

THE MODEL HEALTH **SHOW**

EPISODE 735

The Truth About Overeating, Addiction, and The Scarcity Brain

With Guest Dr. Michael Easter

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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. Is the human brain truly able to handle the environment that we're in today. We've got information on tap, we've got entertainment on tap, we've got food on Tippy-tap. There's so much that we have access to. We're living at a time of apparent abundance, but there appears to be a powerful mismatch taking place with our brain, our nervous system, our hormones, our DNA itself, and the environment that we're currently existing in. And the ramifications that we're seeing are epidemics of chronic diseases, mental health diseases, even infectious diseases, strangely enough, have been on the rise. There's something that is not adding up. And today we're going to take a peek behind the curtain and see what's really going on with our scarcity brain.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Our guest today is an incredible professor, scientist, researcher, and he's dubbed this term scarcity brain to describe how we're interacting with all these things today, and how it's leading to outcomes that we might not necessarily want. So to take back control of our health, of our psychology, of our ability to problem solve, to experience fulfillment, to have the body and the health that we want. Understanding the scarcity brain is really the key to getting where we want to be. Now, one thing that we know for certain is that we do not want a scarcity of essential nutrients. So nutrients that are required to build our hormones, to build our neurotransmitters, to regenerate and support our brain cells. The list goes on and on and on. These things are gonna be coming from our food. And so yes, we want to absolutely eat nutrient dense real foods for the majority of our diets.

SHAWN STEVENSON: And today, more than ever, because of all the stress inputs and how our bodies are processing the data that we're being exposed to, we very often need a little bit of a support. That's where the term supplement should come in at. Supplements should not replace an already healthy diet. It should supplement, it should fill in minor gaps. It should help us to be able to go above and beyond so that we're running on all cylinders. Now, we've existed recently in recent generations in the paradigm of the "multivitamin", and the data is now pointing to the fact that there is a very big difference in synthetic versions of vitamins versus real whole food versions of those same vitamins. Just because the the chemical equation is the same does not mean that it's impacting our health the same way. Take for example, essential nutrient vitamin E.

SHAWN STEVENSON: This nutrient is important for healthy function of your cardiovascular system, cognitive performance, and even the health of your skin. Well, the study published in the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition determined that natural food-based vitamin E, has nearly twice the bioavailability of synthetic vitamin E. So again, the data is now becoming

more and more clear. Just because we get a "multivitamin" that has these synthetic versions of these essential nutrients, does not mean that our cells can actually utilize it. So when we're looking at fortifying our nutrition, providing ourselves with an abundance of essential nutrients, we wanna do this with number one, real whole foods. And number two, real food concentrates. Superfood concentrates. This is why I'm such a huge fan of Organifi. Organifi provides organic whole food-based superfood concentrates superfoods like chlorella, for example, which is incredibly rich in Chlorophyll, which a study published in the Journal Appetite found that chlorophyll can aid in weight loss and reduce the urge to eat hyper-palatable foods.

SHAWN STEVENSON: But it also has remarkable micronutrients like Lutein and Zeaxanthin that helps with our cardiovascular system, with our vision and much more. These foods go above and beyond with their nutrient density. And on top of that, a double-blind placebo controlled study published in the journal Clinical and Experimental Hypertension found that Chlorella was able to normalize blood pressure of test subjects with hypertension. So when I'm saying these foods are superfoods, I'm not exaggerating. We're talking about science backed, we're talking about real. If we're talking about a multivitamin, this is where you need to turn, Whole Food concentrates. Organifi's Green Juice contains chlorella, spirulina, ashwagandha, coconut, and it comes together in this really refreshing beverage that's easy to make, easy to travel with as well. They have these great go packs and providing our families with real whole food-based complimentary nutrition. Go to organifi.com/model. You get 20% off their incredible Green Juice Blend. They also have a great Red Juice Formula Gold highlighting organic turmeric as the foundational ingredient in that formula. And so much more. Organifi is doing stuff the right way, organic, cold processing, organic whole food-based nutrition at organifi.com/model. That's O-R-G-A-N-I-F-I.com/model for 20% off storewide. Now let's get to the Apple Podcast review of the week.

ITUNES REVIEW: Another five star review titled Amazing Content Delivery by #the Health Coach. I've been listening to Shawn for five years now, and I'm ashamed that it's taken me so long to express the gratitude and admiration I have for his dedication and commitment to the wellbeing of the world. He's by far the most insightful, charismatic, educated, digestible, content creator I have ever had the pleasure of learning from. I pray that his work continues and more people are able not only to hear, but listen to the wisdom and compassion shared on each episode. Thanks, Sean.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Oh Wow. Thank you. I'm just taking a moment to receive that. That is so powerful. Thank you so much for sharing your voice and sharing your time and energy with me. I'm so grateful. Thank you, thank you, thank you. And if you're yet to do so, please pop over to Apple Podcast and leave a review for the Model Health Show. It means so much. And now let's get to our special guest and topic of the day. Our guest today is Michael Easter, and

he's the author of "The Comfort Crisis" and the new book, "Scarcity Brain: Fix Your Craving Mindset and Rewire Your Habits to Thrive With Enough". He's a professor at UNLV, and he writes and speaks on how humans can leverage modern science and evolutionary wisdom to perform better and live healthier lives. His work has been implemented by professional sports teams, elite military units, fortune 500 companies, and leading universities. Let's jump into this conversation with the incredible Michael Easter. All right, we've got Michael Easter here in the Model Health Show Studios, and we got this fascinating new book to talk about. But I wanna ask you a question to get started. Are we too comfortable? Are we too comfortable as a species?

MICHAEL EASTER: I think a lot of us are for sure. I mean, if you look at the trajectory of how society is designed and how we live now, we've removed a lot of discomfort out of our lives. I mean, think about, we live at 72 degrees, the average person takes 40000 steps now, we used to take more than 20000. What else? And boredom. We have an immediate escape from boredom in the form of cellphones, right? We're not as bored anymore. 80% of eating is driven by reasons other than hunger. I mean, I could go on and on and on, but the long story short is that, you know, humans evolved in these environments that were uncomfortable. They were not easy. And so we evolved to do the next easiest, most comfortable thing, and that kept us alive for all of time. And then, you know, in the last 150 years, we've really engineered our lives to be a lot more comfortable, a lot easier. Yet we still have that drive to do the next most comfortable thing, and it often backfires. So it's what anthropologists would call an evolutionary mismatch.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Ooh, yeah, definitely. We have that mismatch popping right now. It's kind of like a paradox where we have all of this apparent innovation, and yet we are more kind of dysfunctional than we've been as a species. Like there's more chronic disease, there's more mental health issues, all the things. And, you know, to think about our comfort as being one of the ingredients, because also, you know, I think that we're always seeking it. I think our ancestors were seeking that comfort. But the question is like, once you have it, what do you do?

MICHAEL EASTER: Right. I mean, now we live in it, you know? So I consider this a good problem to have in the grand scheme of time and space because, you know, the opposite is that you don't have enough food, or you have to walk 20000 steps every single day to find food, which by the way, you may not find it. You're exposed to the elements all the time, like, I don't wanna live like that. But at the same time, now that we've engineered so much comfort, into our lives, and we still have that drive, we often forget that we often need to do these things that don't really make sense in the grand scheme of time and space, like exercise, like watching what you eat, like all these things, right? All these health practices we do now, they didn't make any damn sense until like a hundred years ago or less.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yeah. Our ancestors were not like, what's in that when somebody passed them some food? You know, it was just like, it's just food. You know? How many macro... What are those macros? You know, and you just said it too. Like, we are replicating, we're doing simulations of what our ancestors would be doing right when we go to the gym. Not to downplay the value that that can have, but it's just like, we would just be active. We would just be lifting things and moving more because our life required it now that it doesn't require it. And a lot of movement's optional. You know, many of us are seeking out ways to develop ourselves, to basically give ourselves the inputs that our genes are expecting of us. And so with that mismatch, you know, it's so interesting that today not only are we in this place... Which your first book was "The Comfort Crisis", where we're experiencing this comfort crisis.

SHAWN STEVENSON: We have industries that are leveraging that seek... That seeking of comfort and taking advantage of our more sedentary, like, we're just looking that our brain that's averse to boredom is looking for stuff to mingle with. And so this new book is blowing my mind. I showed you just one portion that's high... It's just loaded with right now. This highlighter ink is all over this book.

MICHAEL EASTER: Awesome.

SHAWN STEVENSON: It's so good, man.

MICHAEL EASTER: I love it.

SHAWN STEVENSON: It's so good. And you got me from the first page as well, just the story. Like, it starts off with this kind of ominous situation, which I'm not gonna give it away for people, but you are putting yourself in these different positions to really find out what's going on with our biology, with our brains in this new world that we're living in. And so the title of the new book is "Scarcity Brain". Let's start off by talking about what scarcity brain means.

MICHAEL EASTER: Yeah. Well, it's really, you know, why can't people get enough of food stuff, status, all these things, right? Everyone knows that everything's fine in moderation, and yet we all suck at moderating. So why is that? That's really what the book, looks into. And I started really thinking about this. So right when the pandemic sort of happened, I'm talking like March, you know, mid-March 2020 when people realized that things they need might become scarce. What did we all do? Everyone freaked out, right? Everyone goes to the grocery store, they start hoarding toilet paper. It's like, I need all the hand sanitizer in the world. All of it. You guys can have none. People are hoarding food. And then after you see

that initial reaction to this sort of big scarcity cue that is the pandemic, you start to see people, lean into more consumption in other ways.

MICHAEL EASTER: So a significant amount of people gained weight during the pandemic, right? You had inactivity rise, so people were less active. Screen time went through the roof, people bought more than we'd ever bought before, like these compulsive purchases, you know, and you're going like, what the hell's up with that? And it really was this moment where moderation sort of went out the window. And I just wanted to know why that was. And the book is really an investigation of that. But one of the main things that I think I found that's new and interesting is this idea of, what I call the scarcity loop. And I discovered this thing in my hometown of Las Vegas because I'd made this sort of casual observation that wow, people play slot machines for hours and hours and hours. It's just this repeat behavior that's seemingly kind of fun and stimulating in the short term, but detrimental in the long run.

MICHAEL EASTER: Like the house always wins. The longer you play the slot machine, the more money you're gonna lose. And it ruins a lot of people's lives. These slot machines are everywhere in Vegas. And, long story short, I'm trying to figure out like why the hell do people play slot machines? I end up at a, casino on the edge of town in Vegas that... It's cutting edge. It's brand new, but it is used entirely for research on human behavior. So it's a legit casino, but filled with PhDs and with study subjects, basically. And, that's where I learned about this thing called the scarcity loop from a slot machine designer. And it's a behavior loop that basically you can think about it as the serial killer of moderation, more or less. And it's got these, three parts. It's got opportunity, unpredictable rewards, and quick repeatability.

MICHAEL EASTER: So one, you have opportunity, an opportunity to get something of value that can enhance your life. Two, you have unpredictable rewards. So, you know, if you keep doing the behavior, you'll get the thing of value at some point, but you don't know when, and you don't know how big it's gonna be. And then three, quick repeatability, you can repeat the behavior over and over and over. So think of a slot machine. You've got an opportunity to win money. You know, if you keep playing, you're gonna win at some point, but you don't know how big the win is gonna be, and you can just keep playing and playing and playing. Now this lab, is funded by gambling companies, but it's also funded by a bunch of big tech companies. And so then the question is like, well, why the hell is that?

MICHAEL EASTER: Right? And, it turns out that, you can put this scarcity loop in a lot of other products. Two, to compel people to repeat behaviors that are fun, that are stimulating, that give them some sort of relief in the short term, but often lead to long-term problems. So for example, it's what makes social media work. It's, embedded in dating apps. It's in sports gambling, especially on mobile, the rise of mobile gambling. It's in new finance apps like

Robinhood. Robinhood really took off by leveraging this loop. And it's in all sorts of other, crazy places today where you tend to see people do things to access.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Ooh. Now here's where this really ties in for the Model Health show, is that a big part of this inherent programming that we have as human beings? This scarcity loop can be tied to food. It can be tied evolutionarily speaking to our seeking of food for survival. Let's talk about that.

MICHAEL EASTER: Yeah. So, okay, I talked to the slot machine designer. He lays this thing out and then, you know, and he goes, you know, by the way, it's in a lot of other places than slot machines. It's very powerful. And then once I start looking for it, you start to see it everywhere. And I lay out a bunch of places in the book. But a question that he couldn't answer for me is I go, okay, great. I get this is how slot machines work, but why? Right? What's the bigger reason why? And he's just kind of like, I don't know. I just designed these machines to work, but I don't know what the underlying psychology is, You know? So I call up a psychologist. That's a good person to ask, right? I Call up this guy whose name is, Thomas Ental, and he's done a bunch of studies on the psychology of gambling behavior.

MICHAEL EASTER: And this guy's old school, he's like 80-something years old. He's been doing it since the '60s. And he explained that our... The reason we get sucked into this loop and why it drives this repeat behavior, it goes back to evolution and finding food. So if you think of our ancestors, they had to find food every single day, right? That was like your life. Your life is, you know, have some kids spread your genes, find some food so you can survive and don't die in the meantime, right? Or try to avoid death for as long as you can.

SHAWN STEVENSON: My to do list.

MICHAEL EASTER: Yeah, that's the to-do list. There's three things. When you think of finding food, it is... It has the exact same architecture as the slot machine. So you have an opportunity to find food which will allow you to survive, but you don't know where the food is. It's unpredictable. So you go to point A, it's like, not there, so okay, we'll go check point B. No, it's not there either. We're gonna go to point C, ding, ding, ding jackpot. You find food, you survive. Oh my God, that was thrilling. And by the way, you gotta repeat that everyday for the rest of your life. So we essentially, evolved to fall into the... To get really captured by unpredictable rewards that captures not just human attention, but the attention of all animals. Far more than predictable rewards and drives repeat behaviors.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Now, this might sound like it's still, there's some rationality tied in here, but it's counterintuitive. And you outline this with several animal studies as well, and one of them was like on pigeons.

MICHAEL EASTER: Yeah.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Let's talk about that.

MICHAEL EASTER: So this is this Zentall guy. He can turn pigeons into degenerate gamblers like that. So what he does is, he'll give pigeons two games. In the first game they peck a light, every other peck, they get food. The second game is like a slot machine. So about every fifth peck they get food, but it's random, right? So you might go, you might peck five times, and like on the fourth one you get the food. But then the next series, it's on the second one, you get the food. And he lets them choose between these two games. And what happens is that 97% of the pigeons choose game two, the gambling game. And you also see this with rats. You see this in monkeys. You basically see this in every animal we've studied it in.

SHAWN STEVENSON: It doesn't make sense. It doesn't make sense. You pointed out they would get substantially more with a predictable button push.

MICHAEL EASTER: Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: But it's that sense of scarcity and surprise reward. Like the brain is like hardwired to do that.

MICHAEL EASTER: Yeah. So one of the most fascinating things, and this kind of gets into one of the bigger themes in the book and the questions that I'm still really grappling with the implications is that what this got, so with the pigeons, they normally live in these relatively small cages. It's pretty sterile, kind of a boring life, right? I mean, they're lab pigeons. But he will occasionally put them in a really big cage that's designed to be like, their life would be in the wild. So there's other pigeons in there, but they're also having to like, go look for food and find it. They're having to build nests. They're having to do all these things they would have to do in the wild. And then he will put them back in the game and say, all right, pigeons choose. And they start to choose the predictable game, the one that gets them more food overall.

MICHAEL EASTER: So they make better decisions. So I ask him, why's that? And his theory, it goes back to this theory called the optimal stimulation model. And it basically states that all species need a certain amount of stimulation to thrive. And if they don't get that level of stimulation, they go seeking it from somewhere else. So for the pigeons, they live in a cage. Right. It's kind of a, it's very unnatural. So when you put them in, give them the option, they're gonna seek stimulation from the unpredictable reward game. And of course then the guy goes, you know, when you think of humans, it's like, if we're not stimulated enough in our

life we go searching for stimulation from other places. We gamble, we do drugs, we eat too much. We do all these behaviors that can be counterproductive in the long run.

SHAWN STEVENSON: This is blowing my mind. This is blowing my mind.

MICHAEL EASTER: Dude, that's a crazy one.

SHAWN STEVENSON: It's so it, but then again, it's like, it's so obvious and we don't realize this is happening to us. So we are talking about a gap essentially in fulfillment. And, you know, there are several studies. I did a guest lecture for the neuroscience department at NYU. And it was along with my friend, she's been actually right here sitting in the seat Dr. Wendy Suzuki. And she's done some fascinating work on how these different environmental stimuli can impact our mental health. Like exercise, for example, is like her big lane. But one of the studies that she shared with me was how even our kind of experience of fulfillment or connection or mental wellbeing can get passed down generationally in lab animals, for example. But when you expose, like for example, the experiments on mice to enriching environments, suddenly they become much more well adjusted.

SHAWN STEVENSON: They start making better decisions and all these things. And it's like this research you just shared is like bringing more color to this for me to make it make sense. Like we make better decision... When we are bombarded with this, the life that we live right now, it is comfortable, but also we're psychologically bombarded. Going back to when I said those to-do lists it was just like, find food, move the species on, don't die very short to-do lists pretty, you know, it's some stress there. Today my to-do list is like 27 things, right?

SHAWN STEVENSON: And it's, as soon as five things get cycled out, 10 more things get put on there. Right? There's so much psychological stress that I think it's kinda like digging a hole in our psyche and then we're trying to fill it with all this other shit that doesn't really help us to adjust, if that makes sense.

MICHAEL EASTER: Yeah. And I think that, I mean, when you just look at it from a context of what was life like as humans evolved very different than the life that most people live now. So for example, we spend a lot less time outside. We're a lot less naturally physically active. And also our physical activity has changed. To your point about the gym, it's like, yeah, you need that to replace your time. But when you think about how humans were physically active in the past, we were often having to do mental work as we were physically active. So think about forging for food or hunting an animal like that is really cognitively taxing. You're outside, you're having to navigate the land. You're watching where you put your feet, you're also going, well, I can't get lost or I'm screwed. And you're like, you're tracking blood, you're,

and the like tracking an animal's really hard work, right? And so you're doing all this psychological work as well.

MICHAEL EASTER: And so I think that when you look at how our environments have changed, they've changed in a lot of ways that take a lot of stimulus off of us in a way. Even though we have more stimulus in the sense of like, I have this to-do list of random stuff. We don't have like these 20 others that we would've had.

SHAWN STEVENSON: There's a mismatch again. We're missing inputs.

MICHAEL EASTER: Right.

SHAWN STEVENSON: That, you know, that we evolved with. We're talking hundreds of thousands of years in this kind of current model and versus like a couple of decades if that. And so that can again present why we're experiencing so many outward symptoms of, you know, again mental health issues, you know physical health issues, the list goes on and on. One of the things I love about this book is that you look at the history of things, right? So you didn't just talk about slot machines. You went back to like, here's the guy who made these things, what they are today. I love that. You know, even with my, one of my recent books with Eat Smarter, when talking about a calorie, I went back to the origin.

MICHAEL EASTER: That's awesome.

SHAWN STEVENSON: We talked about where did this thing come from, this term in our culture. And it started off in physics. It wasn't nothing to do with nutrition. And it kind of parlayed its way into popular culture. And so learning this story, because if you could share a little bit of it, I don't wanna give too much away, but slot machines were not the deal. Just like a couple of decades ago. It was like a thing for like the family to do while the real players are like at the tables.

MICHAEL EASTER: Yeah. And this was, that was all the way up to about 1980. So they were in the corners and no one played them. So then the question is, okay, well why did no one play slot machines? And the reason was because they were boring. So they used to have the reels and there was only one row that you could win on. Mathematically that didn't happen that often. So you'd spin a thing and there's, you know, you'd have to get all these symbols to line up, but that was only happening, you know, 5% of the time. So all species, if you do something and get nothing for it repeatedly, you'll stop doing that behavior pretty fast. So this guy... Then this guy whose name is Si Red comes in and he's this guy who's in the gambling industry and he is very old school Vegas.

MICHAEL EASTER: He is a character. He's got the maroon suits, he's got the sunglasses he wears indoors, the bolo ties. And he makes this observation that in the late '70s his grandkids are playing Atari. And he goes, wow, that's really holding their attention for a long time, but it also doesn't make sense to him. And that's because you don't actually win anything real if you win Atari. It's like nothing, right? It's just like you get some pride and you move on. But he wonders if he can take some of the elements of that and apply them to slot machines. So that's what he does. He digitized the slot machines. So slot machines before used to be analog. They were literally like a machine where physical reels would spin. What he does is he turns them into a computer. And now you have a screen where the reels quote unquote appear on the screen.

MICHAEL EASTER: And this lets him solve for the boredom problem. This is the main thing. So now he can project multiple reels on a screen and you can bet on a bunch of different combinations. So you can bet you can make 40 different wagers on a single game basically. And what this does is it increases the probability that you'll win. Now when you think about that, you're going, alright, well now the casinos aren't gonna make any money 'cause let's say you're betting on 50 lines and they're more likely to win. So what he does is he goes, oh, well we'll just decrease the amount you win on each line. So now you might win a few pennies on each line. So what this does is it means that now half of games will win something, but most of the time it's less than you bet. So you might bet a single dollar and quote unquote win 50 cents.

MICHAEL EASTER: Now what this does is this seems irrational, but it's still exciting because he pairs it with graphics and sounds and all this amazing things happen when that happens. And in modern research they'll do basically neuroscience research shows that we register these what are called losses disguised as wins, as real wins. And they compel repeat behavior. So you feel like you're getting something and what it does is you're playing, but you're slowly losing your money over time, even though it's a really exciting act losing money. 'cause you don't really realize it. You're like, oh no, but these good things are happening. Right?

SHAWN STEVENSON: It's so fascinating and one of the biggest revelations was when you shared basically it's, there's a certain spot of this whole process is where the magic really happens and it's as the reels are turning. Yeah. Let's talk about that.

MICHAEL EASTER: I mean this a gambling engineer basically told me, he goes, gambling is not when you know whether you've won or lost. Gambling is when the reels are turning. It is when the dice are rolling across the table, it is when the dealer is about to put down that card and you're gonna find out if you got a blackjack. This is when anticipation peaks. That's what makes gambling exciting. And it goes back to, it goes back to dopamine and different neurochemicals basically that are released during that sort of anticipation phase.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Right. The anticipation phase, and we've been talking about this for years because again, dopamine gets this connection to things that it's not supposed to be connected to. It's really a big part of the seeking behavior. It's not necessarily about the pleasure. We don't get addicted to that. It's potentially we can use it to our favor if we become aware of it, but a lot of times we fall into these loops and don't understand why. And so it's that feeling in that moment when the thing is about to happen is that that's so special. And part of that scarcity loop is being able to do it again and again and again. Can you talk a little bit more about that part?

MICHAEL EASTER: Yeah. The other thing this guy did to make slot machines more popular. So now when you play, you know that you're going to probably win at some point, but you don't know if your dollar bet's gonna get you 25 cents, if it's gonna get you 50 cents, if it's gonna get you \$1.50. If it's gonna get you \$150. Right? So now each pull of the handle becomes more action packed. What he does to increase the speed of a behavior, because as a general rule, the faster you can repeat a behavior, the more likely you are to repeat a behavior. So he gets rid of the handles on slot machines 'cause those slow things down. So he puts in spin buttons and when he puts in spin buttons, the rates of gambling basically double on slot machines. And once this guy's done tinkering with all these little changes he makes, slot machine gambling increases tenfold. And all of a sudden slot machines go from being this little sideshow on the casino floor to taking up 85% of casino floors. And now people today spend more money on slot machines than they do on books, movies, and music combined.

SHAWN STEVENSON: That is crazy pants. That's nuts.

MICHAEL EASTER: It's crazy.

SHAWN STEVENSON: And again, I don't think we think about it. And as you mentioned, where you live, there are slot machines everywhere, I would imagine like...

MICHAEL EASTER: They're indeed everywhere.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Like restaurants, maybe gas stations.

MICHAEL EASTER: Restaurants, gas stations, grocery store, airports, where else am I missing? Bars. Like I'll go to grocery stores in the morning, you know, when like no one's there. It'll be 7:00 AM and people will be playing slot machines. Letting the food spoil. It's crazy.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Wow. Wow. Alright, let's talk about how this connects to, you know, right now here in the United States, according to, you know, CDC NIH prior to pandemic

related shutdown, as we were somewhere in the ballpark of 42.5% of US adults being clinically obese. And it's projected to be 50% by 2030. The latest numbers have not come out post-pandemic as far as that's concerned yet. And I would imagine it's taking a mighty jump and getting there faster. And not to mention if we compile overweight and obese somewhere in the ballpark of three-fourths of our citizens at this point. It's very unusual but when you understand the scarcity brain, it makes complete sense because in some ways we evolved to overeat.

MICHAEL EASTER: Yeah.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Talk about that.

MICHAEL EASTER: Yeah, well... Food has always been at a premium. Food has always been scarce. It's always been hard to find for the vast majority of time. And if you had the opportunity to eat it, that would give you a survival advantage. So we're unique in that we store a lot of fat, and this is so we could travel long distances, so we could explore. It gave us a... It allowed us to survive. So if you think about it, in the past, if you had every, you know, let's say every seventh day, you couldn't really find that much food. This meant that if you had the opportunity to overeat, you should do it. 'cause you know you're gonna not have food at some point. We still have that ancient wiring in a time where we have 7-Elevens on the corner. We got grocery stores, we got Burger King, we got food everywhere, right?

MICHAEL EASTER: The average I think we throw out about a third of the food we produce in America. I like to say that you know, getting in trouble with food, let's say if you're at a weight that you don't wanna be at 'cause you've eaten too much, I like to say that it's not necessarily your fault 'cause you're kind of doing this thing that humans evolved to do. But it is your problem to solve if you would like to reduce your weight. It's still gonna take action. You can't, you know, it's kind of a thing. You gotta figure out for yourself.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Now add to this, the fact that we do have these ultra processed food manufacturers who are taking advantage even more of our biology, right? And it gets into that scarcity loop of the ability to repeat a behavior very easily. Let's talk about that. Let's talk about the, I bet you can't eat just one, phenomenon.

MICHAEL EASTER: Totally. So I'll explain the scarcity loop. Now as I report the book I come across this quote from a person who is a CEO or an Executive, snack food company. So, snacking wasn't really a thing until about 1970. And what happened is that the food industry goes, all right, well, you know, people are eating three meals. They're probably not gonna eat a ton more in each meal, but what we can do is we can create a new category of food and give them new opportunities to eat. So the food industry goes, we're gonna create this new

category called snacking. Now, if people have eaten, you gotta be like, all right, well what will people eat after they've already eaten, [laughter] right? So this guy explains, if you want a snack food to take off, it has to have three V's.

MICHAEL EASTER: It's gotta have value. It's gotta have variety, it's gotta have velocity. So what does that sound like? It sounds like the scarcity loop that I just explained, right? So it's gotta be relatively cheap, high calorie, it's gotta have variety, meaning there is a lot of flavor per bite, meaning there's a lot of different options. So you mentioned Pringles before we started recording. How many different Pringles are there? There's like 25 different Pringles. There's like sour cream and onion, there's barbecue, there's spicy barbecue, there's like, it just keep going. Right? And it's gotta have velocity, meaning that it has to be easy to eat, meaning you can consume it faster. Now I think that velocity is the number one thing when it comes to food. So when food companies process a food, turn a food into an ultra processed food, basically repeated steps of processing that are done to increase flavors, increase all these things that make food delicious, people tend to eat the food a lot faster. So there's a really great NIH study from Kevin Hall, who I'm sure his name has come up on this podcast before. He's done a really great piece of research where he took a group of people and for two weeks he locks them in a lab, right? So for two weeks he lets them.

MICHAEL EASTER: He gives them only food that is very minimally processed, says, eat as much as you want. And they're weighing every single thing these people eat. Like it's extremely nitty gritty with the tracking. Then after that, for the next two weeks, he gives them a diet that is equivalent in macros and salt and things like that, except the food is ultra processed. Sort of the ultra processed take on that. He says, all right, eat as much as you want. Again, they're tracking every single thing. And what he finds is that when people are on the ultra processed diet, they end up eating about 500 calories more per day and they end up gaining weight. And the reason mainly comes down to the speed at which they ate the food. So when a food is ultra processed, it's super easy to eat.

MICHAEL EASTER: Think about getting a piece of I have a guy who's quoted in the book. His name is Mike Russell. He's a nutritionist. And he's like, yeah, my son ordered a pizza from Pizza Hut the other day. He's like, I had a slice. He's like, it literally just like melts in your mouth and falls down the back of your throat, right? Think about eating something like broccoli. It takes so long to eat. It's like crunchy. It's kind of a pain in the ass to eat broccoli. A better comparison might be think of eating potato chips versus a boiled potato, right? You're never gonna sit down and eat 1000 calories in boiled potatoes, but people will sit down and need 1000 calories in potato chips all the time because it got all these triggers that make you wanna eat it. Also very quick to eat.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yeah. Wow. And of course, they're manufactured to be that way. It's taking advantage of this hardwiring one of those phenomena is the vanishing caloric density. So it's like that melt in the mouth experience. So it kind of in a way, because when you eat foods through our evolution, there's a certain feedback when you're biting into that food. We were just talking about this as well with gastrophysics and like a certain crunch, a certain experience, and through our evolution, this would be tied to a certain nutrient density as well. But now with the food, you get this crunch, but then it disappears. So there's like the feedback loop is interrupted. It's just like, did I just eat as much as I thought? Okay, next one.

SHAWN STEVENSON: It's tricking our brains, in a sense, and our biology, not just our brains, because our brains are really even though we can kind of hack it, it's very, very complicated. It's been called the most complicated object in the known universe by Michio Kaku, who's like, we just talked about gastrophysics, but astrophysics in modern day Einstein and our brains are very, very complicated. But there are certain things, certain buttons we can push.

SHAWN STEVENSON: And you highlight this so well in the book that you can get in there and really manipulate what's happening. Now, with that being said, the fact that we evolved in conditions where there was a lack, there's scarcity, now that we have all of this abundance, that programming doesn't suddenly turn off. We're designed for a very different reality than the one that we find ourselves in. And so a lot of people are beating themselves up because it's difficult to adjust in this environment. What we are doing is really putting power into people's hands by us. Like, I think awareness can really help even what's happening with our brains when we can see the thing happening before it happens or while it's happening, like, oh, this is that thing happening. This is that scarcity brain of mine that's doing this thing. Obviously, you're kind of getting us a peek behind the scenes of a lot of what's happening, but what are some of the things that we can do about this to kind of take back control of what's happening internally?

MICHAEL EASTER: Yeah, I'll give you examples using food. So with any behavior that falls in this scarcity loop, I think the first thing is to your point, becoming aware of it. Once you know how the machine works, then you have a better probability of choosing not to mess with the machine if you don't want to. Right. But just knowing how it works. I have a good friend, Trevor Cashy, who works in the field of nutrition and other fields. He said the dessert really tastes delicious until you realize the chef put monkey brains in it, and then it's not so delicious, is it? So the second way is that you can change or remove any of the three parts of the loop, and that will tend to reduce the behavior. So we'll use food as an example. You can take away or change the opportunity. So if you've got some food that you know, once you have one, I think you alluded to that. Once you pop, you can't stop or whatever. Don't keep it in the house. That's pretty simple. That removes that opportunity that you're going to go,

yeah, I'm on this great bender with my health. Things are great, blah, blah, blah. But then you get stressed out or you get a shitty email from your boss, and you go, I'm just going to have one Pringle. And then all of a sudden, the ten of them is gone.

MICHAEL EASTER: Number two, you can take away the unpredictable rewards. A lot of that comes down to, does everything that we eat have to taste like a party in our mouth? Right. No. So as part of this book for example I, and I can get into why, but I'll be quick here, is that I travel into Bolivia to hang out with this tribe called the Chimane tribe, and they have the healthiest hearts ever recorded by science. And it goes back to what they eat. Basically, their diet is they don't eat processed food. They eat food that has a single ingredient. Now, I spend a week with them. I eat what they eat. And I'm going to tell you, their food was not delicious. It was very boring. There's not a lot of salt. There's not a lot of flavor. And when something doesn't taste amazing in every single bite, your likelihood of taking another bite diminishes. At the same time, if you're truly hungry, a food that doesn't have a ton of flavor will still be satisfying and still be good. So I think realizing that not everything you eat needs to taste amazing, that seems relatively reasonable. Right?

MICHAEL EASTER: And then third, quick repeatability eating foods that are less processed slows down the process of eating and leads you to take in fewer calories.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Makes sense. Very simple.

MICHAEL EASTER: Yeah, it's simple. It's like eat, eat foods that are mostly unprocessed, that humans have been eating for thousands and thousands of years, and people will look at that and go, yeah, well, I already know that, but okay, well, now you know why it works, right? And it absolutely does work. I mean, that's the foundation of human health to me.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yeah, I'm a big fan of just even shifting the ratio, you mentioned that NIH study and being a diet that's just completely ultra processed foods, you're inherently gonna be more calories, the same macro nutrients, the same... That was so fascinating. And also in this study, what happened was just subconsciously folks ended up eating less protein in those ultra-processed meals, they were just weeding it out and getting to more carbohydrate-dominant things, which stimulates more appetite, it's just like our biology is cleverly finding a way for you to eat more of that stuff, and so just shifting the ratio, you don't have to go completely... If you're right now, the average American Adult, according to the BMJ, 60% of our diet as an adult is ultra processed foods, what if we instead of the 60-40, the way that the house is winning, I guess go 60-40 whole foods, that is gonna probably have some tremendous benefits for your health.

MICHAEL EASTER: And I think that once you start, once you start that and you get good feedback from doing that, I think it increases the probability that you'll continue with the behavior, maybe even shift the ratio to even better. And I think you're spot on that, I'm not saying that people should only eat foods with one ingredient for the rest of their life. I don't want to live in a world where I don't have the option to occasionally have some Pringles. It's a delicious food. The problem is when that is 60% of your diet, you start to see a lot of the problems that we face today.

MICHAEL EASTER: To me, the scale weight thing is irrelevant. But really the problem with being obese is that increases the likelihood that you will have certain chronic diseases. So people will say, just because you're obese doesn't mean you're going to be unhealthy? Well, of course not. But what it does mean is that it loads the dice in favor of disease. So it's like, do you want to roll the loaded dice or do you not want to roll the loaded dice?

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yeah, we've, of course, articulated this. This is not about a vanity metric. It's seven times higher risk of developing endometrial cancer, twice as high likelihood of prostate cancer and breast cancer, let alone dramatically higher incidence of heart disease and Alzheimer's and all the things like we've got all these stats, but because our culture and this again, being taken advantage of, our scarcity brain, it's just framing it like it's fine, it's fine.

MICHAEL EASTER: Yeah, it's hard.

SHAWN STEVENSON: It's another show here's, another this or that. Don't worry about that. You're going to be fine and it's all good.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Got a quick break coming up. We'll be right back.

SHAWN STEVENSON: The human brain is the most powerful pharmacy in the universe. And I'm saying that because every single thought that we think creates correlating chemistry in our bodies and that biochemistry is designed uniquely for you. It's beyond bio identical hormones or neurotransmitters. These are designed specifically for your own receptor site. So what you're making within your own body based on your thoughts, your perception of reality, is of the utmost importance. And obviously, thoughts of stress and anxiety, and worry and fear, these are going to create cascades that make us feel a certain way. The same with more positive and affirmative feelings and thoughts of joy, of love, of connection. But all of our emotions matter. Now, the thing is, if we're talking about health and longevity, we want to make sure that we're stacking conditions to have more positive, affirmative thoughts and buffer us from the stressful thoughts that we are inevitably going to have. Now, our sleep hygiene, our movement practices, and also our nutrition are of the utmost importance in helping to modulate these things. And when it comes to managing stress, there is one

particular story, tea that has been utilized for thousands of years that stands head and shoulders above the rest.

SHAWN STEVENSON: A study published in Biomedical Research found that test subjects with a variety of health complaints, including anxiety and poor sleep quality, were given lion's mane medicinal mushroom or a placebo for four weeks to monitor their metabolic and psychological impact. The participants who utilize lion's mane had significantly reduced levels of anxiety and irritation than those in the placebo group. The researcher stated, quote, our results show that lion's mane intake has the possibility to reduce depression and anxiety unquote. Not only that, scientists at the University of Malaya discovered that compounds in lion's mane are able to significantly improve the activity of a nerve growth factor in the brain. Nerve growth factor is essential in the regulation of growth, maintenance, proliferation and survival of various brain cells. If we want to have a healthy brain and protect our brain cells, which we don't have, the regenerative activity of brain cells like we do other cells in our bodies, we've got to take care of our brain cells. This is one of the few things ever discovered that has that protective capacity for me and my family. We want to make sure that the medicinal mushrooms that we're utilizing lions mane, chaga, rishi, and the like are all done via a dual extraction to make sure that we're getting these bio active compounds in a more full fashion.

SHAWN STEVENSON: So via a hot water extract and an alcohol extract, there's one company that's doing that and infusing these incredible medicinal mushrooms into things like organic coffee, organic hot cocoa, and I'm talking about the folks at Four Sigmatic. Go to foursigmatic.com//model you get 10% off store wide of all of their incredible medicinal mushroom elixirs, cocos, and their organic coffee blends as well. Today I actually had the lions mane and chaga organic coffee blend. This is one of those things, of course, it puts you on ten, but it helps you to modulate and manage your energy. It's not one of those things where you get this jolt of energy and then it leaves you lagging later on. It's very steady, mild mannered behavior and also helping to really activate the cognitive function that we're looking at when we're talking about things like lion's mane, medicinal mushroom. Can get 10% off store wide plus more. They got some incredible packages that you've got to check out in specials over at foursigmatic.com//model. Go to F-O-U-R-S-I-G-M-A-T-I-C.com//model for 10% off store wide and more.

SHAWN STEVENSON: And now back to the show. Can you talk about the Miami study?

MICHAEL EASTER: Yes. So this one was really fascinating about how scarcity queues affect us. So a scarcity queue is a piece of information that we encounter in the environment that suggests that things that we need to survive are scarce or all is not right with the world, basically. So what these scientists did is they had this table where they had a bowl of low

calorie M&Ms and high calorie M&Ms. And they would let students choose whichever they wanted. And when students received a scarcity queue, which was like news of a war that could put a ration on food or something like that, people chose the high calorie M&Ms, and they ate twice as many of them compared to if they didn't receive that scarcity queue. So the sort of conclusion from the researchers was that when we think the things we need are going to be scarce, we tend to react by eating food. And that makes sense from a historical perspective. It's like if you think that all of a sudden there's going to be a run on food, well, we've got built in refrigerators on our frame in the form of fat. It's like, just start eating food and you see that among all animals too.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yeah, we have this title for it, stress eating. But also on the other side, you can also eat stress as well. Some of these foods are contributing to the stress load in our systems as well. So it's just like this giant feedback loop there, too. And you pointed this out, too, in the book. Like, we get a little bit of a hit, like Serotonin, for example, when we go for some carb rich foods, like snacking on those, M&Ms the fat. And the carb combination is really special for our brains. It really likes that a lot. And we would have done this you shared also, like, if our ancestors were to happen upon a bush of berries of some sort, there are tribes even today, for example, that might come across a food source and they will eat so much that would make them sick, but then they'll keep eating. Talk about that.

MICHAEL EASTER: Yeah. So when I was researching that tribe that I mentioned, the Chimane tribe, I talked to a guy whose name is Michael Gervin, great guy, fascinating guy. And he's researched, spent time with all these different sort of hunter gatherer horticulturist tribes. And he was with the Ache in Paraguay, I believe they are. And he's like, we're hanging out. They come upon this bush of oranges, basically. And oranges are a delicacy because they're more calorie dense than what they would normally find. He's like, everyone stopped, sat down, and they ate more oranges than I'd ever seen anyone eat in their life. They ate so many that they got sick, threw up, they took a two minute break and kept on eating oranges. Because in that context of their life, I mean, they're small people. It makes sense to onboard some fat when you have the opportunity by overeating.

SHAWN STEVENSON: It's bananas.

MICHAEL EASTER: Yeah, I mean, I live in Las Vegas. You go to a buffet, I see the same damn thing. It just happens to be tourist. [chuckle]

SHAWN STEVENSON: Right right.

MICHAEL EASTER: They aren't literally getting sick and coming back to the buffet, but you see people walking out of there going, oh my God, I'm so uncomfortably full. Right. Same behavior.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Why do we do that? It's just like, well, we know why we do it, but it's just like certain food experiences. Like, I'm never going to eat again. Yeah. So I need to get as much of this as Thanksgiving. Thanksgiving is never going to happen for me again. I cannot possibly have stuffing in turkey again in my life. Let me eat as much as I can.

MICHAEL EASTER: And I think, too, look at all the options of things we have to eat. So for most of the time, people were eating a few different things around the menu every day. There wasn't a ton of options out there. Now we have restaurants where there's a giant menu and you've got the appetizer that has a few different things in it. You've got an entree that has a few different things, and you can have dessert. So when people have more different options of things to eat, they will eat more different things to eat. Basically. This is called the buffet effect. So you put someone in a buffet and they'll tend to overeat because there's so many different things to try, flavors to test out, much like a slot machine. Is this one going to be the winner? Is this the winner on the buffet for me? Right.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Let's talk about how we use these things for in particular today. We've got the golden age of television. There's so much social media. There's infinite amounts of things to get lost in. Let's talk about the escape aspect.

MICHAEL EASTER: Yeah, well, I think a lot of the behaviors that we do over and over and over eventually to our detriment, especially if we're like, I don't know why I'm doing this, but I can't stop, it's because it gives us a short term relief from some underlying thing. Could be life stress. It's some problem we have in our life. So a good stat, and I don't think I put this one in the book, is that 90% of phone pickups are not because of an external cue, meaning a notification or something like that. They're because of an internal cue of something happening inside us.

SHAWN STEVENSON: I just check.

MICHAEL EASTER: We're stressed, we're bored, we're whatever. It's like you stand in a grocery store line. People can't stand in a line for more than 2 seconds without being like, what do I do with myself and pull out there.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Or an elevator.

MICHAEL EASTER: An elevator. Yeah, and so I do think that a lot of these behaviors have an escape element, and this is... I think this gets translated at the extreme end into addiction, where addiction to me, there's a lot of theories behind it. For a while in the US, we thought it was... You were a bad person. If you were an addict, it's a moral failing. Then we realized, well, that's dumb. And the argument now is that it's a brain disease, so some chemical thing happening inside the brain that the person doesn't really have any agency over, as I was researching this book, I definitely don't think addicts are bad people at all, but I don't necessarily think brain diseases is a great model for addiction, I think what tends to happen is that people do something that provides them relief and it works for them for a long time, but eventually it starts to tip and it starts to contribute to long-term problems. Yeah, that behavior still solves your problems in the short term, it's still a short-term relief, and by redoing and redoing and redoing that cycle, you find yourself in a pickle and it's usually an escape from some underlying problem.

SHAWN STEVENSON: We're very crafty people, that's what we're doing with all this stuff, we're just trying to find some solace, we're seeking comfort, we're trying to... If this stuff is too heavy or even not even that heavy, we just become acclimated to escape, and that's... What I also love about your work as well is like, we're not villainization any of this stuff. It's awesome to escape into a Tom Cruise movie. I won't do that shit, but also it's pretty awesome to watch it, and the same thing with our different food experiences, knowing that Pizza Hut is a thing, you're like that's given me some joy in my childhood in a while. Actually, there was a Pizza Hut buffet in my neighborhood.

MICHAEL EASTER: I've been to one of those is.

SHAWN STEVENSON: All right so, first of all, it's Pizza Hut. They had those cool glasses that just look... Sodo looks better in those glass.

MICHAEL EASTER: Oh, yeah. Taste better too.

SHAWN STEVENSON: And it tastes better. And they had a buffet, so me and my little brother, we walk into the comic book store and like, whatever it was, 799 or some whatever. And you could just go crazy him and I are too little. I was 12 or something, and he was eight. And we were going hum at Pizza hut, having those things exist, that's not the problem.

SHAWN STEVENSON: We're gonna keep creating, we're gonna keep finding ways to distract ourselves, to pleasure ourselves through food through these kind of external mediums, but I think what's lost in all of this is that inherent desire for fulfillment, for connection, for wanting to feel like we matter, significance. And so I think that's a lot of what's becoming filler. And so you mentioned too, this mismatch, with our short to-do list, and now we've got

all these to-do lists, but is that really meeting again, what our genes are expecting from us from all this time? We live in such a new reality that we're trying to catch up, but it's virtually impossible. Because things are not slowing down.

SHAWN STEVENSON: And so my question to dig deeper into this, we looked at, okay, some things to break this scarcity loop, addressing some of these things, but what about fulfillment, what about focusing on ourselves and real happiness that doesn't require any of these things?

MICHAEL EASTER: Yeah. That's a good question. So as part of the book, I spent about a week with these guys who are Benedictine monks in the mountains of New Mexico, and what's fascinating about these people is that we live in the world where there's a million different things that we're told we need to do to be happy, and there's all this research like right now, the popular thing is, you must have a bunch of friends, you must be social, it's like, yeah, obviously it's good to be social, but... Or, you must meditate, or you must gratitude journal, and stuff like this is coming out of universities, and what's interesting about these monks is their life is pretty hard, they wake up at 3:00 AM every morning to go pray. They go pray in the chapel seven different times a day. They don't eat a ton, they're told to not overeat, they have to do physical labor for four hours every day, and by the way, they can't talk for like most of the day, so it's not like they're super, super social. And when you look at research on them though, they tend to be happier than the average person on average, so they're doing all these things that we might look at and go, Well now, that would make a person unhappy, but they're happy.

MICHAEL EASTER: And so the question is why? And I think, to me, it comes down to. We need a certain level of effort in our life, which these people are getting through physical labor, they do every single day. Yes, we need connection, which they have, but we also need time to be alone in time and solitude to know about ourself. So I had a separate research on the last book, *The Comfort Crisis*, talked to me about solitude, and he basically said like, Look, you obviously need a social network, but if you can't be alone, that's a sign that like something good is not going on, right. When people want to find themselves, to understand more about themselves, they often need to have these stints of solitude, and this is in religious text going back thousands of years. Right? And then I think most important with these guys I met with is that they're not obsessed with themselves. They have a sort of higher purpose, so everything they do is for this higher thing. So for them, it's God. Do I think that needs to be God for everyone? No, do I think that realizing that maybe you're not the center of the damn universe is probably good for a human?

MICHAEL EASTER: Yes, right. And so how is that gonna get expressed and what can you do to sort of do the next right thing and give effort to a cause that's maybe greater than yourself, I

think that ultimately is a big driver of fulfillment and a long and happy life, and one of the researchers who I talked to in this process said, one correlation that I see between people who live a long life and live a happy life is that they do a lot of volunteer work, they spend a lot of time helping others, they do all these things that get out of themselves, even if they're not necessarily checking all these other boxes that we've been told you absolutely must do to be happy.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yeah, yeah, and what you just shared, all of these things are firm, there's so much data on this and increasing our life span and our health span as well. But the question is, are we doing it? Right. So we've got effort. Are we actually putting forth effort? It's important for our sense of well-being to do that, if we're not doing that, we're gonna feel... But we can condition ourselves to be more comfortable in the lack of effort, which is again, this strange thing, our connection we need. But this one really jumped out at me, we need solitude, and you mentioned this earlier, not being able to just be bored. Both of us... We remember a time where we didn't have a cell phone. I was like. We just were with ourselves.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Can you imagine just thinking, there's so much time that I spent with myself just in my own mind and contemplating, but also what's happening too, that freedom is processing. Data is getting processed. We're looking at different angles, perspectives, and having time to just be. Today there's always something but so much of it is manufactured. There was a time we could just leave our house, and she's like, We'll be back when we're back, you can't talk in the meantime. And now it's like people have 24/7 access to you if you allow it. And so part of this is... And I'm gonna advocate for that for all of us because as you just mentioned, not being able to be with oneself, this is a new thing as well, and that's a new thing.

MICHAEL EASTER: Totally.

SHAWN STEVENSON: And it's manufactured by the culture. Yes, we need each other, but we also need to know who we are, we need to spend time with ourselves, we live with ourselves, but we don't fucking know ourselves at all today, we're just kind of like we think...

SHAWN STEVENSON: We're just moving around, just being controlled by the environment, so if we're talking about a vast universe and we're talking about infinite information, it's all within you, there's so much within you to explore, but you can't do that if you don't have time to just be.

SHAWN STEVENSON: So I would advocate for people to just put that at least on your mid-term goals to just have maybe 20 minutes a day to just do nothing. Put everything. You

don't have to meditate per se, but just put everything to decide, turn off your notifications. And just be. And I love this too, for me, I do this on a walk. I don't bring my phone, I just go for a walk, and that's helped so much of what people have heard on this show, and it's come through that experience of just being about myself walking, processing things, thinking about things through different angles, I didn't consciously do that, it just started happening. Problems get solved, ideas, all these things because I have time to just be.

MICHAEL EASTER: In the Comfort Crisis, I spent a month in the Arctic, we were on this caribou hunt. And so we'd sit on these hills because hunting caribou. They're coming north or south, summer into wintering grounds. But none of the caribou coming through. They're just not coming through. So I didn't have my cell phone and I have a book and on a magazine, no TV, none of that. Right, so I'd sit on these hills for hours and hours and hours, with nothing to do, so I find myself bored again. Right, so what did I do to relieve my boredom? At one point, we read all the labels on our nutrition, on our food, right? So we're like, Cliff bar, 250 calories, nine grams of protein, whatever, maybe I got in Cliff and you're looking at the tags on your gear, then you're coming up with Christmas shopping list for the next 15 years and you're... But then I wrote some of the book that I wrote, right. I wrote all these different ideas, and so I'm having all these really interesting thoughts. So when you think about boredom, boredom is neither good nor bad, but what boredom does it's... Boredom is an evolutionary discomfort that basically tells you whatever you're doing with your time right now, the return on your time invested has one thing.

MICHAEL EASTER: So if you think about a million years ago, and you and I are hunting for our tribe. No animals are coming through. Boredom kicks on, it tells us, "Go do something else." Now, in the past that something else was often productive, so you and me, we go, alright. Well, we've been sitting here for a while, the sun was there, and now it's there. Let's go pick some potatoes, let's go find some berries, so boredom often used to push us into something that was productive in the past, but now we live in a world where any time we feel that evolutionary discomfort, a boredom, we have easy effortless escapes from it. We can pull out our phone, we can turn on a TV, we can go behind their computer, we can do x, y. There's a million different things we can do, and I do think that when you look at your point about coming up with ideas on walks, when you look at creatives, boredom in a lot of studies does seem to enhance creativity simply because people's attention is often wandering, and when it's often wandering, it's gonna wander into some interesting areas if you have your phone on you.

MICHAEL EASTER: Right, when your mind starts to wander, you immediately pull out that phone and that kill... You're seeing the same... That everyone else is seeing, no one ever came up with a good idea, watching the video that a million of the people have watched on Instagram, like it just never happened, it usually has to happen in this separate space that is

removed. And when you look at how much time we spend on media today, it's anywhere from 12 to 13 hours on digital media, I mean that's totally brand new for us in our minds. So one of the things I talk about in *The Comfort Crisis* is that there's so much focus on spending less time on your phone, but what tends to happen is that people will take an hour off their phone screen time, and once they do that, they'll go, Oh, well, now I'm kind of bored. What do I do with my time? And they'll watching Netflix, right. Now, that's the same damn thing. The brain doesn't know the difference, so I advocate for more boredom, this is a good way to frame that in the context of today, and I do think it's absolutely powerful to your experience for coming up with ideas, for thinking differently or even just having a time to sort of chill from how fast-paced life is today.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Right, right, right. And it's so good for you, just for processing stress and all the things, and you just mentioned, because the argument might come up in watching whatever, somebody else's video, a million views, a good idea. Yeah, you could have an idea, but it's usually gonna be regurgitation. Right.

MICHAEL EASTER: It would be a take on that, or...

SHAWN STEVENSON: Verses... And you alluded to this, so some researchers at Stanford found that simply going for a walk and their study was like 10 to 15 minute walk, increased their objective creativity, what they were putting them through by 60%, but it was a certain flavor of it, it was something called divergent thinking. So looking at things from these different unique angles, it's just like we have that, we all have it in us to be creators and creative and to solve our most pressing issues. But if you don't have time, you're not gonna find the answer that you already have.

MICHAEL EASTER: Yeah, totally.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Man, this has been fantastic, and I highly encourage everybody, grab a copy. *Scarcity Brain* is available right now, everywhere the books are sold, of course, support your local book stores, jump on Amazon, Barnes and Noble, all that good stuff. Is there anywhere else that people can connect with you and get more information?

MICHAEL EASTER: Yeah, I got a website, eastermichael.com, and I have a newsletter I send out three times a week that talks about a lot of the stuff we've been talking about today, so if you're into this show, you'd probably be into that too, so we actually do audio readings of it too, so...

SHAWN STEVENSON: That's cool. That's cool. Listen again, I love books that provide... It's not just information, but it's profound knowledge, it's like something that changes the way you

view life, and there are quite a few moments of that reading, Scarcity Brain, so just thank you so much for taking the time and energy and putting it together for us, man, that's pretty awesome.

MICHAEL EASTER: Well, I really appreciate you held me as a phone conversation, I enjoyed it.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Awesome, and we don't have any bias towards Easter holidays, except you get free pancakes apparently.

MICHAEL EASTER: Yeah, I made that up. [laughter] I tell everyone that. And he goes, What's the life in these? Well, I get free pancakes and I help on Easter Sunday. So now the secret is out, I've just revealed that. If I've conned you, I'm sorry.

SHAWN STEVENSON: My guy, again, thank you so much for your time and energy, and this is fascinating stuff, can wait to see what you do next. But right now, everybody get a copy of Scarcity Brain wherever books are sold. Michael Easter, everybody.

MICHAEL EASTER: Many thanks man.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Thank you so much for tuning into the show today, effort, connection, solitude and contribution. These are four pillars that can provide so much more health, happiness and success, especially in our world today, but the question is, are we doing them? Are we utilizing these very powerful pillars? I truly hope that you got a lot of value out of this conversation, if you did please share this out with your friends and family, of course, you could send this directly from the podcast app that you are listening on. And of course, you could take a screen shot of the episode, post it on your social, on your Instagram story, you could tag me, I'm @Shawnmodel and tag Michael Easter as well, share the love, let more people know about this incredible information. We've got some epic guests and powerful master classes coming your way very, very soon. So make sure to stay tuned.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Take care, have an amazing day and I'll talk with you, soon. And for more after this show, make sure to head over to the modelhealthshow.com, that's where you can find all of the show notes, you could find transcriptions, videos for each episode, and if you got a comment, you can leave me a comment there as well, and please make sure to head over to iTunes and leave us a rating to let everybody know that the 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.