

# **THE MODEL HEALTH SHOW**

**EPISODE 699**

## **10 Ways To Improve Your Mental Health TODAY**

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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. According to the NIH and the National Institute of Mental Health, depression is now the leading cause of disability and absenteeism in the United States. What's contributing to these increasing rates of depression? Also, rates of anxiety, bipolar disorder, ADHD, and many other cognitive mood and mental health issues have been skyrocketing in recent years.

And today you're going to hear from a series of world-leading experts on mental health to really unpack what's going on with our society's state of mental health, and what these contributing factors truly are, so that we can get to the heart of the matter, we can get to the root of this issue and start to heal as a society. Because our mental health obviously impacts every part of our lives. It impacts how we relate to each other, how we relate to ourselves, how we show up in our relationships, how we show up in the work that we're doing. The list goes on and on and on.

It is very, very challenging to move through life when we're struggling with our mental health and so today, more than ever, we really need solutions, we need education around this subject, but couple that with education that's also empowering and education that is addressing root causes. So again, we're going to hear today from a series of the world-leading experts on mental health. We're talking about double-board certified psychiatrists. We're talking about renowned neuroscientists.

This is going to be an absolute masterclass on mental wellness, but also providing a diverse number of perspectives to really again, patch together what's going to be viable and useful for us as an individual and also what we can utilize to support our friends and family members. So, this is going to be a game changer. Now for this episode, I've got a perfect nutritional compliment to this powerful brain health and mental health masterclass. Organifi is hooking you up with a \$70 gift for a limited time.

When you purchase their incredible Sunrise to Sunset Kit that includes their organic green juice, red juice, and gold formulas, not only will you get 20% off plus free shipping, for a limited time you'll also receive their brain health blend called Organifi Pure for free. That's right, you're going to receive a free 30-count box of Organifi Pure Travel Packs, typically priced at \$69.95. Just go to [organifi.com/model](http://organifi.com/model). That's O-R-G-A-N-I-F-I.com/model.

Again, not only do you get a plethora of antioxidant-rich super foods like coconut and baobab in this incredible pure formula, but also in the Organifi Pure, you'll receive organic coffee fruit

extract, that's been clinically proven to support healthy levels of brain-derived neurotrophic factor or BDNF.

And also, it has organic lion's mane medicinal mushroom that researchers at the University of Malaya have found that it's one of the few things ever discovered to incite neurogenesis, the creation of new brain cells and to be neuroprotective. They're also studying it right now for folks who've experienced traumatic brain injuries and seeing really positive results there.

And by the way, if you're wondering what baobab is, it's a super fruit that's been prized for thousands of years. In two studies, including a randomized, controlled trial published in the Journal of Nutrition Research found that baobab was able to significantly reduce blood sugar response and insulin response when people were given high-glycemic foods like white bread, right?

So, keep in mind another part of our brain health and our mood is keeping our blood sugar levels in check, because spikes and crashes can lead to this phenomenon of being "hangry", of course, and becoming more irritable. But it's just a natural response because the body's going into a state of stress with those spikes and crashes. But in particular, long-term blood sugar derangement and insulin resistance is one of the key components to neurodegenerative diseases like Alzheimer's and other forms of dementia. So again, anything that can help to modulate and normalize, support healthy blood sugar levels is going to be brain healthy.

Again, in addition to the free \$70 gift of Organifi Pure, you'll also receive an additional 20% off at checkout plus free shipping. Go to [organifi.com/model](http://organifi.com/model), that's O-R-G-A-N-I-F-I.com/model right now and take advantage of this limited-time gift. And on that note, let's get to the Apple Podcast review of the week.

**ITUNES REVIEW:** Another five-star review titled "Love, Love, Love" by LA0321. "I stumbled upon this podcast on my journey to wellness, and I'm starting at the beginning. I can't believe how episodes from 10 years ago are so relevant and life changing, and I look forward to listening to all the episodes."

**SHAWN STEVENSON:** I love, love, love that so much. Thank you so much for sharing your voice over on Apple Podcasts and sharing your experience. And you're right, 10 years ago when we started this show, so many of those episodes are providing education and tips, tools and strategies that are now popular in our culture, right? We were addressing these things a decade ago. And it's wonderful to see these things unfolding in society right now, but we want these things to become more common knowledge and widespread, and that's the mission that we have right now at this point.

But also, you better believe the things that we're discussing, the things that we're unpacking and providing education on right now are going to be relevant for people in the next few years. So, we're ahead of the curve. If you're listening to this right now, you are ahead of the curve. You're part of the few, the mighty few, who are leading the charge in transforming the health and wellness of our society. And so, I appreciate you so much for being a part of this.

And with that said, let's kick off this powerful compilation of the world-leading experts on mental health so that we can start to again, address the root cause of what's happening and also get educated about the current state because I don't think a lot of people truly understand how dire the situation is right now.

And so, we're going to kick things off with Dr. Christopher Palmer. And Christopher Palmer, MD is an assistant professor of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School. And in this powerful clip, he's going to be sharing with you the current state of mental health in our society. He's really going to break that down and he's going to share the critical connection between mental health and metabolic health. Let's kick things off with the incredible Dr. Christopher Palmer.

**DR. CHRISTOPHER PALMER:** The field will say we have tons of evidence-based treatments and people should get help for depression. And if they get help for depression, our treatments work. And if we just got more people help, everything would be fine. And the reality is we've got dozens of different antidepressants, we have tons of different psychotherapies, psychodynamic and cognitive behavioral and all sorts of things. We've got ketamine injections, we've got electroconvulsive therapy, we've got transcranial magnetic stimulation and other things. So, with all that treatment, you'd think we would be doing a pretty good job.

But as you mentioned, depression is now the leading cause of disability on the planet above all other medical diagnoses. And it's not because people aren't getting treatment, it's because our treatments fail to work for far too many people. So, if you look at the initial treatment for depression, if somebody comes in off the street with their first episode of major depression and gets treatment, gold standard treatment and antidepressant and/or psychotherapy.

The statistics that usually get cited are 70% will have a response rate, meaning some of their symptoms will get at least a little bit better, but only 30% will have a remission of illness, which means that they will no longer have five out of the nine criteria for depression. It means they will have four or fewer of the symptoms of depression. So put another way, if you come in for treatment for depression and get gold standard treatment, there's a 70% chance after six months that you're still going to have depression. The whole thing. You are going to meet full criteria for depression. And even more people than that 70% are still going to have some lingering symptoms of depression.

When researchers followed people with depression for 12 years and looked like what happens to them long term? Like how many of them are really getting better and staying better? The really shocking and sad news is only 10% of people went into remission and then stayed in remission. That means 90% of people who get treatment for depression, the depression keeps coming and going. It doesn't go away. And they still have symptoms. And on average, people in that study had serious symptoms of depression more than half the time.

**SHAWN STEVENSON:** That is just outrageous. Outrageous. So, we're talking nine out of 10 people who are seeking treatment for this issue that's become so pervasive in our society. Again, you said the number one cause of disability, right? So, this is above cardiovascular issues, low back pain, which is another big one. Whatever the case might be. This is the top thing today it's depression.

And our treatments are only helping successfully, you know, really mapping things out long term, one out of 10 people, right? So, 90% of folks are not getting adequate treatment or not really figuring out what the root cause is. And so, with that being said, again, there's an appearance of innovation and of efficacy. We've got so many different things that we throw at people, but is it working? That's the question really.

And for us to just take a good look to step back, take a meta perspective like, "This is not working very well right now. We need to kind of recalibrate." But we're not really doing that. And is this a result of just kind of getting educated on what we should be doing and just kind of getting locked in and tunnel vision on treating people like this?

**DR. CHRISTOPHER PALMER:** You know, I think the real answer is that people don't know what to do. Well-meaning psychiatrists and neuroscientists and administrators, I think everybody on the planet kind of has a sense that we have a crisis in mental health. The rates are going up, so many people are suffering, lives are ruined by mental illness, depression, bipolar, schizophrenia, all of it. But the answer is that nobody... People haven't been able to figure out like this really simple question, what causes mental illness? So, we're just shooting in the dark, we're just trying this treatment, that treatment. We don't even know how a lot of these treatments work. We just know they kind of sort of reduce some symptoms.

So, we're just shooting at the dark, throwing anything we can at it. And the sad reality, as you said, is it's not working. At the same time that we have growing epidemics of obesity and diabetes in our population, those are metabolic disorders, we also have a growing epidemic of mental disorders. And it's across the board. A lot of people don't realize that it's all of the mental disorders essentially. It's not just anxiety and depression, but they are the most common disorders so they're the ones that get talked about the most 'cause they affect the most people. So that's fine. But autism, autism has tripled in the last 20 years. If you go back

to the 1970s, it's up something like 83 times. 83-fold increase. That's 8,300%-fold increase, which is crazy.

And if you look at bipolar disorder, the rates of bipolar disorder have doubled in adults, and they've gone through the roof in terms of children and adolescents. I mean, it's like a 40-fold increase, but that's largely because it was non-existent prior to the 1970s. But now it's getting commonly diagnosed. The rates of ADHD are up, rates of personality disorders are. Everything's going up. And on the surface, everybody's scratching their head like, "What is going on here? Why are all these mental disorders increasing? This can't be." It can't... So, some people go into the category of, "I can't even believe it." And other people are like, "Well, maybe we're just recognizing it more." But the researchers really doing this work are saying, "No, guys. No, folks. These rates are really are skyrocketing."

And so, when we think about metabolic health and mental health, what I'm arguing is that they are inseparable. That at the same time, a bad metabolism or a faulty metabolism or an insufficient metabolism, whatever we want to call it, a metabolic problem can make someone overweight or obese. There's no question about it. A metabolic problem can be associated with having a heart attack or a stroke. Everybody kind of knows that. But what I'm saying is metabolic problems also affect the brain, plain and simple. In the same way that a metabolic problem can make you die of a heart attack, and it can adversely affect your heart, guess what folks? It can affect your brain too. That the brain is not just immune to metabolic problems.

We know that metabolic problems affect the heart and the kidneys and the liver and your fat cells and all sorts of other things. Why the hell does anybody think the brains not affected? At the end of the day, it's kind of that simple.

**SHAWN STEVENSON:** Next up in this mental health and wellness compilation, we have Dr. Daniel Amen. Daniel Amen, MD is a double-board certified psychiatrist, 12-time, New York Times best-selling author and founder of Amen Clinics with a dozen locations across the United States. Amen Clinics has the world's largest database of brain scans for psychiatry, totaling more than 210,000 SPECT scans on patients from 155 countries. He's leading the charge in actually looking at the organ most related to our mental health, which is the human brain, and he's brought to the forefront this revelation that we have a field of psychiatry that's passing out medications based on a conversation. They're not actually looking at what's happening inside of the person's body.

They're not looking at what's going on with their brain. Is their brain injured? Is their brain experiencing poor circulation in certain areas? Are they deficient in critical nutrients needed to help support cognitive function and manage mental health in the first place? There are

critical nutrients that are required by our brain and nervous system just to run properly in the first place.

And so, if we're not actually having as a standard of care, our practitioners looking at what's happening with hormones, with neurotransmitters, with the brain, and just saying, "You know what? You have a chemical imbalance. I know I didn't test any of the chemicals that are going on in your body. It's just an assessment based off of a conversation." Is that appropriate with all of the tools that we have access to today? And thanks to physicians like Dr. Daniel Amen. The field of psychiatry and medicine is changing rapidly right now. But again, you are ahead of the curve in getting access to information like this.

And in this clip, Dr. Amen is going to be sharing the neuroscience of happiness itself and why American society is now a hotbed for mental health issues. Here's an incredible segment from Dr. Daniel Amen.

**DR. DANIEL AMEN:** If I was an evil ruler and I wanted to create mental illness, what would I do? I'd create American society with fast food restaurants everywhere, with food deserts, with this notion that alcohol's a health food or marijuana's innocuous, or the news is in fact the news. 'Cause the news is not the news. The news is a marketing device for advertisers to make money. And they scare you. Well, millions of amazing things happened yesterday, but you never hear about them because they don't get eyeballs. Fear is a primitive response. The brain pays attention to fear first. And so, they scare you. And in that way, they can sell you the medications that have this laundry list of side effects.

So, before the pandemic, we were at epidemic levels of anxiety, depression, ADHD, addictions. The opioid epidemic, for example. Depression was at 8.5% of the population. And then the pandemic hit and by August of 2020, it was at 28% of the population. It had more than tripled. So not since the Great Depression has there been this level of unhappiness.

And as I saw that, I'm like, "But you can learn to be happy." Whatever situation you are in, you just have to know the neuroscience of it. 'Cause happiness is ultimately a brain function. And as I was tackling this, I came across a video that I just love by Dennis Prager called Why Be Happy? And in it he says, "Happiness is a moral obligation." And I'm like, "What?" I grew up Roman Catholic, and I went to Catholic school and Catholic high school. And I guarantee you that idea that happiness is a moral obligation was nowhere to be found. That it was about guilt and control and shame.

And then it's like, so why is it a moral obligation? Because of how you impact other people. I guarantee you, and you know about this, if you're raised by an unhappy parent or married to an unhappy spouse, and you ask somebody, "Is happiness an ethical issue?" And I guarantee



you they're going to say yes. And so, what we're talking about is not fluff. It's critical and central and ultimately, it's what everybody wants, but they don't know how to do it. And in the book, in the opening, I start with the lies of happiness. Like more of something will make you happier.

And I have a number one New York Times bestselling book. Another one's not going to make me happier. That ultimately happiness is in the little things that happen day in and day out. That hedonism is the enemy of happiness because it wears out your pleasure centers.

**SHAWN STEVENSON:** So that's hedonic adaptation. So, the brain is, like you just said, you already hit number one New York Times, there isn't like a number above one unless you're just like, "I want all of them, I want all the spots." And some people think like that, and you've seen this, and I know that I've seen this as well. When folks, they win the championship or they achieve that highest level in whatever it is that they're doing, and then they sink, they kind of lose themselves. And it's because the brain gets acclimated to that high. Even the things that...

The pleasure things that we seek today, I would imagine, like if we're whether people are utilizing technology or porn or whatever the case might be, you constantly need more and more and more to have that same level of normalcy in a sense. Is that accurate?

**DR. DANIEL AMEN:** Well, there's an area in your brain. So, there's a neuroscience of happiness, and the area in your brain that feels pleasure is called the nucleus accumbens. And it responds to a number of neurotransmitters, but primarily dopamine. And when dopamine hits it, you go, "Oh, I like that." But if it hits it too strong, cocaine, or too often, addiction, it wears it out.

And then you need to engage in that behavior, not to feel high, but to feel okay. And this is why fame is a disaster for the brain. And I've been blessed, I'm in Justin Bieber's docu-series Seasons to be his doctor. And Miley Cyrus. And I adore these kids, but what happened to them is just a disaster for brain function, that they get so much cool stuff, right? From money and drugs and...

**SHAWN STEVENSON:** Notoriety.

**DR. DANIEL AMEN:** Fame and notoriety and anything they want, but it doesn't make 'em happy. And in fact, it makes them sad. And they don't know that we have to protect them rather than, like Justin was on tour and he had to end it early because everything around the fame was then making it worse. So, not sleeping, overworking, video games, bad food, drugs, all the girl... It's like everything to wear out that part of your brain and you just end up feeling awful and people go, "But you have everything," but not a healthy brain.



**SHAWN STEVENSON:** Yeah, that's powerful. So, the neuroscience, so what would a healthy brain look like from a neuroscience perspective?

**DR. DANIEL AMEN:** So, I did a study for this book where I gave 500 consecutive patients to Amen Clinics, the Oxford Happiness questionnaire. And then I scanned them because that's what we do at Amen Clinics. I now have 10 clinics around the country. And we looked at people at high happiness scores versus low happiness scores. And you had better frontal lobe function if you were in the high happiness group, and you had low frontal lobe function in the low happiness group, which means don't let children hit soccer balls with their foreheads, that's a really bad idea.

Marijuana's not a health food because it drops blood flow to the brain. Alcohol's not a health food 'cause it drops blood flow. And if you have low blood flow to your front part of your brain, you end up making impulsive decisions that damage your relationship, less happiness.

**SHAWN STEVENSON:** Oh man, so these exposures, so the prefrontal cortex is going to be more correlated with happiness, is that what I'm hearing?

**DR. DANIEL AMEN:** Good activity...

**SHAWN STEVENSON:** Good activity.

**DR. DANIEL AMEN:** In the prefrontal cortex is associated with happiness, and low activity is associated with depression.

**SHAWN STEVENSON:** Dr. Amen has been a great friend and mentor for me for many, many years. I've learned so much from him. And having the opportunity to spend time with him when I was learning from him from afar for many years prior to The Model Health Show even being in existence, Dr. Amen was a hero of mine. And some of the things that I've been able to extract from our conversations and to see him demonstrate, because here's the thing, my favorite people are those who are congruent. My favorite people are those who walk their talk, who do what they're talking about, who's demonstrating, providing a model for what's possible, and Daniel Amen is one of those people through and through. He's modeling the information that he shares.

And so, when he's talking about brain health and the importance of understanding the connection between our physical health and our brain health, he's somebody who's regularly exercising. He's somebody who's masterful at activities, physical activities that are great for our cognition and keeping healthy blood flow to the brain, keeping certain parts of the brain

active and again, growing, stimulating neurogenesis. Part of that is things like table tennis and tennis, just racket sports period, that he shared.

And by the way, all of these episodes, the full episodes with these experts are going to be for you in the show notes. So, if you want to get the full meal of these episodes, you could refer back to the show notes for that. But he shared in the episode that people who play racket sports have the longest lifespans. Now we're not talking about causality here, alright? But with his data and adjusting for confounding factors, that's one of the things that really stood out.

And there's something really remarkable with things that apply to this speed of a sport like table tennis, that he's made an instrumental part of his life and his practice. And again, if somebody like him is getting these results, it's something that we all need to pay attention to. And another thing that he's demonstrating is his strength. Alright? He's got that strength, he's out there lifting weights on a regular basis, and you could see it, alright? And my guy sliding into his 70s, fitter and more energetic than many people in their 20s and 30s is so inspiring.

And I want to make that more accessible because for me, when I was working to transform my health, thankfully I had access to the university gym that I was going to. But in my community, in Ferguson, Missouri, there weren't any gyms, there weren't any recreation centers, there weren't any yoga studios. We just didn't have that stuff that were in the proximity of where I was at. Now, a neighborhood over in Florissant, again, miles from my house, there was a random Club Fitness with the sweatiest walls you'll ever see, the walls just sweating, sweating more than the people, alright? It's kind of gross, but shout-out to Club Fitness. I'm sure they have some better locations.

But again, we just didn't have much access. And that should not be the barrier, that should not be our excuse. Yes, we want to change that and make it more accessible, but we don't want to get caught up in allowing our environment to determine our outcomes. And so, getting just a couple of simple pieces of fitness equipment at our homes that we can do dozens, if not over a hundred different exercises with, to keep things fresh, and also again, just ease of accessibility. And even if we are in an area where we have access to gyms and things like that, life happens.

And so being able to utilize these tools when we're running behind on our schedule when we need to get a workout in and/or things that we can do with our family, that's so huge for us. As well as being able to do some stuff outside as well, like just stacking conditions. This is why I'm such a huge fan of the equipment from Onnit. Go to [onnit.com/model](http://onnit.com/model), that's O-N-N-I-T.com/model. Get your hands on their primal kettlebells. They've got everything that you need. They've got the most incredibly designed yoga mats even, battle ropes. They've got these

Hydrocore bags to do all of this cool stuff utilizing water. It's just bananas. Sandbags, steel clubs and maces.

Onnit is a company that push those into popular culture. There's a huge movement going on with unconventional training and it's springing up from Onnit. Go to [onnit.com/model](http://onnit.com/model) to get 10% off all of their fitness equipment, plus 10% off their human health and performance supplements that several of them have been run through clinical trials as well to affirm their efficacy. Onnit is going above and beyond. Go to [onnit.com/model](http://onnit.com/model) for 10% off.

And now moving on in our compilation, another one of my heroes from afar who's now a friend and somebody that's in my life is Dr. Caroline Leaf. And she's a cognitive neuroscientist, specializing in cognitive and metacognitive neuropsychology. She's also a multi-time bestselling author. She's a published clinical trial researcher and renowned trainer for therapists, physicians, and medical students.

And in this segment, she's going to be sharing how making a mental illness a part of your identity impacts your health outcomes. Plus, why it's vital to understand the role of the human mind when it comes to disease and healing.

**DR. CAROLINE LEAF:** I watched this over my 38-year career going from in the early, funny enough in the early '80s where we thought the brain couldn't change. We had a better approach with mental health than we have now, where we know the brain can change. And I did some of the first neuroplasticity research in the world, in my field in the '80s. And that was that time when I was told it was ridiculous. And it was only the mid-'90s that people actually accepted that the brain could change. So, it just shows you how recent it is. And so clinically, it's affected how people practice.

So, I've watched people going from having a holistic approach, looking at the person in context, their whole story, if someone's battling with whatever they're battling with, and also separating out things like kind of looking at the whole person. So, if you're battling with learning, you're battling with emotions, what happened? Not just lumping a label on because of the symptom. It was never, "Oh, you're battling with learning, you're battling with behavioral issues and you're feeling very depressed. Okay, so you're clinically depressed, you have a learning disability, here's the medication." That's today.

Then it was a narrative of, "Okay, well let's look at the whole story. Let's bring in the whole team. What happened to you? How can we address that backstory?" And that changed over the last 38 years with the advances of our understanding of the human brain, which we needed. With the advances in brain science, technology, medicine, this has taken us leaps into

the future. But we've paid a huge price, and I talk about that in the book too, and that huge price is that we've forgotten about the narrative of the person.

And there's very few clinicians and people in the field, and I mean, Daniel Amen and myself and a few others are like, there's honestly, there's more now, but at one stage, the going belief is that, if you have depression, it's considered something like diabetes and there's a chemical imbalance.

And I mean, none of this is scientific. None of it's been proven. All of it is looking for some sort of neurobiological correlate that cause this depression. So, it's like, you've got this brain disease and that's why you're depressed. No, you don't have a brain disease and that's making you depressed. You can have one and that can contribute and there could be a tumor or something like that. But over... Your mind is what the overarching concept here. So, you're a person who's experienced may be trauma or abuse or whatever it may be, or COVID and grief and loss and financial, those...

So, when we're feeling mental health challenges, those are not illnesses. They are actually responses, and they are symptoms of an underlying issue, and the warning signals that we need to listen to. And if we don't listen to them and we just stick a label on and people take that on as their identity, it changes the brain, it changes the body, and I'll show you how in a moment.

But what essentially that does in the context of psychology and in population statistics, and what happens to humanity, is when you ignore a person's story and you don't allow a person to express and find the cause and the origin, what you do is remove a whole component of a person's functioning. You literally ignore 90% of how they're functioning. You focus just on the biological.

Which works great if you've got heart disease or something physically wrong with your body, but when we've got a story in our life, which all of us do have, we have to focus on that. So, we see happening, we see what... We saw happening from the mid-'90s when neuroplasticity was at its going, I mean sort of accepted and growing, we saw that leap in medicine, technology, and neuroscience. We saw a backward movement, however in mind.

So, people then started cutting out the story of mind and saying, "Well, that's... We can't really measure it. So it would be, let's focus just on the biology. Let's make everything about the biology of the brain." And it's brain, brain, brain, and forget all about the experience. And that has resulted in our current trend that people don't talk about enough, but it's called deaths of despair. And what is happening now in our current age in 2021, and it started in '96, and it peaked, it was really identified between '14 and '15, and it's a massive problem currently, and

that is that people are dying eight to 25 years younger than they should from preventable lifestyle diseases and disorders. And that's tracked back to the mid-'90s.

So, what I'm saying in total here is that for decades we've been improving the trend of people living longer. For decades, people have been living longer because of advances. But that reversed in the mid-'90s, and by the mid-2000s it was solid in science. So, people are dying younger than they should with advances. There's a paradox, and we have to ask ourselves, how can that happen? It's contradictory, it doesn't work, but it is. And it's happening because of preventable stuff, preventable lifestyle diseases. So, when we think of lifestyle, we think of food and diet and exercise, but it's... And stress management and it's kind of a little category popped in there, but actually each one of those things is driven by mind.

So, we've got to re-look at the whole concept. It's not that mind is just part of a list of things, mind is driving all those things. Your mind never stops for three seconds. We can go without food for three weeks. We can go without water for three days. We can go without oxygen for three minutes. We don't even go three seconds without our mind working. Your mind is the source of everything.

So, your mind is the source of what you choose to eat and the nutritional benefit you get from what you're eating. You can lose up to 80% of the nutritional benefit just by being in a toxic unforgiving or bitter or angry state, which affects your pancreas, for example, and it doesn't secrete neuropeptides that you should have and there's a whole bunch of stuff. So, your mind is driving your digestive system. Your mind drives the benefit that you get down to the level of your DNA out of exercise. Your mind is driving how you manage that next argument, that next podcast, that next interaction, that response to the news. Your mind is always working.

So, if we don't deal with mind or we eliminate mind and just try and label people from a symptom, we are going to land up with what we have people dying younger than they should. And a mankind going advancing with technology but going backwards with who we are as humans. So, in conclusion to that question was a long answer when you identify with... If someone says you have clinical depression from a list of symptoms, and they diagnose... So, symptom, 15 minutes. Diagnosis, label, medication or maybe a bit of therapy or maybe a bit of both, you immediately had changed the way that your brain functions.

You start your frontal... I'm just going to give you simple versions. For example, your frontal lobe, as soon as you get that kind of negative label, you get less oxygen and blood flow to the front of your brain, literally immediately. Your identity gets stuck in being in a very negative identity. So, you have a... That creates imbalance between the two sides of the brain. So, identifying with a toxic label that doesn't actually make sense will affect the functionality of your ability to make decisions and think with cognitive flexibility and right down to the level

of impacting intelligence. And I show that in my research when you actually show a person how to shift their identity and not see themselves as a label.

So instead of saying, "I am depressed, like that's me, I've got clinical depression," you rather say to help them to see, empower them to see that no, you aren't depression, you're experiencing depression, which is totally okay, totally understandable. And if you grab that depression and look at it, you'll find a message in the depression. You are simply responding in a normal way to an adverse circumstance. When you change that, you change everything about the brain, the body, right down to the level of the telomeres.

**SHAWN STEVENSON:** Next up in our mental health and wellness compilation, you're going to be hearing from an expert with over 20 years of experience in health and fitness. He's a multi-time national and international bestselling author. And some say, the people say, he's the most handsome research scientist out there. Now, I didn't say that. The people say that. And I'm talking about none other than Shawn Stevenson. Alright? That's what the people say. It's not me, guys. It's not me. Did you ever think that maybe there's more to life than being really, really, really ridiculously good looking?

There's so much more to life than being just good looking. It's about being smart. Alright? Making smart cool. And all jokes aside, this segment is from a masterclass that I did really looking at the real health outcomes of movement and exercise. Because we tend to look at exercise through a lens of tunnel vision. We think about vanity metrics, accordingly, right? The outer expression of what exercise can do. And not looking at what our genes really expect from exercise and movement in order to have a healthy expression in the first place.

And so, in this segment, we're going to be diving in and talking about the number one cause of disability in missed work in our world today, our reaffirmation of that point, and the surprising impact that exercise can have as a treatment. Check out this incredible insight to add to your mental health and wellness superhero utility belt. The number one thing is depression. According to the National Institute of Mental Health, depression is now the leading cause of absenteeism in the United States. The number one cause of missed work is depression. To say that depression has reached epidemic proportions is an understatement.

Now, a huge, often overlooked underlying faculty or contributing force behind depression in really all manner of chronic illnesses is stress. And a study that was published in JAMA Internal Medicine, so this is the Journal of the American Medical Association Internal Medicine, reported that upwards of 80% of all physician visits today are for stress-related illnesses. Alright?

Upwards of 80% of the things that people are going to the doctor for are related to stress. Stress is a key contributing factor to those things. And we don't think about that because again, stress is sort of invisible in many ways. And in reality, stress can cause a whole series of biological and mental breakdowns as well. Now, how does exercise provide a science backed defense against depression? A brand-new meta-analysis published in the BMJ, one of our most prestigious medical journals, the British Medical Journal, looking at the impact of exercise on symptoms of depression versus conventional treatments like drugs and psychotherapy.

This meta-analysis included 1039 randomized controlled trials. So over 1000 randomized trials were included in this analysis, and this also included nearly 130,000 human beings. And the study revealed that physical activity is 1.5 times more effective at reducing mild to moderate symptoms of depression, psychological stress, and anxiety than medication or psychotherapy. It works better. Over 1000 randomized controlled trials found that exercise works better.

Now, this study has been published for a couple of months now. But yet, why aren't we hearing about this? Why aren't our physicians recommending exercise as a form of treatment? Because to say that it's not science-backed is ridiculous. It's more science-backed than anything. And it's free. It's generally free and accessible, but it's not promoted to provide that benefit so clearly.

Up next in our compilation, we have an expert. We have a practitioner who's one of the foremost experts in really helping us to understand and expand our thinking about who we are and our relationship to all of life. And I'm talking about none other than Dr. Michael Beckwith.

And he's been a pioneering voice in metaphysics and empowerment in helping to redirect our attention inward in a time when there's so much going on externally vying for our attention. And we tend to relinquish our power. We tend to outsource our attention, our authority, to things outside of ourselves.

And he's been an instrumental force in my own life, again, getting close to 20 years now since I first discovered Dr. Michael Beckwith. And this was probably about 17 years ago. And it changed my life for the better, being able to have access to his insights, again, long before I knew him. And now he's a very close friend and mentor and somebody that I can rely on for powerful insights, profound knowledge every time that I speak with him. And in this segment, he's going to be sharing one of the most overlooked factors contributing to our rising rates of depression and what we can do about it. Check out the segment from Dr. Michael Beckwith.

**DR. MICHAEL BECKWITH:** Absolutely true. Even in terms of the rising rate of suicides among all ages, particularly our youth, depression and trauma have become normalized and popular in



the atmosphere of, in the mentality of the world. And so, when you look at our culture, the Western world culture, there is a heavy movement around commercialism, around materialism, around gaining, but there's not a real vision about the activation of the potential within us. We don't hear about character anymore. We don't hear about becoming the best version of ourself. Unless they're listening to you, listening to me, or listening to people who are awake. People are reaching outside of themselves to get something to make themselves happy. Again, the consumption. So that leads to a depression rather than an expression. So, depression means that something's not being expressed.

So just in terms of long-term healing, the studies that I've seen is that if a person walks around, if a person hydrates, if a person begins to stimulate their mind with a vision, then something begins to change within, not only chemically, but mentally. Their focus becomes, "I'm not trying to get famous. I don't want... I'm not trying to get likes. I'm not trying to be known on Facebook. I'm not trying to get something out there that's going to fill me up. I have something, and I want to express that." That's creativity. It's beyond just mere creation. It's actually I'm tapping into something within me that I want to express. That leads to a greater sense of happiness, a greater sense of peace, a greater sense of joy, a greater sense of being available to inspiration. You, see?

And so, I think, when was the last time you heard a political leader or a leader stand up and say, "We have to garner our country to have a vision of what can be possible?" Generally, our leaders will stand up and they're always against something. They're going to fight a virus. They're going to fight another country. They're going to add more nuclear weapons. They're going to do something that's going to augment fear within the population, rather than focus an individual towards a vision of possibility, a vision of peace, a vision of community, a vision of working together.

So, kids growing up and all they're hearing is what they are to be afraid of. That's all they hear. They go to school, we got to get them under the table. It's going to be a mass shooting. "Here's how you get out if a mass shooter comes in, here's the next disease you might get." If that's all they're hearing, then that leads to kind of a depression of energy. You take a child, and I've met your kids, so I know you do this consciously or unconsciously, and you speak to their potential. You speak to their possibility. You speak to the greatness within them on a regular basis. They start to rise up differently than kids growing up with everything you can be afraid of.

Now, of course, you have to teach your kids not to run in front of a car if a car is coming. I mean, there are certain basic thing. "Don't touch the oven if it's hot." Yeah. But if that's their only message, that there's something bad out there and it's going to get you, then there is a curtailing of creativity and hearing the inspirational broadcast that's happening everywhere throughout the universe. So, depression is a lack of expression. That's how I frame it.

**SHAWN STEVENSON:** Up next in our mental health and wellness compilation, we have the one and only Dr. Will Cole. Dr. Cole is a leading functional medicine expert and named one of the top 50 functional and integrative doctors in the nation. He's also a New York Times bestselling author, and on this segment, he's going to be discussing how gut health influences our mental health and the connection between junk food and junk thoughts. Check out this clip from Dr. Will Cole.

**DR. WILL COLE:** The gut and brain are formed from the same fetal tissue. So, when babies are growing in their mother's womb, they're formed from that same fetal tissue, and they are inextricably linked for the rest of our life through what's known as the gut-brain axis, so the connection between the two. We know 95% of serotonin is made in the gut, stored in the gut. 50% of dopamine is made in the gut and stored in the gut. These sort of feel-good, pleasure, happy neurotransmitters. And that's just one aspect of it.

Then you think about 75% of the immune systems in the gut. Inflammation's a product of the immune system. So, most issues with the brain have to do with inflammation. So, both from a neurotransmitter synthesis standpoint and the crosstalk between the gut microbiomes and the brain and the metabolites they produce to do so to the inflammatory component. I mean, there's a whole field of research known as the cytokine model of cognitive function. Cytokines are pro-inflammatory cells. How does inflammation impact how our brain works? How does inflammation impact mental health?

And that's one of... I mean, this book is born out of what I get to talk to people on an hourly basis. And I just know there's a massive sea of people that are falling through the cracks of conventional medicine, doing everything their doctor is telling them to do, and they're considered treatment-resistant, and they are left to be their own doctor, their own health advocate in many ways. And I think... And I'm sure you agree with this, I'm happy that we are normalizing the conversations around mental health and mental health care. I'm happy that we're normalizing the conversations even around autoimmunity. But in many ways, in the conventional mainstream world, it's, in my opinion, incomplete conversation. Because you really can't talk about mental health until you realize that mental health is physical health.

And our brain is a part of our body just as much as anything else. And we like to relegate mental health as sort of this abstract "chemical imbalance" which is flimsy science anyways, but to really ignore the inflammatory component and ignore the gut-brain axis component, largely, these people are left to fend for themselves.

**SHAWN STEVENSON:** Yeah. Thank you for sharing that because mental health and brain health are really synonymous. But it seems very ethereal. It seems kind of abstract when we talk about

mental health. But in reality, again, this is, all of our thoughts create chemistry. And you just mentioned something so profound, which is so much of our mood-altering chemistry is located in our gut. And so, we have this perception, again, like all of our stuff is happening up here in our heads. And I think this is a result of, obviously, our senses being up here, but the gut has been called the second brain, the enteric nervous system.

You just mentioned serotonin and dopamine, and there's so much more. Melatonin is a huge hub happening in your gut. You have these enterochromaffin cells. And so, what we're putting into our gut inherently is going to affect our mood, our perception, our mental health. And just to open this door for everybody, why is food foundational in this gut-brain communication?

**DR. WILL COLE:** Well, it's the entry point. I mean, hopefully we're all eating, right? So, I think it's a way for people to realize they will influence how their neurotransmitters are expressed. How will the brain be firing? How will the brain be functioning? Will it be well-balanced? Will it be communicating properly with the rest of the body or not? And every food we eat either feeds inflammation or fights it. Some in negligible ways and you're not going to notice it, don't stress about it. But there are significant players when it comes to your breakfast, lunch and dinner and your snacks that will do one or the other for you. So yeah, we have to start there. We have to start there.

And the food's a central part of the book, but then again, what I call these metaphysical meals, these things that I want people to start shifting their perspective on like what are the thoughts they're feeding themselves? That's a meal. But that's less prescriptive and more nebulous because it's easy for me to say all the clinical nutrition stuff in the book and show the science and how these foods are most likely to mess up your mood and raise inflammation or trigger an auto-immune issue. These foods are going to nourish the microbiome and calm things down.

It's a lot more to unpack, it's a bigger, complex topic to talk about what thoughts are we feeding our body. But it's the truth. We have to start retraining our brain and retraining our habits to start to be supportive of the parasympathetic, the resting, the digesting, the hormone balanced with these "metaphysical meals." So, things like meditation, things like breathwork, things like somatic experiences can start to shift the nervous system in a more of a resting, digesting, hormone balanced way, which is to me, just as influential as the foods that we eat. So again, to be a both/and approach is important.

**SHAWN STEVENSON:** Yeah. One of my favorite quotes from the book is, "Thoughts and emotions are like nutrients for your head, heart, and soul. And unfortunately, many of us have been feeding ourselves junk food for a long, long time." So, this is speaking to the junk

thoughts that we might habitually be feeding ourselves. My friend Daniel Amen calls them ANTs, Automatic Negative Thoughts. And we get into these negative loops.

And my argument would just say, like my old self hearing this message from you would be like, "This doesn't make sense when we're talking about your thoughts affecting your biology, your metabolism, because how is this influencing your health outcomes if your thoughts don't have any calories?" You know what I mean? Like, it just... Because it's apparently something not tangible, which even that, that's the thing about today. You just mentioned, like we have solid science on this. Your thoughts, they have a physical substance. It's a creation. Truly.

But I think that our mission today is to get people past that veil and appreciate the fact that we can think ourselves into better health. But we have to address kind of the underlying milieu, the underlying mess that we find ourselves in.

**DR. WILL COLE:** Yeah. I agree with you fully. And I think for many people, at least that I've seen over the years, when they start feeding themselves these healthy metaphysical meals, these nourishing thoughts and habits that will start to cultivate more of a parasympathetic state, they tend to want to go towards the foods that love them back too, because it's kind of like they have a more of a self-respect. And it's not that they're trying to diet and shame themselves into wellness, it's like, "No, I... " They start to love feeling great more than they thought they wanted that food that didn't love them back. And that's sort of the paradigm shift.

But look, some people, the entry point for them to start reclaiming their health is the food. And then at some point, I see that bandwidth increase, that resilience increase because they may be cleaned up their diet, they worked on healing their gut. Then they'll, "Okay, this meditation stuff, this breathwork stuff, this somatic stuff, I can handle it now." So again, to deal with both the gut and the feelings and meet yourself where you're at, it's okay. But at some point, in your journey, most people are going to have to deal with both sides of this coin. The physiological and the mental, emotional, spiritual.

**SHAWN STEVENSON:** Our next expert in this mental health and wellness compilation is making some huge changes in mental health treatment in our world today. She's a Harvard-trained psychiatrist, and she founded and directs the first hospital-based nutritional psychiatry service in the United States. I'm talking about Dr. Uma Naidoo. In this segment, she's going to be discussing the surprising connection between sugar and illicit drugs and the influence that ultra-processed foods are having on attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder. Check out this clip from the amazing Dr. Uma Naidoo.

**DR. UMA NAIDOO:** It becomes a cycle. It becomes a cycle of eating those foods, you're having less space to make better choices. And we get into the cycle of cravings that people will talk

about. We know that sugar is associated with the dopamine reward pathways that street drugs are like cocaine. So, we know that when people speak about a strong term like sugar addiction, it actually has some scientific basis to it.

So, with PTSD, you are already struggling with an overload of things on your brain, and you can almost... You have less capacity to make those healthier choices. So how do we walk ourselves back from that, and how do we break that path? Certainly therapy, certainly other forms of treatment become important, but food is also something we can deal with in that instance.

**SHAWN STEVENSON:** Alright. Now I'm going to bring up something that might have got skipped over there. You mentioned cocaine, alright? And this pathway being very similar with sugar. And I think a rational argument would come up is that nobody's like selling their furniture to get sugar or selling their... Out selling their body or something.

**DR. UMA NAIDOO:** No. True. Good.

**SHAWN STEVENSON:** But in reality, it's because sugar is so easily accessible and socially acceptable. And there's a really famous study that was done on rats, giving them the option of choosing between sugar water or cocaine. And to rats that were even addicted to cocaine soon shifted over their addiction to the sweetened beverage. It's so bananas.

**DR. UMA NAIDOO:** It is not only crazy, it is in our food everywhere. And I think that this is something where we have to educate ourselves. The power of nutrition becomes, as you talk about, really important to us. Because people don't realize there are... There's an organization out of Austin that has listed upwards of 250 other names for sugar on food labels. So, a couple of things about this.

**DR. UMA NAIDOO:** People don't realize that something simple like brown rice syrup is sugar, because brown rice is associated with a more complex carb. Maybe people are encouraged to eat that over other forms of rice. But people also don't realize from food labels that because our food labels are in grams and not ounces and pounds, which is how we, all our cookbooks are standardized in the United States, they don't know how to convert it. So, 4 grams of sugar is one teaspoon. So, if you start to convert that, you realize on a package on a food that you're eating, the amount of sugar you're consuming. And sugar taps into that dopamine reward pathway. And that's in fact how we start to crave it more.

**SHAWN STEVENSON:** This is so important and again we're talking about solutions today, but another absolutely massive issue, specifically affecting our children right now is ADHD.

**DR. UMA NAIDOO:** Mm-hmm.

**SHAWN STEVENSON:** And so, if you could, can you share just how long you've been in this field and could you share what you've seen over the span of your career with rates of ADHD? Has this been going up from what you've been seeing firsthand?

**DR. UMA NAIDOO:** It actually has. So, I've been in this... I've been a psychiatrist for just over two decades now. And I will tell you that prescriptions in both children and adults are precipitously higher for ADHD, I would say in the last decade or so that I've noticed. Early on in my career, yes, it was important. Yes, it existed. But now I'm finding that more adults are coming in with problems, but also children. It's just sort of, I feel like it's everywhere. And I know that's a gross exaggeration, but I feel like that's what's going on in the clinical world.

And I am a nutritional psychiatrist, so I'll probably take everything back to food, but the truth is, our food system has changed. What we're eating has changed. Eating a night of Pop-Tarts and cereal is going to impact your brain development. So, we have to make that connection that food is impacting the brain development of children. And I can't ignore that fact when prescription rates are going up for things like ADHD. So, I feel like taking a step back from that and rethinking what we're doing from early on is going to affect the brain development of children.

Of course, there are genetic, environmental factors, so many different things. Not every child has the same access to food. Or same access to food or same access to healthy food. So, all of that becomes important. But I think our messaging has to be different in terms of our own understanding, because I think that that's where the power lies. Food labels are not necessarily going to change, Shawn, no one else is from the outside is going to tell us, but I think we need to empower ourselves to help our own families, help our kids, help our generations that are after us or before us.

**SHAWN STEVENSON:** Yeah so, we can do it. Let's dive in and talk about some specifics here with this one. What are some of the specific foods that can trigger or contribute to symptoms of ADHD?

**DR. UMA NAIDOO:** Sure. So, one of the things to think about with ADHD is those processed, ultra-processed foods, the colorants stabilizes, all of those things, the ultra-processed ingredients in those foods are just not good for brain development. The...So that's a big one because I think that it excludes a lot of sorts of school-age snacks and things like that. Omega-3 fatty acids is hugely important in many different mental health conditions, including ADHD, including cognitive disorders, but also depression and anxiety. And we get them from things like wild sockeye salmon, fatty fish, sardines, anchovies. But you also get plant-based sources.



You do get the short chain ALAs in plant-based sources, so there is a little bit of an issue around availability in the conversion because it's not as efficient as the omega-3 fatty acids, in things like in fatty fish. But you can get sources in walnuts, chia seeds, flaxseeds, sea vegetables. We know that they exist there, and we know that they are important, so consuming them becomes important.

A lot of people say, "Well, can I take a supplement?" You can't out supplement a healthy diet. So, start with food first and then if you're talking to your doctor and you need that supplement, absolutely. But these are powerful tools in sort of the armor that we need for our mental wellbeing.

**SHAWN STEVENSON:** Alright. I hope that you enjoyed that clip from Dr. Uma Naidoo. And it was actually just a couple weeks ago, I was hanging out with Dr. Naidoo. We met up for tea and coffee. Alright. This is the thing that I haven't really done before. Funny enough, I know it's one of the common things in culture. "Let's get together for coffee, let's get together for a drink. Let's get together for tea." I've never been that guy. Alright? So, the first time that I actually had coffee outside of the Four Sigmatic coffee that I make in my house, which I've only been drinking coffee for a couple years, maybe like what, maybe five years now?

And the first time that I had coffee outside of that was a guest on the Model Health Show, brought some coffee to the studio for us. He went to this fancy organic cafe. And that person was superstar strength athlete, Mark Bell. But that was my first-time having coffee outside of the coffee that I make at home, right? So, like going to get coffee, with my standards and my skepticism about coffee, is a big deal. And so, just sitting with Dr. Naidoo and having incredible conversations and looking at what we can do to not just change the landscape of health and wellness, metabolic health, and mental health of our society, but working to change university education.

And we already collectively, her and I, and several of the other experts in this compilation are already demonstrating and implementing programs in university settings, alright? Now, I'm very honored to say this. I've been there speaking for neuroscience departments at NYU and outside of that, from a societal perspective, doing talks at Google, for example, I've done that. Alright, so being able to traverse these different mediums and to make these really powerful connections is helping to shift the tide. Again, it's slowly but surely, but things are really picking up now because there's so many warriors who are really active right now, helping to change what's happening and what's being taught to university students who within the next few years and following decades, they're going to be shooting out, demonstrating, repeating standards of care that can either be more holistic in their thinking.



And really addressing personalized healthcare and paying attention to the nutrition, the movement practices, the sleep habits, the stress, the traumas that their patients have gone through. And the list goes on and on, the things that can manifest disease symptoms, truly caring for patients. Truly. And not just doing the standard of care where we're analyzing symptom clusters and then prescribing medications based on those things. That is the standard of care currently. That is the predominant thing that's done. And we're going to change that.

And again, you are part of that. Every time you hit "play" on these episodes, every time you share it, every time that you demonstrate that you take this information on, and you start to be the walking representation of what's possible, you are making a dent in the universe. You're making a dent in this healthcare crisis that we have and helping to fortify real change. So again, I want to thank you so much for that. And again, being that I've been making coffee, and I still, I did it today. The coffee that I'm making, I trust myself and I trust Four Sigmatic. Organic coffee and it's infused with organic dual extracted medicinal mushrooms.

Now a meta-analysis, if we're talking about mental health and mood, a meta-analysis of seven studies titled, Coffee and Caffeine Consumption and Depression, found that each cup of coffee people consumed per day was linked to an 8% lower risk of depression. Now again, we're not talking about causality here. It just happens to be aligned. The problem, however, is the quality of coffee that people are drinking. And studies like this that may be done in foreign countries that don't have pesticide laden coffee so prevalent in their culture, that can be one of the factors where they see more positive benefits.

But to take it a step further, it's not just the mood supportive thing, but it is the health of the brain itself. Regularly drinking coffee has been shown to help prevent cognitive decline and reduce the risk of developing Alzheimer's and Parkinson's disease. This attribute referenced in the journal, Practical Neurology, is yet another reason why smart coffee consumption makes the list of neuro nutritious beverages. Now again, the coffee that I drink from Four Sigmatic is infused with things like chaga medicinal mushroom, again organic, which chaga is likely the most antioxidant rich thing that humans consume, alright?

And it's been clinically shown to increase superoxide dismutase in the human body. This is a super antioxidant that plays a vast array of roles and things that we dub as anti-aging, things that we consider along the lines of anti-cancer and anti-inflammation, really, really remarkable stuff. And also, things like lion's mane mushroom, cordyceps, the list goes on and on. And if you're not a fan of coffee, their incredible teas/elixirs where you can just get chaga or lion's mane or reishi, you can have access to that too. But again, it's organic and it's dual extracted. They're making sure you're actually getting the nutrients that are found to be beneficial in these studies.

A lot of companies are not doing that. You might hear about this and run out and get some medicinal mushrooms from company X. And I highly advise against that. You want to connect with people who care deeply about what they do. And I have vetted them. I know them and they're doing stuff the right way. They love what they're doing, and they love being of service. And so go to [foursigmatic.com/model](https://foursigmatic.com/model) and you get 10% off plus access to even deeper discounts with some of their incredible bundles. So go to [foursigmatic.com/model](https://foursigmatic.com/model) that's F-O-U-R-S-I-G-M-A-T-I-C.com/model and get hooked up.

The very best coffee that you're going to have. And again, it's infused with organic medicinal mushrooms. And wow, there's really nothing else like it. Now moving on, I had to add another segment from the person for me personally who's had the biggest impact on my thinking as far as mental health, is Dr. Daniel Amen. And this is from another conversation that we had. And in this conversation, he's going to be sharing why it's critical to build something called brain reserve to protect our brain from life's inevitable stressors. Of course, he's going to share what brain reserve actually is and some of the things that build it or deplete it. Check out this next segment from Dr. Daniel Amen.

**DR. DANIEL AMEN:** Brain reserve is the extra tissue and function you have, brain tissue, brain function, to deal with whatever stress comes your way. I was an Army psychiatrist for seven years and I realized, put two soldiers in a tank, expose them to the same blast, the same force, the same angles. One of them walks away unharmed, another person is permanently disabled. Why? It depended on the brain reserve or the brain health they brought into the accident. And brain reserve is happening throughout our whole life. And even before we're born, it's the health of the mother, it's the health of the father. So, parents who smoked as teenagers, their children have less reserve.

Parents who are under great stress when, they're mothers, when they're pregnant with a child, that child is born with less reserve. Parents who are smoking pot. In Durango, Colorado, the incidence of babies born with marijuana is up 1700%. It's horrifying that baby's going to have less reserve. And then it depends on what happens throughout your life. Those of us that played football, we're stealing our reserve, I had no clue. But stealing our reserve. Those of us that grew up on fast food, less reserve. Those of us that grew up in houses of high adverse childhood experiences, stealing our reserve. Those of us that grew up with parents who cared, parents who paid attention, parents who read with us every night, more reserve.

And so, every day, and it happens throughout your whole life, every day you are building reserve, money in the bank for brain health or you're stealing reserve. And if you go to bed a half an hour early, you're building reserve. If you decide to stay up and, "Well, I'm just going to finish this series on Netflix," and you go to bed at 1 o'clock and you have to be up at 05:00, you

just stole a whole bunch of reserve because you know this, when you don't sleep properly, it turns off 700 health promoting genes, which means trash begins to build up in your brain and it steals reserve.

**SHAWN STEVENSON:** Next up in our mental health and wellness compilation, we have Dr. Robert Waldinger, and he's a professor of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School. We got a lot of Harvard alums on the show today. And again, it's just showing that even at these places of higher education, prestigious universities like Harvard, things are changing from the inside out. Again, there's a lot of antiquated things still being taught to medical students there, but there are incredible researchers at these institutions who are changemakers. And he's also the director of the longest running human study on health and wellness. And this is the Harvard Study of Adult Development at Massachusetts General Hospital.

In addition to being a bestselling author, he's also a practicing psychiatrist and psychoanalyst. And in this segment, he's going to be discussing why our relationships are such an influential factor on our mental health. Check out this clip from the amazing Dr. Robert Waldinger. Why are relationships such a huge influence on our health and longevity?

**DR. ROBERT WALDINGER:** Yeah. The research is still going on, but we've spent the last 10 years in our study trying to answer that question. The best thing we can say now, 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 of the things 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 kind of 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:** That's so remarkable. And the thing is, even as you're saying this, it just experientially, we know this, but to have the science to affirm it and to direct our attention to it, it's basically a buffer. It's a very powerful buffer against how we're processing and dealing with stress. And we'll put this study up for everybody to see on the screen, but an analysis recently found that upwards of 60% to 80% of all physician visits today are for stress related illnesses.

**DR. ROBERT WALDINGER:** Absolutely.

**SHAWN STEVENSON:** Right? Stress is tied into so many different things that can go wrong in the human body, but we... And just to be clear as well, it's not the absence of stress, because stress can get turned into a bad word as well, right? But it's our ability to properly assimilate, manage, grow from stress, or make stressors. You mentioned exercise and things like that. But overall, when we get into this place of chronic stress and not being able to deal with the stress.

**DR. ROBERT WALDINGER:** Right.

**SHAWN STEVENSON:** And so, our relationships basically make us stronger in the face of stress.

**DR. ROBERT WALDINGER:** Yeah, yeah exactly. And what we hope is, as you say, that we have the chance to recover from stress. And also, that we're not overwhelmed by challenges. That if we have challenges that we feel capable of meeting, that's great and that fosters growth. If we have challenges that are overwhelming, we don't have ways of coping. And that's when stress becomes detrimental to our bodies. Relationships and connections keep us wanting to be our best selves in the world. I mean, one of the things they often find is that men in particular are more likely to die shortly after their partners die. And the question is, why does that happen? Is it mystical? Is it...

And one of the simpler explanations is that men often as they're older, stop taking their medication, they stop eating as well 'cause they don't have a partner there to say, "Did you take your pills today?" They don't have a partner there to make sure they're eating decent food and they're remembering to eat and they're not drinking too much. And so, in some ways, these connections in the most simple fashion keep us trying to be our best for each other.

**SHAWN STEVENSON:** Yeah. And in the context of men, I would think also that sense of purpose as well.

**DR. ROBERT WALDINGER:** Yeah.

**SHAWN STEVENSON:** Living for her, providing service. But I would imagine obviously it's going to affect everybody.

**DR. ROBERT WALDINGER:** Everybody. Women too. Absolutely. That part of what happens is we all want to feel like we matter somewhere in the world. And often the place we feel like we matter first is with each other, with our closest relationships. So, what happens when the person you're closest to is not there anymore? And when we're lucky, we find new people to whom we can matter, and they can matter to us.

**SHAWN STEVENSON:** Yeah. Now, here's the biggest question, right? We know that our relationships obviously have a huge influence on our lives, but I think we have this very romantic idea about relationships. "You complete me" and the whole thing.

**DR. ROBERT WALDINGER:** Yeah, yeah.

**SHAWN STEVENSON:** But what actually constitutes a good relationship? And I think it's going to be surprising for people. Because we think super smooth sailing, no problems.

**DR. ROBERT WALDINGER:** No, no. In fact, we found that like many of our most stable couples fought like cats and dogs. But the difference, so it wasn't the amount of arguing you did, it wasn't even the amount of anger. What it was when we actually watched couples on video having an argument, it was whether you could see a bedrock of affection and respect even when people were arguing. So, what we know about the best relationships is, first of all, there are always disagreements. Always. And the question is, how do we manage those disagreements? Can we find ways to work out those inevitable conflicts? I want this and you want that, always going to happen.

The question is, can we find a way to work things out so that neither of us feels like we've won or lost? That we both feel okay about each other and ourselves when we emerge from working out a conflict. That's the key. Not whether disagreements happen, 'cause those are always going to happen.

**SHAWN STEVENSON:** In the book you also talk about some of the myths about happiness. And one of those is that happiness is an accomplishment, essentially. It's something that we can basically achieve like a certificate or something. Can you talk about that?

**DR. ROBERT WALDINGER:** Oh yes. This idea that, "If I just get these things in my life, if I buy the right stuff, if I get the right partner, if I go to the... Live in the right place," that each of those things will somehow set me up for good. The truth is, happiness comes and goes. For all of us. Nobody is happy all the time. And it's really important to name that 'cause when we look at

somebody else's Instagram feed, for example, we can think they're having the best life ever. They've got it all figured out and they're happy all the time. 'Cause we curate what we show each other.

**SHAWN STEVENSON:** Yeah.

**DR. ROBERT WALDINGER:** I don't post the pictures of myself when I wake up in the morning feeling depressed or dreading the future. I post the pictures where I'm happy and I'm in a nice place. And so, what we want to do is be much more aware of the ways that we compare our insides to other people's outsides.

**SHAWN STEVENSON:** Alright. We're now at our final expert in this powerful mental health and wellness compilation. And to close things out, I didn't think that there was anybody more appropriate than somebody who is an early guest of The Model Health Show many, many years ago. She's been a multi-time guest. And a little fun fact, The Model Health Show was the first big podcast that our next expert was on many years ago. Since then, she's done all the things, she's done all the major media, all the big shows, but I knew then, "I was like this... She's got the juice." And I'm talking about Dr. Susan David.

Dr. Susan David is an award-winning Harvard Medical School psychologist and her number one Wall Street Journal best-selling book, Emotional Agility, describes the psychological skills to thriving in times of complexity and change. Dr. David's TED Talk on the topic of emotional agility has been seen by, I think it's around 10 million people at this point. And she's also been a frequent contributor to the New York Times, Wall Street Journal, The Washington Post, the list goes on and on and on. And in this segment, she's going to be sharing the truth about our emotions and why they're so valuable. Check out the segment from the amazing Dr. Susan David.

**DR. SUSAN DAVID:** If we think about our inner worlds, our thoughts, we might have thoughts about I'm not good enough, or there's no point in trying, we might have emotions and we have many different emotions that course through our worlds every day, emotions, experiences like stress or disappointment, joy, anxiety, and so on. And we also have our stories. We have stories, some of them were written on our mental chalk boards when we were five years old. Stories about whether we are good enough, what kind of life we deserve, what kind of love we deserve.

And as it turns out, how we deal with our inner worlds does drive everything. It drives how we love, how we come to our relationships, what we share, whether we are able to be vulnerable. It drives how we parent, the way we are able to show up to our children and to help them to navigate their own emotions.

It drives how we lead in our organizations and beyond. And of course, it drives our health and our wellbeing. Because as an example, when we come home from work, if we are feeling stressed and we are unable to recognize that that stress is about something that happened in the workplace that day, and so we push it down or we are not able to deal with it effectively, that then we know impacts on our likelihood that we'll sit in front of the TV as an example, as opposed to making effective choices.

So much in our society suggests that it's all about externalities. That if we structure the environment, it's almost this idea that yes, if we don't like our house, we can paint the walls. If we don't like our car, we can change it. And there's almost this idea that we can change anything by changing externalities. Whereas actually so much of the kind of life that we have, the kind of love that we have and the choices that we make is driven by the relationship that we have with ourselves.

Now, just to be clear, that's not to say that the external world doesn't matter. We know that systems and policies make a difference. We know that if we live in a community in which we are unserved by public transport and it takes two hours to get to and from work, that that's going to impact on our lives. And to deny that would be denying reality. So, we know that systems and processes make a difference. We also know that we can set up our immediate environment in ways that are congruent with choices that we want. So, for example, the simplest most obvious example is if you're trying to make effective health choices and you go into the kitchen and there's no fruit, but there is chocolate, well, your environment is nudging you in a particular direction.

But ultimately, the way we navigate our inner world, our ability to be healthy with ourselves, with our emotions, to be connected with our values and who we want to be, this has an outside impact on everything else. And in many ways, these ideas of emotions and inner world have historically been pushed to the sidelines. And so, Shawn, I know you speak to a lot of psychologists and you do a lot of work in the area of psychology, but I'll share with you that when I was doing my PhD in emotions and I was in a psychology department, I struggled to find an advisor who was willing to supervise me, to supervise my research in the area of emotions.

Because even in a psychology department 20 years ago, the idea was that actually it's about what you can measure. It's about externalities, it's about maybe behaviors, but the whole idea of emotions was seen as being soft, fluffy, intangible. We see this in our organizations where emotions have become feminized and pushed to the sidelines. And one of the things that I'm most excited about of my work and the world we're in right now, is there's a radical reawakening and a radical reckoning with this acknowledgement that emotions shape our



thinking, our decision making, and our behaviors. And they're probably the most powerful resource that we can have.

The other that I just wanted to connect with briefly, because I think it's so important is, you mentioned this idea about sometimes what happens is the emotion or the experience becomes our identity. And I think this is really powerful and I'll give you an example of what I mean here, which is words matter. Words matter. So often we'll say something like, "I am sad." Okay, "I am sad, I am angry." And it's so commonplace. We all do this all the time. Like I am sad, of course, like what else would I be saying? But if we think about it when we say, "I am sad," what we are actually saying is, I am all of me, 100% of me is defined by sadness.

And so, Shawn, one of the things that I speak about a lot in my work is about the fact that all of us, every single person listening today, we all have beauty and wisdom and compassion and capacity and values and intentions. In the dark of night when we aren't in a swirl of anxiety, but rather we kind of get into bed and we are just alone with ourselves, and we kind of tap into the core of who we are as individuals. Every single one of us has values and like this kind of deep voice inside of ourselves that is really what I want to think of as our human wisdom.

And when we say something like, "I am sad," there's no space for anything else. There's no space. If I am angry with my partner or with my spouse, if that emotion is all-enveloping, there's no space for who do I want to be in this interaction? Who do I want to be in this relationship? What are my values right now? Yes, I'm angry with this person, but what is the greater goal of how I want to come to this relationship?

And I often think that when we say, "I am sad," it's almost like what we are doing is we are saying almost that sadness is a cloud in the sky and we have become the cloud. And what I like to think instead is that there's huge power in naming our thoughts, our emotions, and our stories for what they are. They are thoughts, emotions, and stories.

They aren't fact, they aren't our identity. They are thoughts, emotions, and stories. So, they are part of us, but they are not all of us. And the way we start getting this beautiful separation so that other aspects of ourselves can come to the fore is when we start noticing them for what they are. And this is what you are reflecting on earlier. I'm noticing that I'm feeling sad. I'm noticing the urge to shut down in this conversation. I'm noticing the thought that there's no point in trying. I'm noticing that this is my "I'm not good enough" story.

When you start to notice your thoughts, your emotions and stories for what they are, which is thoughts, emotions, and stories, parts of us, but not all of us, what we start doing is we start creating space for other aspects of ourself to come forward. And so, what we are doing when we do this is we move away from, "I am sad, I am the cloud," into recognizing that you are not

the cloud. That every single person listening, you are not the cloud. You are the sky. You are the sky.

You are human and messy and able and big enough and capacious and beautiful enough to experience all of your thoughts, your emotions and your stories, and to still choose who you want to be in this space, in this moment. You're undefined. When you look at the sky, you don't look at a cloud and define the sky by the single cloud. And emotional agility is about moving into the space of being the sky.

**SHAWN STEVENSON:** Thank you so very much for tuning into this episode today. I hope you got a lot of value out of this. To hear from so many different perspectives about our current mental health situation and practical things that we can do to help to change the tides, it's so important. And it's so important to share this by, of course, sharing it by imbuing, embodying and being the representation. But of course, directly sharing this as a resource with your friends and family. You could share this through the podcast app that you're listening to. Just send a DM, send a text message. Or of course you can take a screenshot of this episode and share it on social media.

And tag me if you want to share it on your Insta story. I'm @shawnmodel on Instagram and on Twitter and at the Model Health Show on Facebook. And I always love to see that when people are sharing the episode. I'd love to see when people are sharing where they're listening at as well. I've seen it all. People listen to the episode while they're doing laundry, while they're out walking the dogs, while they are working out, while they're painting. The list goes on and on. I've seen all kinds of cool stuff. But I'd love to see where you are rolling with me at. And of course, in the car, that's a big one as well.

So, I appreciate you so much for being a part of this mission and we've got some epic masterclasses and world-class guests coming your way very, very soon. So, make sure to stay tuned. Take care, have an amazing day and I'll talk with you soon. 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 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 the show is awesome, and I appreciate that so much. And take care. I promise to keep giving you more powerful and powering great content to help you transform your life. Thanks for tuning in.