affects our health. And number two is being in love has a tremendous influence on our appetite and our body composition.

Now, this is a good point for us to address the pink elephant in the room, alright? There's a spectrum of love, right? There's a spectrum of experience. Humans, we have this really interesting thing that we do; we're always trying to encapsulate things and condense things down and to minimize things and then put things in pithy boxes that make us feel comfortable. Love is a word used to describe things that truly... We're talking about, there can be millions of different expressions of what love is. It's almost infinite. And I'm not just talking about an outward expression of it, I'm talking about biochemically the way that our bodies are constructed in the presence of love, right? No two people are going to experience love the same way. It is a remarkable thing we put this little label on it. And so, I want you to, first of all, open your mind to the fact that as we use the term "love" just for the sake of conversation, it's so much bigger, so much grander, and it can mean so many different things. But the general assertion of love here in our culture, the beginning of love, when you're "falling in love."

Even the name "falling," do you want to fall? Do you really want to fall in life, period? If you fall, like did anybody see this? You know, that's the kind of vibe when you fall. It's embarrassing. And we tend to embarrass ourselves when it comes to a new love. We start acting real out of pocket. We start acting out of character, right? And it's just this phenomenon. We feel like someone has come along and they've intoxicated us. But the truth is, we've intoxicated ourselves with our perception. No one sprinkles magical fairy dust on us to make us feel any kind of way. It's a chemistry that we create based on our perception. This does not negate the fact that other people do not influence us deeply and even share in brain patterning, share in the make-up of our microbiome, and sharing bacteria and all kinds of... We do share stuff. We share energies. That's what we're going to talk about a little bit later. But the reality is, the big picture of love is based on our perception, and it's something that we create within ourselves.

Now, I want to give us conscious permission to choose love, because in our reality today, we fall in that sh*t. We fall in love. We trip... "I fell in love again. Anybody got any ban-dex?" Alright? Is that really an intentional, conscious love, or is it tripping and falling in love and getting bruised up and you might be on a road to some... Having some scars? Maybe too many scars. Having scars is not the problem, by the way, because any act of love or connection with another human in a loving relationship, nobody's going to come out unscathed. Alright? This is the nature of the game. But being able to understand that I am choosing this versus being a victim or an opp in this scenario, where you're just at the mercy of this thing, like we're supposed to be more evolved than that as a species, right? So, we can have that natural connection. That part? Absolutely. We're talking about what our cells are designed for. If we get really just looking at evolutionary biology at it's most fundamental thing, our DNA, our cells, we're here for the purpose of linking up with other humans and procreating, right? Keeping the species going. And there's like these real-world things that manifest for that to happen. But we as a species, we see ourselves as being far more evolved than that, right? So then why don't we act like it? Okay?

Because we are. We can be, we can be. But we cannot negate the "animal side" of it, the animal instincts. Because again, we put a label like that, and it seems very primitive. We're talking about the beauty of nature and the unseen, and understanding the impact of pheromones, and why do we kiss? Researchers at the highest level of science have concluded... Because it's such an interesting phenomenon. Why would we do that? Like, "Put your face on my face." Or "Put your eating hole on my eating hole." Why would we do that? It is very strange if we think about it, and the very best hypothesis is that we evolved this behavior, this practice, to sample each other's biochemistry, to sample each other's immune system to see if we're compatible. Are we going to have a good offspring? Are we going to have safety, security? All the things. There's so much biological data shared in a kiss, right? So that stuff is all real and it's happening. At the same time, we can't just let the nature part supersede our higher intelligence as well.

We want to blend those together because that sampling might be popping off. It's just like, "Oh, this is it here," but in reality, like, they don't really have... Yeah, they don't really... Kind of living on their friend's couch or... Well, I don't know if this is...

You know what I mean? You can blend both together. And so again, no disrespect to any... If you're living on a couch right now, listen. Okay? Sometimes couches are... It's a part of the story. It's a part of the evolution. Alright? We got many friends. We've got people who've been on the show. They couch-surfed for a while. Now, they're super stars. Alright? So, but at the same time, it doesn't mean there should be baby making if you're on the couch, 'cause it gets crowded on the couch. Alright, so getting back to this point with love being influential in our appetite, our desire draws towards food and consumption and how that affects our ability to lose weight even, and of course overall, our body composition. When it comes to love and weight loss, it appears, again, to depend on the phase of love that you're in. That early love with all of that chemistry altering in our bodies tends to lean towards reducing appetite and cravings for food, for food, and contributes to weight loss based on a recent study.

And this was conducted by researchers at Harvard University, and this was published in the journal, Obesity. Yes, they're looking at that. How does love affect obesity? And they analyzed the impact that a particular hormone related to human bonding and intimacy has on appetite. Now, this particular hormone is called oxytocin, and this is a hormone that we naturally release when in the presence of people that we love and care about. Oxytocin is released through hugging and bonding and closeness, and of course kissing and of course sex, with just intimacy with people that you care about, but in particular is more notable to be with your significant other. This was a randomized placebo-controlled crossover study, so the test participants were utilizing both conditions of receiving the oxytocin and receiving the placebo. And these were men in this study, and they were given a dose of intra-nasal oxytocin or a placebo. When the study participants received the oxytocin, it caused them to consume less calories. It increased the release of satiety hormones, in particular cholecystokinin or CCK, and it improved their insulin sensitivity.

Wow. Again, we naturally produce this in the context of intimacy. Now, oxytocin, again, this is free. We don't need to run out to... "Let me get some of that tocin. I heard this study that it'll make me consume less calories." It's not about that, alright? This is how to do this in the context of this clinical setting. We release this in the engagement with pleasurable activities, things that we love, people that we love. Right? You have it on tap if you want to use it. Now, that's a look at biochemistry related to the act of appetite, appetite suppression and potential on body composition. But what about psychologically the impact of love having on our body weight and things of that nature? Well, psychologically, love tends to evoke more motivation. Love tends to evoke more motivation, more of a drive to get things done, whether it's in the

pursuit of conditions for that love to be cared for, whether it's in the pursuit of that love itself, but it just tends to evoke more motivation.

Also psychologically, love helps to reduce distractions. We tend to become more single-focused on that love, and so it eliminates distractions and things that might pull us away that could lean us towards certain food choices, certain activities that pull away from our conscious choices, so that reduced distraction and we're so focused on that love, it will tend sometimes, especially in early love, to leave less time for us to be distracted by Temptation Island out here on foods, okay? 'Cause that's where we live, we live on food Temptation Island at this point as a species. And also psychologically, love tends to make us more active. Again, we're talking about the early phase of love in particular, falling in love and having that early phase of love, and the research indicates it's really somewhere in that first year, about that time span, nine months to the first year in particular is where these things start to change, alright? And so psychologically, love tends to make us more active, thus helping us to expend more energy to improve our insulin sensitivity because why? Why when you first get together? 'Cause you're doing stuff. You're doing stuff, you're going out, you're going to the museum, you're going to the bar, to dance, you're going out, alright? And you're going out, you're probably going in a lot, you know what I mean? You're going in.

Alright? So, you're humpty, humpty more, right? It's a great bit from Chris Rock, he talks about when you get together in a new relationship, that early relationship, you spend a lot of time coming and going. Alright? So just leave that... Well, how I phrase it, leave it how I will, but there's multiple meanings to one of those words, alright? Coming and going. That tends to happen in the beginning of a relationship. So, with that said, being more active, reducing distraction, evoking more motivation, these are all components of why early on, we might see a reduction in appetite, in abnormal cravings, in reduction in food consumption, so love affects it in that way.

But in the case of mature love, in the case of mature love and support and its influence on weight loss and our body composition, there are a few things more helpful for weight loss than a supportive partner. I mean, that's just the way it is. There are few things more supportive psychologically to fulfilling our potential, to meeting our goals than a supportive partner. Now, with this said, just a quick glimpse into the evolution of love and the in-love phase and just that chemistry changing over time, especially when you began to spend more time together, because at the beginning, we tend to just see all the good stuff we want to see and downplay any things that might be bothers, we'll just it put in that label, but over time, especially when we start to spend more time together, you start to notice things that don't resonate with your perception of how things should be done, your habits, whatever, you can start to rub up against each other, have more irritations, and that's a natural thing because everybody is different.

Everybody perceives things differently. I know when I first met my wife, I literally said this to her, I cannot believe I said something so crazy, I said... This was within that first year, I said, "I don't think I can ever be mad at you." What? What? What was I thinking? What was I thinking? And all the while she was just in her mind, she had a lot of stuff to say, she tells me this now, 'cause my wife, she says stuff all the time. And at the time though, the first year, she didn't say much, but she was thinking that sh*t though, she was thinking it, she told me, "I was thinking it. I just didn't say it." And so, as we grow together and we become more of ourselves, open ourselves up to be seen more and more, and again, there's a lot of fears there, there's a lot of adjustment, there's a lot of healing through our traumas from our past experiences that can all take place, and also new traumas, you know what I mean? There's a lot that is in that recipe of a healthy successful love as you grow through things. And so, love evolves, and it doesn't mean that one is better than the other, another problem is we tend to look back like I want that old love.

I want that old thing back. As Jay-Z said, "You want my old songs, buy my old album. It's the past, I'm onto new things." And so, all of us collectively understanding and being more aware and intelligent in this process, because mature love can actually be far more joyful, far more visceral and powerful than the in-love chemistry. Often again, I don't want to put any negative labels on that because that's beautiful as well, however, there is a halo around that of ignorance, there's so much that you don't know at the time and you're just operating in this chemistry. And so as we choose love and growth and to better ourselves, and to support the betterment of our partners, so many qualities and character traits are birthed, they're really developed from these experiences, and it can be amazing. And so I don't want us to get caught up in what phase of love we're in, and this is better than that. This is more so just about an awareness of how are these things affecting my health, because on the other side, the comfort and complacency in long-term relationships may actually increase the likelihood of excess weight gain. I know I might be speaking right now to somebody's heart.

You are not alone. You are not alone by any stretch of the imagination. A 10-year longitudinal study of nearly 2000 young adults in the Midwest examined potential links between marital status and health behaviors. The study cited by the American Psychological Association found that married men were actually 25% more likely to be overweight or obese compared to other men. The authors of this study stated that it appears, "Once people get married, they let themselves go." Meaning, an individual may be more likely to stay in shape and groom themselves when they're out on the market and trying to attract mates. Has anybody ever let themselves go? Have you ever let yourself go? "Let yourself go." We fall, then we let ourselves go.

These connotations, these are not empowering, but they happen, these things can happen, and that's okay. Now, even with letting oneself go, it can be a state of comfort, and that's okay, humans are seekers of comfort. And once we become aware of that and reframe things because it's all about perspective, the actions that we take, reframe things to... If we're in the context of a marriage for example, to be able to be healthy and not be a burden... Our health later on down the line, protecting our relationship and the mental health of our partner by taking care of ourselves, make sure that we are there and have the energy to raise a family or support our significant other's family and family members and whatever the case might be, whatever that mission, that connotation there, we could shift the perspective, but it's just in our culture today, we have a culture of sickness, we have a culture where it's normalized to be unhealthy, it's normalized to let oneself go.

We all have a space where we can let stuff go and relax, chill out, have a good time, but when we habitually are making choices that destroy our bodies from the inside out, destroy our brains, destroy our mental health, that's beyond letting oneself go. That's just outright dangerous and negligent, but that's the culture that we exist in today. Today, we have a culture where if you are healthy, you are abnormal, you are not the norm. And to start to shift this around, we have to shift our perspective, because in the context of marriages, it's seen in this light, overall 25% increased likelihood of becoming overweight or obese, it's not just how it is, this doesn't happen with everybody, it's cultivating, creating structures around health. And as I mentioned earlier, although marriage appears to be protective, I guess a myriad of health issues, we've already talked about cardiovascular disease, obesity appears to not be one of these things it's protective against but goes back to the structure and goals within the relationship itself. If health and weight loss is the goal, a supportive partner can dramatically improve the rate of success like nothing else can.

So again, it's all then how we're viewing our relationship. Now, in this context of mature love, and we see again, the benefit with a healthy sexual relationship, really being protective of cardiovascular health and body weight and all these other things as we move on in life, being more active, having that energy, stamina, I was thinking about what is something that we can add in today nutritionally for us to really target this, and also understanding that in our culture again, being healthy is abnormal and we have plummeting rates of fertility and skyrocketing rates of sexual dysfunction, what are some of the things that we can do? Obviously, the basics, high quality sleep, movement practices, eating real food, healthy relationships. What's another thing we can add into the mix? Well, a peer-reviewed study that was published in 2016 and was conducted by researchers at Mahidol University in Bangkok, Thailand of all places, the researchers were analyzing the impact that cordyceps mushroom had on sexual function, and it was administered to 22 men for eight weeks, and it showed a 33% increase in sperm count, 29% decrease in sperm malformations, and a 79% increase in sperm survival rate.

Wow. Wow. Again, there are billions of dollars right now being invested into fertility treatments that are largely not bearing great results, and simple things like this that have been used for thousands of years, thousands of years, it's one of the top things in Chinese medicine, naturally occurring medicinal mushroom, this is the remarkable benefit coming from cordyceps. Also, this was published in the American Journal of Chinese Medicine, they found that one of the things that it does, cordyceps protects our mitochondria. So glorified as the energy power plant of our cells, but really being environmental sensors and being able to print out energy needs, our mitochondria, and so when I say energy needs by the way, this means that our mitochondria are not just making one thing, our ATP, this energy currency, they're going to be able to produce various compounds, other compounds, and this is really where science is right now, based on our needs to improve our form and function. The researchers found that cordyceps protects our mitochondria by scavenging reactive oxygen species. Now, mitochondria is the end destination for fat getting burned, fatty acids are going to be sent... We've got beta-oxidation, we got cellular respiration, this is happening in the mitochondria to actually burn energy, to burn that stuff off.

Now again, several human studies have found remarkable benefits of cordyceps on sexual health, but also it improves cardiovascular function seen in peer-reviewed data, VO2 max, insulin sensitivity, all these things, this isn't about improved circulation, the circulation, improved circulation. But even today, it's one of the things that I utilize multiple times a week, and I have cordyceps-infused coffee, organic coffee from Four Sigmatic. Their cordyceps coffee also includes L-theanine, which is remarkable. The journal, Brain Topography, found that L-theanine is one of the things that can help to reduce anxiety and improve spatial awareness and balance, reduce stress, all by its relationship with GABA. It also has chaga in there as well. And if you're looking more for brain health, they also have a lion's mane infused coffee as well, dual extracted medicinal mushrooms, organic coffee, and if you're not a fan of coffee, they also have hot cocoas that have things like reishi, and they have a cordyceps blend as well. And if you just want the medicinal mushrooms themselves, there is no place better, they're doing a dual extraction, hot water extraction, alcohol extraction to actually get out the triterpenes and the beta-glucans and all these different biological compounds and we hear studies like this, like which method did they use?

You get them all. You can utilize Four Sigmatic. Go to foursigmatic.com/model, that's F-O-U-R-S-I-G-M-A-T-I-C.com/model, you get 10% off store wide. Alright, now moving on, again, this is our list of five clinically proven ways that love affects our health. Number three is love improves our resiliency against stress. A study published in the journal, PLOS One, Public Library of Science One, used subjective and objective tracking utilizing fMRIs to see how the influence of a romantic partner can have on our pain tolerance. Now, the study included 15 adults in romantic relationships that were established in the previous nine months.

The participants experienced moderate to high levels of thermal pain while doing one of three things, in one condition, they were looking at a photograph of their romantic partner, in another condition, looking at a photograph of an attractive acquaintance, and in another condition, responding to a word association prompt shown to reduce pain through previous studies, so this is like a distraction technique. After compiling the data, the participants reported less physical pain when looking at a photo of their partner versus looking at someone else. And the researchers noted that looking at a partner's photo activated the brain's reward system, which suggests this activation may lower your perception of pain overall. It's re-conceptualizing pain by influencing the reward centers of our brain seeing that picture of the person that we are in love with.

That's pretty freaking remarkable. And you've felt that before probably, when you're in love, you feel like I can do anything, I could fight for... I'd die for you. I'll go through anything. And truly, biologically it does alter us to where we have that capacity to endure more thanks to the impact of love. Also, in this same vein of resiliency, being in love has been found to create more resiliency with our immune system. In a study titled Falling in Love Is Associated with Immune System Gene Regulation, citing the journal, Psychoneuroendocrinology, the scientists were profiling 115 circulating immune cell samples collected from 47 young women over the course of a two-year longitudinal study. At the end of the study after compiling the data, the researchers found that there was selective upregulation of innate immune responses to viral infections, less likelihood of succumbing to things like the common cold and faster recovery from illness if they did happen to get sick, thanks to the power of love. It's pretty remarkable. Now, I want to reiterate this point, this was a selective upregulation of innate immune responses, this isn't like willy-nilly immune system overreaction, the right immune cells were upregulating in response to viruses, there was an intelligence uptick in the performance of the immune system.

So that is another aspect of creating more resiliency through the power of love. Another aspect seen in peer-viewed evidence is that we have increased resiliency in surviving a heart attack should one occur. So, we talked about the benefits of the cardiovascular system in association with love, but what if a heart attack happens? Well, love increases the survival potential if a heart attack should occur. Researchers studied over 25,000 patients with a heart attack diagnosis that took place between January 2000 and March 2013, the data was then presented at the British Cardiovascular Society conference in 2016. The researchers uncovered that people who were married were 15% more likely to survive a heart attack than those who were single. Wow.

So again, this protective... And they were looking at a variety of confounding factors, this jumped out, whether or not the person was married. Now as remarkable as this is, we still might have that thing come up, the what aboutism, where we're just like what about the

quality of the relationship? What if it's an unhappy marriage? Multiple times I've pointed out that the quality of the relationship, obviously that's going to have a huge impact on our health and our mental health and all those things, but there's something protective about being in a relationship, being in a marriage in particular, and so to speak briefly to that aspect, we do want to, again, take personal responsibility and remember how powerful we are to make choices within our lives, and remembering that we have the pen in our hand when writing our own personal story, and if improving the health of a relationship and/or moving away from an unhealthy relationship if your heart is calling to that.

We've talked about how important heart health is and how remarkable our heart is. If our heart is really speaking to that, we have to give ourselves permission to move in that direction for our health, for our mental health. With that said, it's going to evoke the responsibility of elevating our standards, of growing ourselves, of cultivating a healthy relationship with ourselves primarily. And we've talked about this obviously many times on The Model Health Show, we had some of the most incredible teachers in this subject matter when it comes to relationships and emotional intelligence, emotional agility, and we'll put a couple of them for you in the show notes, one recently with Dr. Susan David for example, really jumps out. And just being able to study... Make it a study. If having healthy relationships is something that matters to you, you have to make it a study. If it's something you've not been able to maintain or even to experience in some aspects, we have to make it a study.

As I mentioned, my wife and I's relationship was very different year one, and things can happen over time, but ultimately, until we both made a study, we didn't have examples of a healthy relationship, neither of us. We just knew three people who ever had a successful relationship combined, long-term relationship. So, for us to do this, we're doing something that we didn't have any exposure to, it was abnormal. And to do that, we had to make it a study. So, if it does matter to you, make it a study. Learn more about it and know that healthy love is your birthright. And your story is unique to you. And whatever you've been through historically, it's all given you the tools and the gifts and the insights that you need right now to make the decisions that are going to move you towards the healthy relationship that you are already in right now, improving the health of it, and/or moving into a healthy relationship, because...

And also in truth, love itself can be stressful. Love itself can be stressful, even with new love, because it's creating this chemical cascade that's indicative of stress, funny enough. But the biochemistry is also indicative of drive and of perseverance. So, it's, again, all this stuff is in the framing, like the impacts it has on our body, the stress and all this stuff, we get to choose what it means. And our thoughts and our mindset around these things are really the tip of the spear, is the most powerful part of it, that everything else comes after. And speaking of which, and this perception of stress, we're going to move on to number four here on our list of five ways

that being in love affects your health. Number four is, love deeply impacts our brain health and mental health.

Now, it's important for us to make the connection between the heart and the brain to lay the foundation for this. What's really fascinating is that the heart actually contains a little brain in its own right. Yes, the human heart in addition to its other functions, actually possesses a heart-brain. This is what researchers are calling a heart-brain, composed of about 40,000 neurons that can sense, feel, learn, and remember. The heart-brain sends messages to the head-brain about how the body feels and much more. Until the 1990s, scientists assumed and most of us were taught that this was only the brain sending information and issuing commands to the rest of the body, to the heart specifically, but now we know that it works both ways. It's friends with benefits. In fact, the heart's complex, intrinsic nervous system, labeled as "the heart-brain" again, is an intricate network of several types of neurons, neurotransmitters, proteins, and support cells like those found in the brain upstairs. Research from the HeartMath Institute has shown that the heart communicates to the brain in several major ways and acts independently of the cranial brain. So, we have this connection with the heart and the brain, you literally have a heart-brain.

And researchers at HeartMath Institute have also been at the forefront of analyzing the electromagnetic field extending from the human heart, and several feet from our bodies that we can utilize technology now to actually see and monitor the electromagnetic energy field emitting from the human heart itself, and it extends upwards of eight feet from the human body, it's called the tube torus. It's fascinating stuff, and it speaks to again, we see a certain spectrum of reality, there's so much that we don't see, don't understand, we put ourselves in this pity little box as a human, we don't really get that we're connected to everything, every single thing in our universe will connect to all of it, and more viscerally, especially things that are in close proximity to you, we're intimately intersecting like energy fields that can be monitored today, we can actually see it. Now, with that being the foundation, moving on and looking at how love impacts our brain and mental health, a meta-analysis of 15 studies, including over 800,000 participants, found that marriage significantly reduces the risk of developing dementia versus living single. I know whenever I say living single, I immediately think of the TV show, shoutout to Queen Latifah, Kim Fields.

Now the study, cited in the Journal of Neurology, Neurosurgery and Psychiatry uncovered a 42% risk reduction in developing dementia in married couples. Now, we're talking about being a protective mechanism truly, dementia, just one form of dementia, which there are many... Alzheimer's is the sixth leading cause of death in the United States. It's creeping its way into the top five causes of death for our citizens, for our family members. And it was nowhere near the top 10 until recently. In the human story, something is seriously awry, and there is a protective benefit of being in a loving relationship, I'm going to put the emphasis on loving

relationship just for simplicity sake, because marriage can, again, psychologically we can label it so many things, and it is so many things, but just a warm, healthy relationship is going to obviously be more protective. Now since we're talking about brain health, we can't do this without dipping our toes into the benefits of a healthy sexual relationship on our brain. A study done by a team of researchers at the University of Maryland found that regular sexual activity not only triggers neurogenesis, the creation of new neurons in the brain, it also improves connective function, potentially helping people to think more clearly.

Interesting, have you ever thought more clearly after... You know? Has that ever happened? Another study, and this one was published in 2010 in the Journal of the Public Library of Science, and it found that sexual activity causes cell growth directly in the hippocampus, this is the memory center of the human brain. So, there's something about making love and making memories that goes together. Now, another research team at Rutgers University have been studying female orgasms for 25 years, what a thing to devote your life to? They recently concluded in a study that was utilizing fMRIs, and they found that in women, orgasm helps to light up as many as 30 areas of the brain. Now, just to be clear, various activities light up various parts of the human brain, very few things light up 30 areas at the same time. These illuminated areas were indicating increased blood flow, and the researchers noted that this increased blood flow is potentially carrying a surge of nutrients and oxygen to brain cells and can definitely lead to a healthier brain. Now again, doing things that are often considered to be brain-healthy like crossword puzzles, memory games, Sudoku, these are all considered to help to stimulate the brain, but they only do specialized regions, female orgasm, 30 different regions of the brain.

So, this is a different kind of Sudoku. Sorry. Well, SudoQ. So, this matters even more potentially as we move into older age brackets. In a study conducted by researchers at Coventry and Oxford universities in Britain, 73 people between the ages of 50 and 83 were analyzed, their research revealed that study participants who engaged in weekly sexual activity scored higher on tests of verbal fluency, which is the ability to recall, organize and use words effectively as well as improvements in visual spatial ability, this involves movement, depth perception, distance perception, all that good stuff, improves through consistent, healthy sexual activity. So, engaging...

Especially when we're talking about the context of the older age brackets, this is usually going to be in the context of a healthy marriage and healthy relationship. Now, this can segue into the question of, what are you doing it on? Alright? Marvin Gaye, Between the Sheets, what sheets are you on? Not only can this add to a layer of sensuality and intimacy and good vibes but sleeping on great sheets can also improve your sleep quality. A randomized control trial that was recently conducted found that mental alertness during the next day improved by upwards of 20%, and 94% of people preferred sleeping on these organic bamboo lyocell sheets

from Ettitude. Their thread count is equivalent to the finest Egyptian cotton, but it's a much more sustainable organic bamboo lyocell material that I'm telling you have to experience yourself.

You cannot put into words, when you slide into these sheets, there's no words to describe it, you're sliding into a love song. You're sliding... Marvin Gaye's lyrics, you're in the essence of the lyric itself, it's not the word written on paper, it's the muse. Now, these sheets are also free from harmful chemicals, irritants, allergens, they're hypoallergenic, they're anti-microbial, they're self-deodorizing, they're breathable, moisture wicking, they're thermoregulating, the list goes on and on and on. I've been sleeping on Ettitude sheets for years. I cannot recommend them enough. Head over to ettitude.com/model, that's E-T-T-I-T-U-D-E.com/model, use the code model15 at checkout and you get 15% off of your purchase, plus they have a 30-night sleep trial, so you get to sleep on them, think on them, dream on them, if you don't absolutely love them, you can send them back for a full refund. Again, it's ettitude.com/model, use the code model15 for 15% off. And to tie this point in with love and the brain and a brain offshoot, we tie mental health to brain health, in particular looking at the work of Dr. Daniel Amen, that our mental health is a brain function.

According to Robin Simon, a professor of Sociology at Wake Forest University, marriage has for a long time been associated with better mental health. He says, "At this point, hundreds of studies document a robust relationship between marriage and improved mental health. Married people report significantly fewer symptoms of depression and are significantly less likely to abuse substances than their non-married counterparts. This is because marriage provides social support, including emotional, financial and instrumental support. Also, married people have greater psychosocial or coping resources than non-married, higher self-esteem and greater mastery." Now, again, we don't want to be in the whataboutisms because not all marriages are conducive to these things, or we can experience symptoms of mental health challenges within the context of the healthiest of marriages as well. But overall, it's the overarching picture of the human species and the data that we have, this holds true with being supportive of our mental health as well as our brain health. And now we're at number five on our list of the five ways that being in love affects our health and love deeply impacts our longevity.

According to the longest-running longitudinal study ever conducted, it's had multiple directors all coming out of Harvard University, and the latest director of this long running longevity study was recently on the show, Dr. Robert Waldinger, and his episode just blew my mind, it was one of my favorite conversations. The ability to have this 85-year-plus study running and running so gracefully and powerfully in so many different data points, what he shared was that the number one predictor, after looking at all of these confounding factors, health status, sedentary behavior, vocation, body composition, all these different things, the number one

thing seen in the data, the longest running human study ever conducted, the number one aspect, the number one data point indicating how long you're going to live is the health of your relationships.

Now as I mentioned, this was one of my favorite conversations of the year, and so I thought it would be great for you to hear a little bit from Dr. Waldinger himself, I shared this segment actually out on social media, on Instagram, and now it has almost 2 million views as of this recording, and so it really struck a chord with people and rightfully so. And also, this speaks to 2 million views on IG but YouTube, if you're watching the YouTube version, we're like, what is going on? I see the wonderful comments, people are like, "Everybody should be seeing these episodes, they should be having far more reach," and I agree. A couple of years ago and doing work around pandemic issues, how we do it, all data-driven, science and empowerment, we had a couple of videos taken down off of YouTube and they've never gotten back to our promotion or our reach of our videos since then. And so, we could see our backend metrics and we could see we've got friends who are in this space, that YouTube isn't as pushing our videos out or recommending our videos as much, but that's okay.

We'll find a way to trump the system, but the biggest way to do that is by you sharing this video, by you liking this video right now, make sure you're subscribed, hit the subscribe button, subscribe to the show here on YouTube and of course, leave a comment, share one of your biggest insights, engage with this and let YouTube know that we want this amazing content seen by more people. Without further ado, Dr. Robert Waldinger.

ROBERT WALDINGER: So, when I had the opportunity to take over this study that had tracked hundreds, now thousands of lives for so many years, I thought this would be the coolest thing to devote my time to. This is so unusual that a single study of the same people has lasted 85 years, but the thing that surprised us was that the people who stayed healthy and lived the longest were the people who had the warmest relationships with other people. And when we found that, we didn't believe it at first, so we thought how could this be?

Okay, having good relationships could make you happy, that makes sense. But how could it get into your body and predict that you'd be less likely to get coronary artery disease, or that you'd be less likely to get arthritis or that you would live longer? How could that possibly happen? The best hypothesis with some good data is that it's about stress, that good relationships seem to be stress relievers, and I'll explain. So, when something happens to us, you have a really upsetting thing happen during your day, you get a ticket, or some medical crisis happens, you can literally feel your body change, your blood pressure goes up, your heart rate goes up, it's called fight or flight mode, and we want our bodies to respond that way. But then, when the threat is removed, we want our bodies to come back to baseline. And one thing you'll notice is that if you have something upsetting happen in your day and you're thinking about it and

you're upset about it, if you have somebody at the end of the day you can talk to about that, and you're able to talk to them, you can literally feel your body calm down and go back to that equilibrium.

What if you don't have anybody you can talk to like that? And so, we think what happens is that people who are more isolated, lonely, less connected, that those people stay in a low-level fight or flight mode of chronic stress, higher levels of stress hormones circulating in their bodies, higher levels of inflammation all the time, breaking down body systems slowly but gradually. And so that's what we think is one of the main drivers of how relationships can either improve our health or the lack of good relationships can break it down.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Now in addition to the amazing work from Dr. Waldinger and his team, we have to add onto this point of love affecting longevity. Research from 2011 that was published in the American Journal of Epidemiology, this included 95 different studies comparing the death rate for single folks versus people who were married or living with their partners, the study's authors found that there's about a 25% increase in risk of early death when people were not in a relationship, a committed relationship. Now generally, again, this is going to be in the context of our elderly years, and also, I want to point us back to a state of empowerment, because if you don't have a significant love or romance in your life, as Dr. Sandeep Jauhar shares, and we referenced his work earlier on in this episode, he says, "Don't despair. Science is pretty sure that loving chemicals are released when you feel affection for all sorts of things. It isn't just for another person." He said, "For some people, the most intensive relationship in their lives might be with their children or with their parent or with their pet, so I don't think it's the object of love, it's really more the feeling."

So let this be a call to action to diversify our sources of love and connection, because again, it's not just about the object, it's about the feelings that we generate from within ourselves and being more aware and passionate about love, been more respectful about love and choosing to love, because we can access that power no matter what condition we're in right now, no matter where we are in our lives, we can consciously choose to be more loving, to love more, to extend more love. So, in the context of a healthy relationship, absolutely, but it's not just our intimate relationship, it's extending beyond that, whether it's with our children, our parents, aunts and uncles, of a loved one, friends, pets, as the study mentioned. And there's so much love to give, it's really infinite.

And I often think about this, to give and receive from the inexhaustible source as my friend Michael Beckwith says, and when I think about love, that's what I think about. And I appreciate you so much for tuning into the show today, I hope you've loved this episode. If you did, please share it out with your friends and family. Of course, you could tag me on social media, I'm @shawnmodel, take a screenshot of the episode and share it up, and I'm on Twitter as well

@shawnmodel. And you could share this directly from the podcast app that you are listening on, so make sure to share the love today and send this to somebody that you care about. I appreciate you so much for tuning into the show, we got some epic shows coming your way very, very soon, so make sure to stay tuned. Take care, have an amazing day. I'll talk with you soon.

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