

THE MODEL HEALTH SHOW

EPISODE 730

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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. A massive meta-analysis published in the peer-reviewed Journal PLOS ONE uncovered the number one element that's impacting human health and longevity. Researchers at Brigham Young University did a huge meta-analysis, that means multiple studies, and this included 148 studies. This is a robust set of data. And this also included over 300,000 study participants. And after compiling all the data, looking at their lifestyle factors, looking at their states of health, the researchers found that people who had healthy relationships or healthy social bonds had about a 50% reduction in all-cause mortality. What that means is people who have healthy relationships have about a 50% reduction in dying prematurely from everything. All right, let that sink in for a moment. It is our relationships, as the researchers uncovered, that was more impactful than exercise, than being able to beat obesity. The list goes on and on. Nothing impacted health more than the quality of relationships.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Now, to take this a step further, right here on the Model Health Show, we had on the director of the longest-running, longitudinal study on human health and longevity. Dr. Robert Waldinger, out of Harvard University, is the fourth director to have the baton passed to him in this study. And their data concluded the same thing. The number one factor determining how long we live and how long we live healthfully is the quality of our relationships. Our relationships are really the tip of the spear. They're deeply impacting all of our lifestyle factors because the quality of our relationships deeply influences our exercise habits, what we're eating, our sleep habits, how we relate to ourselves, our sense of purpose, our sense of self-esteem and self-value. The list goes on and on and on. We know that good relationships and good moments in relationships can really be like rocket fuel for us. And struggle points in relationships or even negative relationships can really, really mess up our lives and make everything exponentially harder. So this masterclass is a call to arms to really leverage this, leverage the power of relationships in specifically the most remarkable emerging field, looking at what are all of our relationships really revolving around?

SHAWN STEVENSON: What is kind of the cornerstone of so many of our relationships? And like I said, it is now emerging in the scientific data what that factor is. And that factor is food. We connect around food like a few other things in our reality. Food and eating together is something that is deeply embedded in human evolution. Today, food is a cornerstone in everything from a first date to the last time that we are seeing someone and saying goodbye. I recently had that experience at my father's funeral. And afterwards, we're celebrating life and connecting around food. Whether this is after the big game or after graduation, the list goes on and on and on. So much of our lives have food featured in them.

It goes so much deeper than what is seen on the surface because this isn't something that's just kind of like an extracurricular thing about food. Food is part of our survival. As we evolved as a species and created tribes, much of our lives centered around food. And food was something that the entire tribe was involved in. We hunted together, we gathered together, we prepared food together, we ate together and we celebrated together.

SHAWN STEVENSON: It was usually during these meals and afterwards during celebration where stories were told, where tradition was passed on from one generation to the next. Prior to the advent of writing and books, this is how the story of humanity was passed on. And again, this was all revolving around the celebration of food. And so to say that this is a powerful, epigenetic controller is an understatement. This is one of the primary things impacting how our genes are getting expressed. That's just one dimension of why this impacts our health so deeply. And we're going to impact this even more today and really be able to leverage this and to really transform the health of ourselves, our families and our communities by leveraging this information that you're going to learn today. Now, as I mentioned, one of the most remarkable emerging fields was looking at how eating together with friends and family, understanding the power of food and the power of our relationships and their intersection, how they're integrated together sent me on a really remarkable journey. And I'm grateful to be able to share some of this incredible science with you.

SHAWN STEVENSON: We're gonna start with a study that was conducted by researchers at Harvard who are collecting data on family eating behaviors, food choices and health outcomes for many years. What these researchers uncovered was that families that eat together on a regular basis consumed significantly higher amounts of real whole foods, namely fruits and vegetables, and as a result consume significantly higher amounts of essential nutrients that help to prevent those family members from chronic diseases. On the other side, they found that these family members consumed far less ultra processed foods and some of those newly invented chemical elements and by nature avoiding some things that create or contribute to the onset of diseases. Now, this is fascinating in and of itself, but it's not enough. I want to dig in and look for some specifics, all right? Namely, okay, so eating together has this protective effect with family members, but how often do we have to do this? That's the question.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Because knowing all the years that I worked in clinical practice and working with real people and real families for many years, I know a profound truth that all health practitioners need to know if they haven't already had this revelation, which is people want change, but they don't want to change that much, all right? People want benefits, but they don't necessarily wanna turn their lives upside down to get them. And that is understandable. We are creatures of comfort and strive for the minimum effective dose. And this is something for us to celebrate, for us to know, because we do have so much going on in

our lives today. And we have to understand that, again, a lot of times people want change, but they don't want to change that much. So we want these benefits, but oftentimes we want to bring ourselves currently to the new party, get those benefits without changing. Change is involved, but we don't have to make the change difficult. And so I went into the data looking for the minimum effective dose, and I found it.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Two studies, one was published in the Journal Pediatrics, and the other was published in JAMA, the Journal of the American Medical Association. And these researchers found that eating together with your family three times a week led to significantly reduced incidence of obesity in those children, in the families, and significantly lowered incidence of the development of disordered eating. Now, these are just a couple of the incredible kind of preventative health outcomes that we're seeing in the data from three meals a week together. Now, this should already be sparking a call to arms for us today, an action step for us today, which is let's get this three meals per week scheduled. Let's get it on the calendar, because we've got to understand there's so many different things going on in our lives. And a lot of times today, if we don't schedule it, it's not real. We've got all these things that are significantly less important than our families that make it on our calendar, but not family meals. And this kind of protective nature of eating together with the people that we care about. So start to think in the back of your mind, like what can that look like for you? If you're not already currently getting in that minimum effective dose of three meals per week, what days might fit?

SHAWN STEVENSON: Because we're gonna go through some specific strategies at the end on how we can implement this stuff, but just start thinking about it a little bit. You know, maybe it's family dinners on Monday and Wednesday and brunch on Sunday. You know, just start to think about it a little bit in the back of the mind. Maybe it's breakfast is like that meal that you can kind of dial in and eat with your family, eat with your kids on a regular basis. So just wanna plant that seed, start thinking about it, because you've got more science to get into. Because we just talked about the benefits for kids, this kind of protective element for kids. What about for us, the big kids? Well, another really fascinating study. This was published in the Journal Family and Consumer Sciences. Uncovered that sitting down to a family meal helped working parents reduce the tension and strain from long hours at the office. They were looking at people who were working in the tech industry. So you know that that can be pretty stressful. The researchers found that even if test subjects had major stress at work, if they could consistently make it home in time to eat dinner with their family, their work morale stayed high, productivity stayed high, stress had this ability to kind of be metabolized.

SHAWN STEVENSON: However, the researchers noted that as work increasingly interfered with the ability to make it home to eat dinner with their family, levels of dissatisfaction at work began to creep up. Productivity starts to go down and stress is no longer getting

processed efficiently. So why does this matter? Because I just threw out the S word a little bit here. All right, I'm talking about stress. All right, I'm talking about that BS, that big stress. All right, looking at how stress was really impacting our lives. Well, according to another study that was published in the journal the American Medical Association, after checking out what patients are actually going to see their physician for, they found that 80%, 60 to 80%, so upwards of 80% of all physician visits today are for stress-related illnesses. All right, stress is a huge component of so many of the different disease manifestations that we see on the surface. But underneath the surface, we start to see the elements of stress and how that can really break our bodies down. We can see dramatic suppression of our immune system or even hyperactivity of our immune system, which is really kind of the front line of being able to defend our bodies from all manner of chronic and infectious diseases.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Our immune system really needs to have a place to operate in an intelligent way, but stress can really kick things to either side. In addition, the excessive production of stress hormones itself can really do a number on breaking down our tissues. So we want to be able to have our stress hormones to get up and to get things done and to take things to the limit whenever needed, but we also need to be able to down-regulate because living in that constant fight-or-flight, sympathetic-dominant state breaks our bodies down prematurely. And what we really see, talking about these stress-related illnesses, is an acceleration of our rate of aging. So again, there's something protective for the kids and parents alike. Now, let's take this one more step further because I can already feel a little bit of whataboutism popping up, all right, when talking about the ability to get these benefits and to eat together with family and friends. By the way, friends are included, all right? Shout out to friends. Shout out to Matt LeBlanc, all right? But just keeping in mind, friends are included in this equation as well. It's getting together with people that you love that has this really special benefit.

SHAWN STEVENSON: And we're gonna talk about why in just a moment. But one of the things that we need to address is the I'm not able to do this. That sounds good and all, but I'm not able to do this. Or there are many people who aren't able to do this. This is a position of privilege to be able to eat together with one's family. And I wanna acknowledge this and really unpack this perspective because it's really important, especially just overall in the conversation about health and wellness today in our society. So many people are calling for more access. So many people are calling for the ability for more people to be able to do some of these things, to learn about these things and to put them into place in their lives. Now, I have a very unique perspective on this because I come from conditions where I can literally count on my two hands how many times I sat down and ate a meal with my family. Living in a low income environment, either one parent's just not around, we're eating a lot of ultra processed foods and we're kind of just grabbing and going.

SHAWN STEVENSON: We might eat at the same time, but we're largely just kind of scattering. Somebody's going, watching TV, playing a video game, going outside, whatever the case might be. We just didn't have this kind of structured peace in our culture. Now, I know this. Had my parents known that eating together with their children could help to protect their health in some way, they would have done it. They weren't proactively trying to mess us up. So often, myself included, we carry stories about our environment that we come from, our families that we come from that can restrict us from being able to really just process things in a healthful way and to move forward and to not carry the resentment and the blame. Not to say that negative things didn't happen to us, but we need to be able to take control of our story right now so that we can write a healthier future moving forward. And so again, for me, what gives me solace is knowing that, Hey, I wanna believe that my parents, had they had access to this information, this is something they would have employed in our lives, but it wasn't a part of our culture, unfortunately. And so with this being the case and being someone who is from, truly a low income environment. Living in poverty in the United States, and I always like to make that clear because poverty in the United States is very different from poverty in other parts of the world.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Poverty in the United States mean you probably have a TV, all right? We had the floor model. We had a floor model TV. And there was one time I even got a little black and white, boy, a little black and white, little TV in my room at one point. Now my room might've been as big as a closet at the time, but we still had access to those kinds of things. We might get a video game system a year later after everybody else has got it, but I play it at my friend's house, but we still have those kind of things. We probably have a vehicle or access to a vehicle. We did take public transportation quite a bit, absolutely. But there were times my mom was always hustling. She was a hustler and she would get cars at different places and run them into the ground, of course. And eventually she started getting cars from a place called O-K Junk Cars. And this is a true story, O-K Junk Cars. Shout out to them on Manchester, right outside Maplewood. All right, shout out to everybody in St. Louis. But she was getting cars on rotation. She'd always get a Ford Escort for some reason from O-K Junk Cars, running into the ground. That's how I learned how to drive a stick shift, by the way.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Shout out to the Ford Escort. Anyways, so with this being the case, again, coming from an environment where we still have some, not necessarily a lot of resources but we have this capacity to develop resourcefulness and to evoke creativity, to make something out of nothing in this environment. And for us, what we really need access to the most is information. Awareness is the first domino for so many of these things. At the time we were getting food from charities. There was the Hosea House was near our home for a time period where we get different food gifts and also gifts for holidays like Christmas and things like that as well. We were on government assistance, food stamps, WIC. All the things, you check the boxes on us struggling to survive. That's the reality that we were living in. Not

to mention in the environment itself, being exposed to a lot of volatility, right? We're in conditions where there is drug activity, there's gang activity, there's violence. But what most people don't understand is that there's also a lot of beauty in this environment as well.

SHAWN STEVENSON: There's this very interesting dynamic of community that manifests. There's, as I mentioned, a powerful kind of hotbed of creativity that we start to see in popular culture, by the way, from what is born in these conditions of poverty has now become a huge part of popular culture. And it's born in those conditions. And so being really put through the fire can manifest something very powerful. And so I wanna celebrate the beauty of the environment as well and not just talk about or make it seem like it's all bad because it's not. Now, real talk, I gotta share this, I lost people. This is not a joke, this is not a game. It's not like it's all sunshine and roses. And I almost lost myself many times as well. And there's so much potential. There's so much beauty and opportunity, first and foremost, when we become aware of it. So that's why I do this show today is to provide a model. All people have to do, this doesn't cost anything. All they have to do is press play and they can find a door out of those conditions because I did it, I walked through it. And I'm saying all this to say that in these conditions, again, being able to take control of the microculture in our household, had my parents become aware, we would be able to get some of these results. And I'm not just saying this because it sounds good, I'm saying this because it exists in the science.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Another study that was published in the Journal of Nutrition Education and behavior looked at family eating behaviors and the impact that it had on children in low-income communities, these researchers found that these children who ate together with their families, one parent, both parents didn't matter, caretaker ate together with their families, four times a week, ended up consuming five servings of fruits and vegetables at least five days a week, and these children consumed significantly less ultra-processed foods, namely chips and soda when they ate with their families at least four times a week. There was something protective about it versus kids who ate less than that with their families, or if at all, like in my case.

SHAWN STEVENSON: And so what the research is noted, by the way, in this data, which is really fascinating, is that specifically when the TV was never or rarely on during family meal times, they were seeing these health outcomes. All right now, by the way, we're gonna get to a place of balance here, because this is not saying we can't enjoy a movie night or watch the game and eat some food with the people that we care about, those things are wonderful, but there is something very special. Something deeply ingrained and transformative about eating with the people that we love on a consistent basis, there's something that our DNA needs... Our genes are expecting of us to do this, and so again, we're gonna get more into those details on how we can make this work, what that looks like under different circumstances, but I wanted to highlight that regardless of the conditions that we're in...

Regardless of the conditions that we come from, by being aware of this, we can start to make change, we can put this in place for ourselves because the data indicates that even if it's low quality food, there's a protective element when we're eating together, there's something special about it, now let's talk about what it is. First and foremost, When we get together with people that we care about, there is this really remarkable invisible thing that we can now track, we could take objective measurements or biomarkers and we can track this now, but for centuries, for thousands of years, throughout human evolution, this has been going on beneath the surface, when we are with people that we love and people who love us, we have a really remarkable shift in the chemistry that we're producing, all of our thoughts create chemistry in our bodies, conscious and subconscious, we don't have to know that we're thinking these things and also the environments that we're in.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Alter our chemistry as well. Why does this matter? The chemistry that we're producing based on our thoughts, for example, we can have thoughts of anxiety that's producing a cascade of chemicals that makes us feel that feeling... It doesn't just happen out of nothing, it's based on the chemistry that we're producing within our own bodies, or chemistry of love, chemistry of anger, we feel it in our bodies, we know what that feels like, and we're creating alterations in the hormones that we're producing, the neuro transmitters that we're producing we're making shifts in things like insulin sensitivity, we're making shifts in things like leptin sensitivity, the list goes on and on. We're changing how our cells are communicating based on our thoughts. It's so powerful. Now, with that being said, one of the remarkable changes that takes place when we're with people that we care about is we have an increase in a really powerful hormone called oxytocin, oxytocin has received the nickname by scientists as the cuddle hormone, all right, the cuddle hormone. Now, it's really deeply related to human bonding and connection, it's part of the reason that we bond with other people, we bond with the people that we bond with is because oxytocin is there like a little bit of a love potion, making us feel more connected.

SHAWN STEVENSON: All right. So again, this is happening beneath the surface, but now we know what's happening, and this is part of the reason why eating with people that we care about is so influential on our health, is that we're having this positive alteration in our chemistry within our bodies, it's making really remarkable shifts to our biology, and by the way, these hormones, this isn't like an exogenous oxytocin, this is made in you for you... Alright, this is FUBU, it's FUBU in your body for us by us. Please understand how powerful this is, it's not bio-identical. It is literally produced and made for your receptor sites, this powerful pharmacy, the most powerful pharmacy in the universe for you as an individual is within your own body and mind, because it's making chemistry on top... On top, specifically for you. And there are certain things that we do that help to create really advantageous changes to our biology, and one of those is being with people that we love, so... Oxytocin. Why is this so remarkable in this whole equation? Well, oxytocin is one of the few hormones that have been

identified that can essentially neutralize the activity of cortisol, one of our most glorified and talked about stress hormones, which cortisol is not bad, cortisol is just misunderstood, alright.

SHAWN STEVENSON: But when cortisol is doing the most, when it's running too hot, that's when we could have problems, and so helping to get stress in check, oxytocin does that... It's about that life. Alright. So keep that in mind, we're gonna put that in the back pocket, we're gonna expand on this because what we're really looking at like what's controlling all of this cascade, when we're talking about our hormones production, transformation in our physiology, we're looking at the activity of our brain and nervous system. So one of the other things that we've identified is that when we get together with people that we care about under this incredible sphere of good food to boot, with that combination together, we're seeing this switch over take place from the sympathetic fight or flight nervous system to the parasympathetic, which is nicknamed the rest and digest. The rest and digest nervous system, suddenly, our ability to assimilate, digest and eliminate waste products is all enhanced thanks to eating with people that we care about. So again, we could just keep digging deeper and deeper looking at... Let's jump over to the psychological ramifications, one of the most special aspects of this and why we're seeing these really cool things happening with kids who eat with their families on a regular basis, there's a deep human need, a deep psychological need to feel seen.

SHAWN STEVENSON: To feel a sense of significance, to feel like we matter, this is an opportunity, understanding that the dinner table is a unifier, and it doesn't have to be dinner, by the way, but that table to sit down together is a bonding agent. It's a unifier, it's an opportunity to get real face time with somebody who's counting on you to see them, to feel seen, to feel loved, to feel a sense of significance, that's one of the elements that can be looked past when talking about, why, why are we seeing these health benefits with kids when they're eating with their caregivers on a regular basis, this is part of it. Now, with that being said, we're gonna talk about in a moment what the barriers are to making that happen and make it happen on a consistent basis, but just to share one more element, because this is important for all of us as adults as well, to be able to connect with our loved ones, and it creates a space for us to offload stress, and remember, this is important for all of us because it is stress that is a primary driver of illness today, it is stress that can break our bodies down prematurely.

SHAWN STEVENSON: So utilizing the science backed deeply ingrained in Human Evolution strategy of eating together with the people that you care about, there's nothing like it, there's nothing quite like it in our reality, now, just noting some of these benefits that we've covered, and there's more... And by the way, all of this, all of the science that we've covered is featured in the new Eat Smarter Family Cookbook, now available nationwide, it's on store

shelves nationwide at your favorite book stores, and of course, you can get a copy online from your favorite retailer, Barnes & Noble, Amazon, all that good stuff. My heart felt invitation for you is to make sure that you get a copy of this book like yesterday, and you will find that this will be a staple in your kitchen. The science is remarkable. Yes, but the celebration of food and being able to have these incredible food experiences, you know, having a transformation in our kitchen culture, being able to involve our kids in this process, or just creating a kitchen culture where we feel good in the kitchen and we can create a vibe that we enjoy, so we can make this again a more consistent part of our lives.

SHAWN STEVENSON: That's what this is really all about. So there's 100 amazing, 100 amazing recipes in the book. Now, listen, if you don't know. I'm a foodie. I love, I love delicious food. If it's not delicious why am I here? Alright. And I understand, again, I'm a nutritionist, alright, I have been in this field for 21 years. I have colleagues who are on that eat to live, don't live to eat wave. They're riding that wave. Alright, they're riding that wave, but the waters are kind of choppy, alright, they're not really catching the flow often times you see a lot of pissocity in their face. Let's just be honest.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Alright. We might not want to go surfing with them, as well intention as they are, and they might get some people out to surf with them who's like they're, you know, about their life. But not only is that not speaking to the essence of so much of humanity, this is ignoring our biology as well, because our very highly complex, intelligent flavour palette helped us to evolve, and we were driven to eat certain things that tasted good to us, that's why we would eat them. Yes, yes, food manufacturers have manipulated our innate desire to eat tasty things, that's the problem, us enjoying good food is not the problem. It is not the father. Alright, so I wanna celebrate this innate human faculty that we have to enjoy delicious food, and now is to look at, Okay, with all these incredible benefits that we're seeing in the scientific data, and all of this again being power-packed into this amazing book that has over 250 scientific references. This has never been done with a cookbook before, and truly being about that life when it comes to deliciousness, it's something really special. So again, I'll encourage you to get your copy to celebrate this new book launch and also helping to invest in this movement in Family Wellness and...

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yeah, it just mean so much to me, truly. So, definitely grab your copy. Now, with all of this incredible information, what's happening on the other side, what's happening when we're not taking advantage of this. Do we have any data on that? Well, yes, we do, a peer review study published in nutrition journal in 2018, found that people who eat alone on a regular basis tend to have poorer diet quality and lower intake of essential nutrients than people who eat with others on a regular basis. We know this already, and we've got peer review data to affirm what we already know innately.

SHAWN STEVENSON: We've quickly devolved from a species who ate together with our tribe to moving further and further apart, to having communities, neighborhoods, different houses, but still we would have family, close family in proximity in those neighborhoods to now, we're often separated from different generations, and to that point where we are today, we've evolved to a point that we're even separate in our own households, our face-to-face relationship with the celebration around food has now been replaced largely with eating in isolation often in front of mind-numbing media. Now again, this is not a bashing of that behavior, because I've been known a time or two on a lunch break, the pop band, I don't know, some Conan O'Brien clips and have my lunch or...

SHAWN STEVENSON: I just watched some hip hop evolution show and looking at the history of 50 years of hip-hop. Alright, so this is not the problem, it's when that completely replaces being human and eating face-to-face with people that we care about, we can have these new innovations that can bring us together in some aspects, but they cannot replace real connection in the real world. Now, what's the state of affairs? We went from 100% of people eating together with their families on a regular basis, again, we're talking about thousands upon thousands of years, because that's just how it was. The question is, where are we today? Well, despite all of the psychological and biological benefits of eating together, that is acknowledged again in multiple purview studies, according to researchers at Harvard University today, only about 30% of families managed to eat together on a regular basis.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Again, this cultural norm of eating together as a family has steadily declined in recent decades, while our consumption of technology and ultra-processed foods has steadily gone up. So this is a call to arms today, it's a call to arms for transformation, it's a call to arms for family, because when we're trying to change behaviors, like I wanna eat healthier, I wanna exercise, I want to do these things to progress my health, those things are very respectful and altruistic and honorable, but trying to change one's behavior in a culture that is not well, makes that behavior change incredibly, incredibly difficult to do.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Not impossible, because I come from that, we can still change under the most un-ideal circumstances, but it takes oftentimes, so much suffering, so much trial and error trying to figure things out and call your way into that when the culture is just inundating you with sickness. It can be done, but what if we can address what is the most powerful agent for change, which is we step in and instead of trying to get people to change their behaviors, we change the culture around them that makes the behavior to be healthy automatic. That's how we make change. I'm so grateful it took me years and practice to figure this out, it took me years, but now to be able to lay this out in a way that this is available for people to have access to this literally all compiled into one resource. Now, with this, Eat Smarter family Cookbook, this is truly transformative because we get decades of information, not just from myself and my experience, but again, there's over 250 scientific

references, so there's all this science affirming how to actually make change long-lasting. And a big part of that is changing the culture, so that healthy choices are automatic, the larger culture that we're dealing with right now that we're all kind of swimming in...

SHAWN STEVENSON: It's kind of like fish, we're fish out here, and fish don't know that they're in water, they don't know, it's just where they are. So we're out here swimming around, we're day walkers we're earth walkers, but we're swimming around in this culture and we think that we're making choices based on what we want, it's an appearance of freedom, but your culture determines what choices you have, your culture influences your awareness, your culture determines your cravings. You're very likely not going to crave something that is not a part of your culture that you've not been exposed to... I've shared this on the show before. There are people in Cambodia, shout out to everybody in Cambodia who's listening in to the Model Health Show. There's a delicacy in Cambodia, deep fried tarantula, alright. Arachnophobia is not allowed here. Okay? That deep fried tarantula is a delicacy, according to my folks in Cambodia. All right? We are probably not gonna crave that here in the United States if you've not been exposed to that. And very likely somebody who's living near a rice paddy in Thailand, who's never been to Burger King or Little Caesar's or Dairy Queen, gotta have Burger King, dairy Queen. They're probably not gonna crave a Whopper. They're probably not going to crave a Pizza Pizza. They're probably not going to crave a blizzard. How do I know all those names of foods? Because I've been there frequented. Okay?

SHAWN STEVENSON: Now, cravings are cultural, trying to change the larger culture. Something that I've worked on for many years. It can be done, but it takes a mighty, mighty, mighty, mighty will and time. It just does, because systems become very solid and changing them can be very difficult because the culture that we exist in today in the United States right now, and this is according to the BMJ, I've shared this multiple times, and now many colleagues have shared the, shared the gospels out here on social media and things like that. But according to the BMJ British Medical Journal, one of our top tier peer-reviewed journals, nearly 60% of the average American adult's diet is ultra processed foods. Foods that are so far removed from anything natural that we can't really even understand where they come from. Humans have been processing foods since our inception. All right? When you cook a food, you're processing it, whether it's baking a sweet potato, whether it's cooking some steak, whether it's sauteing up some spinach.

SHAWN STEVENSON: When you cook a food, you're processing the food, also pressing the oil out of olives or coconuts, for example. These are all processed foods. They're minimally processed, though they're very close, they're in close proximity to where they come from. Dare I say. You can still recognize where they come from. That's real food. Ultra processed foods, on the other hand, is when you have a field of wheat that through an immense amount of processing synthetic ingredients, added artificial colors, artificial flavors, food dyes,

pesticides, herbicides, rodenticides, the list goes on and on. This field of wheat somehow becomes a box of Pop-Tarts. I like the ones with the sprinkles. All right? I was about that Pop-tart life. That pop-tart, where the... Where does it come from? Okay, I said... I was gonna say where the from, where the from. You cannot tell any longer where it comes from. It is so denatured it's so far removed from anything real. If you were to present that box of Pop-Tarts to the person living near the rice patty in Thailand and say, Hey, where does this come from? They're probably gonna hit you with the Thai kickbox, swift kick to the, to the shin. Pow. Okay? 'cause they don't know, like get the... What are you doing? But if they taste it, It might taste completely fake to them, which is often what folks that are coming from different cultures say, when they start to eat more kind of Americanized food and or they're gonna be like, oh my goodness, what is that? That is so tasty.

SHAWN STEVENSON: But whether or not they even think it's fake initially, if they keep eating it, something else takes over. And we've talked about the chemistry behind that, food scientists and all the things going on behind the scenes that make food so addictive like that. But the bottom line is this. That's the state of affairs for adults in the US. But this is the first book, the Eat Smarter Family Cookbook that is presenting this new study looking at ultra processed food consumption by our children. I'm very honored to be able to say this, that this is the first major book publishing this data. But at the same time, again, this is a call to arms for me. This study was published in the Journal of the American Medical Association, and they tracked ultra processed food consumption by US children aged two to 19 for about 20 years. The researchers found that in 1999 the average American child's diet was 61% ultra processed foods. By 2018 that number had reached almost 70%. Almost 70% of our children's diet here in the United States is made of ultra processed fake food. And within the time span, we've seen about a tripling of childhood obesity. Is that an accident? So again, this is a call to arms today and understanding that all of these activities work together in synchronicity.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Family, friends, community, healthy relationships, food, the expression of health in our bodies, all of these things go hand in hand. And with that being said, let's dive into five science-backed ways to make family meals more consistent and rewarding. Number one, we already touched on this a little bit, but schedule it based on your lifestyle. We know what that minimum effective dose is. Three meals together each week has this really powerful protective effect for children and adults alike. So what are those three meals for you? And by the way, if this has not been a part of your family culture at all, even starting with one or two meals a week is just fine, okay? But again, based on the data, three meals per week, let's schedule it based on our lifestyle, what works for you and your current schedule right now. And like I said earlier, we have this list of events, we have this itinerary on our schedule that are often far less important than our family.

SHAWN STEVENSON: And so schedule it, make it real. Put it, put some solidness to this activity. What are those days for you? Alright, it could be, again, breakfast together, you know, Monday through Friday. It could be, you know, family dinners, Tuesday, Thursdays, and you know, family dinner night out on Saturdays, you get to pick, but make it real. Schedule it. And by the way, again, keep in mind friends count too. So even getting together with your friends or a friend of yours for lunch or for a cup of coffee, all of these things count. All right? All of these things count, and you can even invite them over for some really good coffee. All right? And you already know we're about, we're about organic and medicinal mushroom infused, like Chaga, one of the most remarkable sources of antioxidants ever discovered, noted in purview data to be very effective at reducing the impact of cancer.

SHAWN STEVENSON: We also see Chaga being one of the natural elements that helps to produce or induce more production of something called Superoxide dismutase, a really powerful master antioxidant in the human body that is part of the reason why it's so effective at targeting cancer cells. So Chaga, Lion's Mane noted in multiple studies to help to reduce anxiety and even to stimulate the production of new brain cells. And this is from researchers at the University of Malaya, and they're studying it for its neuroprotective benefits. And so, am I just randomly picking two powerful medicinal mushrooms and organic coffee together? No, that's what I had today. That's what I had today from the incredible folks at Four Sigmatic. All right, go to foursigmatic.com/model, and you get 10% off their incredible think blend. That's their think blend, because it's targeting cognitive function. All right? So you can get the ground coffee, make it yourself.

SHAWN STEVENSON: I'm into that life now. The drip life, I'm into it. Or they have instant coffee as well. And that's what I actually, I bring that along when I travel. And you know, again, this is something that I love making coffee. Don't tell my wife this, but I love making coffee for her in the morning. It's just part of what we do. I don't like sometimes when she rushes me, all right, because sometimes she's like, just get my coffee and then we could talk, all right? Sometimes she do hit me with that, but I love it. I love doing that for her. And this is something you would love as well. Definitely check them out. Four Sigmatic is truly an elite of their own when it comes to coffee. That's F-O-U-R-S-I-G-M-A-T-I-C.com/model for 10% off all their incredible coffees.

SHAWN STEVENSON: They've got some remarkable, if you're not into coffee, there are teas, there're incredible elixirs that are, you know, you can get lion's mane you can get Reishi, you can get Cordyceps, all dual extracted. So you actually get all of these vital nutrients that we've been talking about. Foursigmatic.com/model. Let's move on to number two on this list of five science-backed ways to make Family Meals more consistent and rewarding. Number two is to give yourself grace. Give yourself grace. We're looking at changing the course of our family's future. We're looking at generational health, not just generational wealth, but generational

health, creating new family traditions and bringing families back together. So this is a big deal, and it could be a big task sometimes, so give yourself some grace for that. I'm gonna read to you a special section from the Eat Smarter Family Cookbook itself. Now this section is looking at implementing those family meals and also being able to deal with other family members in a graceful way to make all of this happen.

SHAWN STEVENSON: So here we go. This is a portion from the Eat Smarter Family Cookbook. Whatever the goal you have is, whatever the reasons might be, a little communication can go a long way. Again, some families hop right on board and enjoy the new open waters. Other families might have some questions about the voyage, while other families might have a member or two who feels like they'd rather walk the plank. One of the simplest ways to get your kids on board is to get them involved. Ask them for their input on what an awesome family dinner would look like. Ask them questions about what could make it more fun and rewarding for them. Maybe they'd love family dinner to be outside one of those nights each week, whether it's a patio, a blanket in the backyard or picnic table at a nearby park. There are so many flavors of what an outdoor meal can look like.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Maybe they'd like to have a special seating arrangement, a special pre-meal ritual, or a special dessert. There are so many ways to help them be involved in the process. You'll likely find that when you give them specific choices, A or B, they're more willing to oblige and even more happy with the outcome. Be kind and patient with yourself, but also be firm in your intention. Everything will not always go according to plan, but you are more than capable of navigating choppy waters. For instance, the kids might not be thrilled about getting off their screens for family meals initially, especially if the family culture has been screen heavy previously. But those cognitive patterns that make their devices so alluring can be tampered down and changed. You have to understand that their little brains can get addicted just like ours do. As a leader, you have the ability to know your family member's personalities and what motivates them.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Use your benevolent influence to guide them in the desired direction, and definitely take advantage of the other tips in the book to put some icing on the family Time cake. Again, that was a section from the Eat Smarter Family Cookbook. Please make sure to pick up your copy. I think you're absolutely going to love it. The science is incredible. The stories, the ability to really unpack these things and to bring them to life and make them applicable is really special and something that I spent a lot of time putting together. But moving on, we're gonna go into number three here on our list. But again, this portion was about giving yourself grace and understanding that this is a new venture for a lot of us, and we have the ability to, again, we're gonna alter the direction of our family's future and possibly generations to come.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Because what tends to happen is that our family behaviors, in particular around food, tend to get passed on. And so I'm really excited to see the cultures that my kids make having implemented some of these things in our own lives. All right, now we're gonna move on to number three on this list of five science-backed ways to make family meals more consistent and rewarding. Number three is to utilize the power of gratitude, prayer, presence, and pause. For centuries, humans have utilized pre-meal rituals to slow down and to create connection and to create connection. If you take a moment and look behind the scenes, you see that there is a remarkable change happening in our bodies and in our brains. When we take a moment of pause, the process of prayer to bless the food, but also bless each other has been again, a storied tradition.

SHAWN STEVENSON: You can take any of these pieces that fit best for your family, even something like a gratitude practice before your meal would suit just fine. For years, my family and I have been going around the table before we eat and we share three things that we're grateful for from that day. And this could be small things, and it sometimes it could be big things, but it's opening up a certain channel. Number one, it's getting us talking. Number two, it's sharing some insight about where we are right now, because sometimes it's just, I'm just grateful to be sitting here. I'm just grateful to be having this meal right now. I'm grateful for this food. And you can see when we're sharing where we are emotionally. And so it's starting to open up and unpack. And this gives a really great opportunity during these family meals to see our children, to see our loved ones, our significant other, to actually see them, to see beyond the words. Because most of our communication is nonverbal. We know this, but are we seeing the people in our lives? It gives us a chance to actually see them. And so we can start to, if we are paying attention, catch things, little warning signs, sometimes that might stave off bigger problems down the road. And we can also catch joy. We can catch the beauty right in front of us and be able to see the people that we love.

SHAWN STEVENSON: So taking a moment of pause, gratitude, prayer, presence. One of the other practices we've done as well is we go around the table and share something that we failed at today. We did that for a while. That one's a little tougher, but what it does is it gets us to reframe things. And also it humanizes us as parents because sometimes we can be seen as these powerful entities that pick us up off the ground and put us into our seats or drives us around to all these different obligations, and we can seem kind of superhuman. And so when I start to share something that I struggled with during the day, I know that my kids start to see me more as not just dad, but as a human being, to have compassion and empathy for. And I've seen that compassion and empathy that they've developed at the dinner tables go out into the real world.

SHAWN STEVENSON: So that's number three. Moving on to number four on this list of five science-backed ways to make this process more consistent and rewarding. Number four is to

actually practice presence. So practice presence. And what I mean by that is we cannot be present if we're absent. We can't be here and there at the same time. We can't be here and not here. All right? We are going around present, going around at school, going around the desk. You're either there or you're not there. And when we're on our devices, we're not there. Alright? Our devices can divide us. And sharing this study with you, again, this is all featured in the new Eat Smarter Family Cookbook. Hopefully this is gonna help you to understand the territory that we're operating in when we're bringing our devices to the table. Researchers at the University of Texas Austin conducted fascinating studies to test a variety of cognitive processes while test subjects had their phone face down on the table next to them versus having their phone in their pocket or backpack or having it in another room entirely.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Having their phone within their field of vision led to significant reductions in their cognitive capacity. The researchers surmised that the presence of their phone reduced their mental energy or caused more "brain drain" while having their phone in their pocket or backpack near them caused slight reductions in cognitive capacity as well versus it being in another room. But in both instances, the participants when having the phone near them subjectively, didn't think that having their phone around them affected them at all, but they were severely wrong. It did. So even bringing the phone to the table is going to be a distraction because your brain knows all the goodies in that thing. It knows that's the portal into Wreck-It Ralph part two. All right, Wreck-It Ralph two, he goes into the internet and it is crazy. All right? Our brain knows that there's so much there.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Endless supply of whatever in that phone. Get it out of your field of vision number one, absolutely. But also just don't bring it to the table. This could be something really helpful. You gotta know yourself too. Know thyself. I had a friend of mine who would leave his phone in his car when he got home from work because he knew that if it was even in the house, if it was around, he was gonna be on it. He'd do a lot of just checks and that would pull him into that internet black hole. So let's make a phone free environment at the dinner table, or you know, again, whatever meal that is to the greatest ability that you have. If you can, you know, again, if you're out to eat with somebody, if you could tuck it away in your purse or just sit it somewhere to the side, you know, I don't necessarily wanna keep it in your pocket either.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Maybe turn that bad boy off if you know about, you know, the little, what it's doing to the... To your troops. We've talked about that in past episodes as well. The science is clear on that too. So, but it's just something to be aware of. Practice presence. Let's keep our phones away from this time of connection and community to the best of our ability. Alright, moving on to number five on this list of five science backed ways to create more consistency and a more rewarding process of eating together with people that we care about. Number five is to proactively create a mental reward. This is so important. I cannot

stress this enough. When we are going from largely eating separate and on devices to, you know, coming home and telling your kids like, listen, I was just listening to this podcast and it's this research scientist, nutritionist guy, and he said, we need to eat together.

SHAWN STEVENSON: So get off your device. That might not move the needle in the way that you want, all right? We can make people do stuff, but we tend to revolt, all right? We tend to suppress, we want to create an atmosphere where everybody is wanting to participate. Now, this is not always gonna be the case. Again, I shared this earlier. We gotta be a benevolent leader because we are parents. We do know what's best generally, but at the same time, we've gotta understand basic psychology, which if we're addicted to our devices, which we are, and we are suddenly saying, get off your device, eat this food and smile. That might not work well, all right? We've got to replace that behavior with something of equal or greater value. Or if you take an addict and you take away the thing, there's gonna be withdrawal. All right?

SHAWN STEVENSON: So how do we do that? How do we create a reward tied into the family dinner? There's so many ways to do this. You've gotta know the personalities of your tribe, and we can utilize different things in different ways. So we can use food as a leverage point. Absolutely. But you've gotta be mindful of this. We don't want to make food an ultimate reward for some people because that can be a unhealthy connection. But for most people, food just is a reward. We enjoy food and utilizing it in an ethical, smart, complimentary way is totally fine. And so for my son, my youngest son, his personality's very different from my oldest son, all right? My oldest son is like, whatever. My youngest son, he likes routine. He, if he knows what's happening, he's all good, all right. And he'll do what... Like, he's the kind of person that will do his objectives first so that he can be free to do what he wants.

SHAWN STEVENSON: My other son, he'll want to do all the things he wants and then try and squeeze in the obligations, the real objectives later, all right? At the last minute a lot of times. And so understanding our kid's personalities with my youngest son, if I'm suddenly springing on him, like, because maybe we have Monday, Wednesday, Sunday dinner schedule, but now I'm like, oh, hey, today's Tuesday, but we gotta switch, switch it Tuesday 'cause we can't do dinner. Whatever. He might feel a little... He might get a little grumbly, but if I say, Hey bud, we're thinking about switching family dinner to tonight. Did you want to have the cherry frozen yogurt pops for dessert or did you want to have the snicker bites for dessert, which are two desserts in the Eat Smarter family cookbook, by the way, kids love. And then all of a sudden, I know he likes Sweets like his mama.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Alright, he get it from me, mama. Okay? I know that he's about the sweets life. All right? So already he's just like, oh, oh, cherry fruits and yogurt pops. Okay, so the, we missed out on the disgruntled-ness because of that. Like he has something to look

forward to that he enjoys. But outside of using food in that context, and I'm just giving a very subtle example, we want to use things that are non-food. And so how can we tie in that kind of more dopamine experience with the family meal? More reward. And that's what dopamine is tied to. Having a post meal or sometimes peri-meal during the meal experience of something really rewarding. Like this could be, you know, a family game night depending on the personality of your family members, whatever game that might be. There's a wide range of what that can look like, but it can be some of the funnest times in our life.

SHAWN STEVENSON: This could be literally a post meal video game session. Like sometimes that'll break out with me and my youngest son. We might just like, okay, after dinner we're gonna, you know, jump on this 2k about to get smashed. All right? This could be, and for my family, I've created an environment of creativity and also, you know, this could be a challenging skillset as well. And you know, blending those together, we might break out in like a rap battle or sometimes we're just kind of having a session, you know, it might not necessarily be a battle. Sometimes it comes to that. We come to verbal blows with the, with the rap battle, but we even got this little microphone we pass around and you know, it's just like something that's manifested in our family. So whatever that... It could be interesting conversation topics, the list goes on and on.

SHAWN STEVENSON: There's some wonderful resources. We'll put some for you in the show notes as well. And they're in the Eat Smarter Family Cookbook too, but great resources for interesting ideas and topics and things to talk about that sometimes we just don't think about. And so finding a way, and these are just a few examples to create that dopamine release, create a sense of reward and experience and, you know, emotion and things that bond us together. That's what's gonna make this process more consistent and rewarding. I hope that you got a lot of value out of this episode. Again, make sure to pick up your copy of the Eat Smarter Family Cookbook from your favorite retailer today. If you've not gotten your copy yet, get your copy. I promise you it's going to be one of the most valuable health assets that you've ever had. I promise you that.

SHAWN STEVENSON: And listen, as of this recording, this is still the first week of its release. So this really means so much for this movement to really make sure that this book is getting the best placement in bookstores and really letting the society, the publishing world know that this is the kind of information that we want. We want information about family, about health, and about empowerment. So truly it would mean everything. If you get your copy of the Eat Smarter Family Cookbook today. We've got some incredible 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 the modelhealthshow.com. That's where you can find all of the show notes. You can find transcriptions videos for each episode, and if you've got a comment, you can leave

me a comment there as well. And please make sure to head over to iTunes and leave us a rating to let everybody know that this show is awesome. And I appreciate that so much and take care, I promise, to keep giving you more powerful, empowering, great content to help you transform your life. Thanks for tuning in.