

THE MODEL HEALTH SHOW

EPISODE 750

Why the American Diet is Fueling Higher Rates of Anxiety

With Dr. Uma Naidoo

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SHAWN STEVENSON: Welcome to The Model Health Show. This is nutritionist and best-selling author Shawn Stevenson. And I'm very grateful for you tuning in with me today. The latest research is affirming that mental health and brain health are truly synonymous. We must protect and support this powerful organ that's influencing every single cell in our bodies. All of the neurotransmitters, hormones and various metabolic factors that are influencing how we feel, that are influencing our mental health are literally made from the food that we eat. Our brain, our nervous system is made from the food that we eat. And you're probably very aware that the quality of foods, of nutrients that we are building our brains out of, has gone down tremendously in recent years.

SHAWN STEVENSON: And we're also, coincidentally, but maybe not so coincidentally, seeing epidemics, multiple epidemics of mental health conditions, in particular anxiety. It has skyrocketed in the last couple of decades and also taking a mighty jump just in the last few years alone. But this has been going on in trending upwards for several decades now and it's time that we do something about this. But we've also, again, we've got a look at some of the foundational ingredients that are contributing to these epidemics. And looking at, again, the raw materials that we're building our brains and our bodies out of because food truly, according to our incredible guest today who is a board certified psychiatrist working out of Harvard and also she's developed the first nutritional psychiatry ward at a leading hospital. She is treating patients successfully for all manner of mental health conditions utilizing food as a primary factor in treatment.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yes, there are a plethora of medications that are available today but unfortunately the data is affirming that the majority of people are not getting well and staying well. We've got to take a different approach. We've got to take an approach where we're addressing some of these key inputs. So if you've been struggling with your own mental health, if you know someone who has, this episode is incredibly important. This is important for all of us because all of us deal with stressors and struggles and all kinds of things. Especially in our society today it's not hard to find things to make you feel bad. It's not hard to find things that stress you out. It's not hard to find things that give us anxiety and depression and distract our brains and cause challenges, massive challenges with our ability to pay

attention. We have a society that is now built, that is hardwired for all manner of craziness. And if you were like me growing up, mental health was definitely not something that was discussed.

SHAWN STEVENSON: All right. People just had whatever stuff going on, their traumas, their heartbreaks, their experiences and you just tough it out. Matter of fact, you don't even talk about it. Alright, that thing is a locked away key thrown away and it's just something that unfortunately tends to fester up in our psyche. And also some of the leading data is affirming how these mental health challenges and excessive stress lead to physical disorders, physical conditions. And the vast majority of our physical ailments. Whether it's heart disease, whether it's physical pain, the majority of these conditions have an emotional component to them. And so being able to have this introspection, being able to have these tools to provide ourselves, to provide our DNA, our genes with the inputs to have a healthier expression to support our mental health is absolutely key. And so I'm very very excited about this episode.

SHAWN STEVENSON: And before we get to our special guests it's important to understand that our capacity, our mental health, our physical health, these are all driven by energy and having energy allotted, energy available to literally think the thoughts that we want to think, to be able to have more self-control and self-management of our minds, of our thoughts.

SHAWN STEVENSON: We can get depleted very quickly, you know, especially in today's society. Again there's so much coming at us. And so having some supportive nutrition is obviously critical. And right now with innovation there are some things that are kind of head and shoulders above other things when it comes to energy, and in particular numerous studies, including a study published by the Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology, AKA the FASEB journal, have found that exogenous ketones can be up to twenty-eight-percent more efficient in generating energy than glucose alone. Plus studies have found up to a 15% increased mean power output After recovery when utilizing ketones, helping our bodies to heal and to recover. There's something really special about these exogenous ketones, but we've taken a mighty jump from the conventional ketone esters. When we now are able to utilize ketone IQ, go to hvmn.com/model and get your hands on ketone IQ.

SHAWN STEVENSON: I've personally experienced ketone IQ improving my cognitive performance and specifically my endurance during my workouts. And for most people, this isn't gonna be for everybody, but for most people they notice this the very first time utilizing ketone IQ. I know that I did. And you know, of course over the years, I've been in this field for about 21 years now, and I've utilized so many different things. It's very rare to find something where you see a noticeable improvement immediately and that's what I experienced. Again this is not necessarily gonna happen for everyone, but for the majority of people utilizing ketone IQ, this takes their energy to another level. But here's the key, without any strange jitters or crashes or anything like that. It's just utilizing a primal energy system in our bodies for performance.

SHAWN STEVENSON: So check them out. Go to hvmn.com/model and you're going to get hooked up with 30% off your first subscription order automatically. All right. So again, that's hvmn.com. And get your hands on ketone IQ. And now let's get to the Apple podcast review of the week.

ITUNES REVIEW: Another five-star review titled, 'Shawn is a beautiful person', by Runner and Walker. His focus is on helping people to achieve health. He knows we are set up to fail. He says, it's our responsibility to change our environment. He shows us how. Thank you Shawn.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Oh, wow. Thank you. Thank you so much for seeing me. Thank you so much for that acknowledgement. I appreciate that immensely. From my heart to yours, thank you. And listen, if you have to do so please pop over to Apple podcasts and leave a review for The Model Health Show. All right, leave a review, pop over to Apple podcast. It truly does mean a lot. And without further ado, let's get to our special guest and topic of the day.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Dr Uma Naidoo is a Harvard-trained board certified psychiatrist and what also makes her truly exceptional is that she's a nutrition specialist with her education from Cornell University plus a professional chef with her education from Cambridge School of Culinary Arts. She's currently the director of nutritional and lifestyle psychiatry at Massachusetts General Hospital where she consults on nutritional interventions for

psychiatry and medically ill patients. And now she's back for another powerful conversation specifically addressing nutrition and anxiety. Let's dive into this conversation with Dr Uma Naidoo.

SHAWN STEVENSON: All right. My friend, Dr Uma Naidoo. So good to see you.

DR. UMA NAIDOO: Great to see you Shawn. Thanks for having me.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Of course, listen as a board certified psychiatrist I've got to ask you this. From your perspective have the rates of anxiety been going up in recent years or even recent decades?

DR. UMA NAIDOO: Yeah.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Because you get to see this firsthand. And I want to ask you about this personally.

DR. UMA NAIDOO: Yeah, it has. So Shawn even before the pandemic anxiety was actually the most common mental health disorder in the United States. Many people don't realize that, it was always about three times more common than even something like depression. But during the pandemic, and hence the reason for my book, it really worsened. In the early pandemic times in around spring of 2020 a medication called Zoloft, Sertraline, a selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor went on shortage in the entire United States. Doctors and prescribers were getting emails and calls from pharmacies saying you need to find a solution for individuals who are taking this. And the reason behind it was there were new diagnoses of anxiety, maybe some mood disorders around that time.

DR. UMA NAIDOO: So these were not... These were new prescriptions and that's why we ran out. We know that of course this had a toll but the Lancet published a paper saying that, something I feel like I've seen and experienced is that the increase is 25% as we've gone through the pandemic, which is a massive jump. And so I feel like there needs to be more solutions than just that prescription pad because other information and research has shown

us that even when you take medication for anxiety you may not ever feel the relief of it. In fact a larger percentage of people don't get a cure or don't even have remission from anxiety. So we need more solutions.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Actually you posted not too long ago a more recent paper which some of this data has been known for quite some time and actually we just talked about. Dr. Caroline Leaf...

DR. UMA NAIDOO: Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Before the show and she shared with me, it's decades ago that this was pretty well established that the serotonin theory of depression is largely disproven in certain scientific circles. But now a more recent paper came out kind of addressing this.

DR. UMA NAIDOO: Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Because SSRIs have been a billion dollar industry.

DR. UMA NAIDOO: Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: But you just shared, a lot of times people aren't actually finding relief, especially enduring relief.

DR. UMA NAIDOO: Correct, especially enduring relief. I like how you phrase that because you might get initial relief, but it's not sustainable or you develop side effects. So there's a whole spectrum. I think it goes back to the fact that with diagnostic criteria, we have the DSM-V TR. It's not like if you come in Shawn and you have a cough, I can get a sputum test, I can order different, you know... I can order an x-ray and order several things and actually treat what I know might be infecting you. It's not that way in mental health. We can't just do a brain biopsy. We have these diagnostic criteria and people very often have a mixed set of symptoms. Then when we get to the medications we have had a very heavy sort of reliance on the serotonin hypothesis and a study published in the British Medical Journal, which I

referenced in my book last year.

DR. UMA NAIDOO: And I'm careful about how I frame this because I'm not trying to say if you're taking a selective... An SSRI, stop your medication. I'm not saying that at all. Talk to your doctor. Examine the data for yourself. Have a conversation with a provider. But essentially this research group in the UK essentially said, you know, there's not much basis for this. And the way I see this is it has spun off into the pharmaceutical industry in a very big way, the reliance that we have on SSRIs and I feel like we just need to have a longer, bigger conversation about this so people have more solutions. And that's where I do feel food is one of those lifestyle pillars that could make a difference that we often overlook.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yeah, it's so fascinating and of course talking with you and your traditional education and then your education so far beyond, you know your university education and what you're doing you're... I don't use this word lightly and also I don't want to paint this as like you've been doing this for super long, but you are a pioneer in this field, you know nutritional psychiatry is really something that you push forward into our culture and have such a prestigious clinic to help people through the use of nutrition. And I want to point us back to this because it's so fascinating, you just said it, you know, you have a manual that we're educated on to treat patients with mental health and it's fitting in a certain criteria and it's often based on behavior or...

DR. UMA NAIDOO: Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Conversation. But we're not actually testing. Does this person have some kind of issue with serotonin? It's based off of a theory.

DR. UMA NAIDOO: Based on a theory and there isn't, you know, yes, we can do blood tests and we can check this and that but it's not as clear as a liver biopsy. It's not as clear as other diagnoses in other specialties. So I feel we're already a little bit in the dark in psychiatry and I think we need to acknowledge that and offer guidance based on that. But that's where I feel, and this happened early on in my career... I'm not against medications. The medications, I've said this to you before Shawn have saved the lives of many of my patients, but it's not the

solution for everyone. And when it is even a part way solution, food nutrition and lifestyle factors can always help because maybe you don't need as high a dose. Maybe over time your provider can work with you to taper you safely off the medication.

DR. UMA NAIDOO: But you know, I've been talking to a group that I work with in the United Kingdom and they even are talking about things like serotonin addiction because they find that the prescriptions of GPs are so high because they don't have other solutions. So it's a big deal.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yeah. You know it should seem obvious at this point that you know healthy lifestyle factors, things that we evolve doing that our genes expect from us, that our DNA requires in order for healthy cellular function and replication. These basic things, if they're not done we're just kind of window dressing. And you pointed out in your book, and this was such a strong statement, that the American diet is actually fueling higher rates of anxiety.

DR. UMA NAIDOO: It is.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Can you talk a little bit about why that is?

DR. UMA NAIDOO: It is, you know, unfortunately for the most part in America, we are led by things like the standard American diet. Which you know is called SAD for a reason, the acronym, and it's also called the Western diet and that diet is really very high in processed, ultra processed junk foods and fast foods. We know that some fast food french fries have added sugar in them to make them hyper palatable. So when people go to that drive-thru they upsize and when they get that largest size of fries they eat it and then the next time it's lunch they feel for it again because it's starting to tap into our craving cycle.

DR. UMA NAIDOO: But these foods are engineered a certain way. We also have a very heavy reliance on just sugar in many of our foods, including things like bread and if you've not eaten a certain product for a while and you go back and taste it, maybe you're at a dinner or at an event you will actually realize there's so much sugar in some basic foods that we eat,

including savory foods. So the added and refined sugars are a problem, the high fructose corn syrup, the sodas, the sports beverages that are loaded up with sugar and things like that. We also know that through the foods we eat and sometimes the fact that we eat those processed foods there's a lot of processed vegetable and seed oils that can actually drive inflammation. So that's another thing that's in our food as well. Then there's artificial sweeteners. There's some newer sweeteners where there's some really exciting and newer data. But for the most part the sweeteners that are on the foods that are labeled diet or low sugar or no sugar are problematic, especially in the diet sodas.

DR. UMA NAIDOO: And then it's the sort of unhealthy fats. The shelf-stable baked goods that you can buy this week and you can serve it next week and they're shelf-stable because they're kind of pumped up with sort of preservatives and colorants and dyes and all that stuff. But also the wrong types of fats, the trans fats and the hydrogenated oils, which are really pro-inflammatory for our bodies. Because we tend to eat this kind of diet without a reliance on fiber, vegetables and plants... I would say a plant-rich diet. And balancing that nutritional psychiatry plate with the right proteins, fats and even complex carbs, we've kind of gotten our meals into disarray and that is definitely driving anxiety and it worsened during the pandemic.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Let's break down a little bit why sugar is so troubling when it comes to anxiety. Why is sugar something that can exacerbate symptoms of anxiety?

DR. UMA NAIDOO: Yeah. I think it's a little bit of a trick and this is what I mean. The times that people will say but you know when I'm really anxious I just... I want that candy bar, I need that soda or that, you know, very fancy coffee with tons of ingredients. I just need that because it's gonna make me feel better. It's gonna calm me down. And the funny thing is that in the short term you actually may feel a little bit better, that kind of is tricking our brain because that initial rush of sugar may make you feel better.

DR. UMA NAIDOO: It's the long-term effect that is actually problematic. And in fact has been shown to damage neurons over time. So if we are subsisting on that sugar laden diet, we are damaging our brain over time. The other thing that sugar does is that it drives inflammation

in the gut and in the brain. So we are feeding those not so great, not so cool microbes down in our gut microbiome and when they thrive they upset the environment of the gut. They lead to dysbiosis and inflammation in the gut. Over time their toxic breakdown products damage the cell lining of the gut and you get leakage into the circulatory system.

DR. UMA NAIDOO: You eventually develop inflammation in the gut, leaky gut, or intestinal permeability over time. So sugar is problematic on multiple levels, and it is hard to extract from our diet. So I just try to guide people toward extra dark natural chocolate, towards pieces of fruit, towards berries rather than a reliance on just candy, which is what we're used to, candy and cakes and that kind of stuff.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Mental health is really brain health.

DR. UMA NAIDOO: It is.

SHAWN STEVENSON: It's a big, big part of this.

DR. UMA NAIDOO: It is.

SHAWN STEVENSON: And you just shared, if we could just get this as a society, like sugar is not without a cost. This is something that was not a part of our diet as a species.

DR. UMA NAIDOO: No.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Literally until...

DR. UMA NAIDOO: No.

SHAWN STEVENSON: About 150 years ago it became more prevalent, but it is really 50, 60, 70 years ago where there's this huge upswing in its consumption and availability. And we went from around the 1900s, maybe under 10 pounds of added sugar. Per person.

DR. UMA NAIDOO: Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: In the United States or in the western world.

DR. UMA NAIDOO: Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Per year, and that number is skyrocketed. It's at least 70 pounds per person. Some reports estimate closer to a 100 pounds of added sugars per person. And you just shared, again, if we could get this, this can potentially, this sugar consumption is damaging our neurons. And this is where all the magic is happening with our mood and with our cognitive function.

DR. UMA NAIDOO: You're right. And thank you for pointing out those statistics because we now eat so much sugar and as the food industry developed these neat tricks, like creating refined sugars, but then adding into foods and realizing, hey, food can be tastier and people are gonna wanna eat those foods. So it kind of caught on, and then it was developing high fructose corn syrup, and let's see what we can put, where can we put that? And ended up in almost all foods. So even savory foods have a ton of sugar that you don't even realize is there. So now you'll see healthier brands coming up with ketchup, with they'll have a label, low sugar or no sugar, or no added sugar. And that's the reason, because a lot of those foods have a ton of sugar that you don't even, you don't even realize is there.

SHAWN STEVENSON: I was just about to say ketchup. This past weekend, my son had a basketball tournament. And we got room service, and they sent these little things of Heinz ketchup.

DR. UMA NAIDOO: Yep.

SHAWN STEVENSON: And it was high fructose corn syrup was one of the ingredients.

DR. UMA NAIDOO: Yeah.

SHAWN STEVENSON: And I'm just like, man, this is bananas. It's been there for years and it's so unsuspecting. So many of these products that we come in contact with have this high fructose corn syrup. And also if you think about the brain itself, it runs primarily on glucose. And your work has been a lot of what you've done and also your education with Harvard and some researchers there found that it was something like 50% of the sugar that we consume in a given meal can get shuttled to the brain because the brain evolved to really snatch up a lot of the sugar that we consume. But it used to be a small percentage...

DR. UMA NAIDOO: It used to be much smaller.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Of our diet.

DR. UMA NAIDOO: Yeah. Yeah.

SHAWN STEVENSON: But now this kind of abhorrent amount of sugar that we have access to, it's just driving up to the brain in droves. And this is one of the things we're seeing potentially with Alzheimer's.

DR. UMA NAIDOO: Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: As well. In this category of, it's being labeled by some scientists as Type 3 diabetes.

DR. UMA NAIDOO: Yes. Some people are calling that. And not everyone agrees with that term, but here's the thing. It's pointing to a mechanism. It's pointing to a way in which society has actually evolved and changed that is driving disease in a certain way. I also see this Shawn a lot with, get a lot of questions about children's mental health, and why are we seeing so much more of these specific conditions? And I can't not include the fact that this conversation has to involve the food we are feeding children and that we're all consuming. But are we seeing that uptick because there's such a reliance on those foods?

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yeah.

DR. UMA NAIDOO: And there are simple things like condiments. You're not thinking to yourself when you're eating something else that I should worry about the condiment. But those are often, even salad dressings, loaded with not only high fructose corn syrup, but just other ingredients that are not good for us. For example, there's a study in... An animal study, and I'll just preface this by saying we have to start the study somewhere and then we have to move them to humans. But I thought what was significant about this one is it looked at the microbiome and a substance called carboxymethyl cellulose, which is actually a thickener in food. And so the CMC was damaging the microbiome of these mice, and they had less of an ability to form the short chain fatty acids that we need. This was a 2022 study. So what it informed me of, it's not diagnostic, it's not we need more information, but it at least alerts us to the fact that it is a problem. And where do we find those ingredients in kind of processed, ultra processed foods, thickening something or whatever it is. So it's the sugar, it's the other processed ingredients. And until we find our way forward, we are not... No one has to be a perfect eater, but at least stepping back from some of that, finding those healthier ketchups or whatever it might be for what we eat and enjoy.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yeah. Today's conversation is a nudge towards paying attention to the smaller things too.

DR. UMA NAIDOO: This is true.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Because we don't think about stuff like that, about our condiments, for example.

DR. UMA NAIDOO: We don't.

SHAWN STEVENSON: And when I was a kid, and I'm not exaggerating, well, maybe I am a little bit, but I think my blood was like 5% ketchup, you know what I mean? Like fish sticks, ketchup. Nuggets. Ketchup.

DR. UMA NAIDOO: Ketchup.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Eggs, ketchup.

DR. UMA NAIDOO: Ketchup. Yeah.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Everything, except bologna sandwiches.

DR. UMA NAIDOO: Okay.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Because I have some self-respect. I didn't put ketchup on that. I put mustard and shout out to people who put ketchup on bologna. No disrespect, but everything. And I would even joke about it.

DR. UMA NAIDOO: Yeah.

SHAWN STEVENSON: I'd tell people like, I'm black and white and red because I eat so much ketchup.

DR. UMA NAIDOO: You eat so much ketchup.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Or I'm black and white and orange because I eat a lot of cheese or whatever it was. But I knew the foods that I liked, which were these condiments, salad dressing, things like that. But the good news is there are a lot of companies who are doing things with more efficacy and intelligence and care, who are not putting these...

DR. UMA NAIDOO: They're trying. They're trying to make better foods.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Crazy amounts of added sugars and things like that or even higher quality sweeteners, or making them lower glycemic and things like that. So if we could even just make little shifts like that and pay attention to the accessory items, that can be helpful.

DR. UMA NAIDOO: I like what you're saying, because a lot of people will pick on the fact that,

oh, well why are you talking about foods, not necessarily on me, but just the, the concept of foods in moderation, balancing where you get those calories from or cutting back. I think it's very hard in this environment to say to people, just give up all processed foods. Never look at one. Because it's hard. We have grown a reliance on these foods, but the ones that you choose matters, where you put your dollars matters, the choices do matter. They matter to your physical health, but also your mental health. And here is where I think making those healthier choices of whether you are even seeing meat products that have, now I've seen them saying no added nitrates in them. Studies have shown that nitrates can worsen depression.

DR. UMA NAIDOO: I don't think the food industry is doing it for that reason. I think they're doing it to show that they're trying to be healthier. But even when we make those choices, it could be that slight tweak that is helping us, because we know that we're consuming more sugar. We know that our dinner plate has increased in size from about eight to nine inches about 60 years ago to 10 to 11 inches now. So even the size of our portions has increased. And if you think the size of portions have increased, and we're eating more sugar as well, that's a lot more of the less healthy ingredients.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yeah. I love this. I'm glad that you pointed out specifically with our kids and ultra processed food consumption. I cannot state this enough, JAMA, Journal of the American Medical Association did a 20 year study looking at ultra processed food consumption by US kids. In 1999, the average child's diet in the United States was 61% ultra processed fake food. And by 2018, that number had risen to 67.5%. Almost 70% of our children's diet is ultra processed food.

DR. UMA NAIDOO: Ultra processed.

SHAWN STEVENSON: And as you know that's the average, so there's gonna be children at the lower end and higher end of the spectrum.

DR. UMA NAIDOO: And the high end. Yeah.

SHAWN STEVENSON: I was definitely on the higher end of the spectrum.

DR. UMA NAIDOO: Wow. Wow.

SHAWN STEVENSON: With my ultra processed food consumption and my health demonstrated that.

DR. UMA NAIDOO: Yeah.

SHAWN STEVENSON: All these chronic conditions. Chronic asthma, allergies, chronic pain. I had an advanced arthritic condition with my spine at 20 years old, which is, that's years in the making to have that level of degeneration that I had. And it's just, I was making my tissues, my neurons. The fuel that my body was running on out of very, very low quality, new, newly invented artificial ingredients. And what we're advocating for is we're not going to ignore the fact that there are all these delicious things that exist today, but what we wanna do is shift our ratio some. Instead of 70% of our diet being that for our children, let's shift that ratio maybe 50%. Or maybe we can shift it. Just flip those numbers and do 30% ultra processed foods.

DR. UMA NAIDOO: Exactly.

SHAWN STEVENSON: And 70% real minimally processed foods.

DR. UMA NAIDOO: Exactly. I really appreciate that, because I feel it's about where people get lost if they get into this very split mentality. It's either this or that. I think we need to find that gray zone that works for more people. In other words, how can you, in your diet, make that adjustment toward a healthier plate in the moment, in the day, in the week for your family. Maybe slightly better choices, though, we start with awareness. There's a repository, as you know Shawn, for other names. And I want people to know this 'cause I want them to read food labels, for other names for sugar on food labels. The number the last time I checked was 262.

DR. UMA NAIDOO: So if a parent, a mom or dad, whoever it is, doing this food shopping, including say a teenager, if you are looking at that label, make sure that you know what's in it 'cause it could have tons of different types of sugar and you don't even realize, and it could be a savory food. So having those little things that we educate ourselves with is key because the food industry is not gonna change. We have to change where we spend our money and what choices we make of those foods. And there are slightly healthier versions of everything now.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yeah. And you've gotta educate yourself, because food companies will have a health wash and they might throw 'gluten free' on the label, but then there's like 10 other sugars in there. Just what we need to do, of course, education is a huge part of this. Books like yours, *Calm Your Mind with Food* is the new book.

DR. UMA NAIDOO: Thank you.

SHAWN STEVENSON: By the way. Everybody should pick up a copy like yesterday. But for us to be empowered and to understand... Even last night, for example.

DR. UMA NAIDOO: Yeah.

SHAWN STEVENSON: My wife made a real food dinner. Every one of those, there were three different items, you could tell where they came from.

DR. UMA NAIDOO: Great.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Alright.

DR. UMA NAIDOO: Yeah. Love that.

SHAWN STEVENSON: A lot of those foods don't even necessarily need a label. But then, because it's Christmas time, she made some Christmas cookies. And what she did was just used higher quality ingredients that she could.

DR. UMA NAIDOO: Yep.

SHAWN STEVENSON: And this morning I went over, because I didn't want to ask questions. Alright. And it was just a, it was a special moment. She came over with the cookies, she was so happy.

DR. UMA NAIDOO: Yeah, yeah.

SHAWN STEVENSON: And there was sprinkles on there.

DR. UMA NAIDOO: Yeah.

SHAWN STEVENSON: And they had different colors. So, of course my mind is like, I wonder what these dyes are. And I went in there this morning and I saw the sprinkles sitting there on the counter. And there was like green sprinkles. And because as you know some of these food dyes are indicated for increasing symptoms regarding ADHD.

DR. UMA NAIDOO: Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: It's particularly for children. And, but the green food dye, and this was we just got them from Whole Foods.

DR. UMA NAIDOO: Yeah.

SHAWN STEVENSON: It was colored with spirulina to make it green. And then there was another color... There was like a blend of color. One was like beet.

DR. UMA NAIDOO: Beets can be red.

SHAWN STEVENSON: And then like combined with spirulina whatever, to make this other color. It's just like...

DR. UMA NAIDOO: Wow.

SHAWN STEVENSON: They're paying attention to those things. It's still, we gotta be clear still the sugar sweetener, that kind of thing.

DR. UMA NAIDOO: But it's a difference.

SHAWN STEVENSON: But just like little steps to pull away a couple of toxins. And also, again, the meal itself, real food. And then we had a little bit of ultra, there's still cookies, ultra processed food.

DR. UMA NAIDOO: Yeah. But it's your little snack. It's the holidays. Having that balance is critical for us. Like, I don't ever want a person to feel you cannot, if you love birthday cake on your birthday, you should not feel that you can't have a piece. But I do feel that what I'm gonna encourage you to do is have that piece, but not have that be your every night dessert. And I feel like that's a little bit missed in the conversation in nutrition, Shawn, because people are advocating for a very split society around only eat these foods, never eat that, excluding certain food groups. And I feel like if you are metabolically flexible and more metabolically fit you can eat a little bit more grains. You can switch out your plate because you're exercising, you've reached a point of healthfulness. But if you're at a point where many of my patients are at and I have been at certain stages in my life as well, like on a pathway to improving, your body may not be able to tolerate those ingredients in the same way.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yeah.

DR. UMA NAIDOO: And you may have to be more careful about where you get your carbohydrates from and you want more of the complex carbohydrates from vegetables and things like that than eating the other things that many Americans enjoy, like sandwiches and pasta. Again, it's not demonizing the food. It's where you are at that you can make an adjustment. So I really like what you said because even when people understand things like you can use the color of beets to... Beets, by the way, have positive substances for your heart, but you can use the color to make certain things at Christmas time. You can actually almost

employ that powdered beet, which may not have, you have to read the ingredients, but may not have additional sugar, beets are sweet. But use that for things that you're creating. I really like that.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yeah. Part of our metabolic flexibility has to do with our own unique microbiome.

DR. UMA NAIDOO: Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: And you talk about that in the book as well. Can you share why our gut bacteria are a major key for controlling anxiety?

DR. UMA NAIDOO: It turns out that there are, there have been studies and several different species, Lactobacillus have been associated with different ways that they can actually help anxiety. Some manipulate the GABA receptors, and we know that GABA is related to anxiety. Some work through serotonin and dopamine. So there are about six to eight lac... Of the group lactobacillus that have these effects. And I run through some of those in the book. So it may not be that you know where it's coming from, but you have an awareness that these little guys, these microbes are pretty powerful and impacting us both in a good way and a not so good way. But if you are harnessing through eating many prebiotic foods, just paying attention to fiber, paying attention to the kaleidoscope of colors in the plant foods that we're eating, because it's so much more than just the colors of the rainbows, it's a million more colors and it's million more nutrients that we can get.

DR. UMA NAIDOO: When you're doing that, you are actually, you are uplifting and enhancing them. And when they are thriving, they can function because they don't just hang out. They deal with sleep and circadian rhythm, which is our internal body clock. They deal with immunity. 70% of our immune system is in the gut. They deal with vitamin production, hormone production, and they impact sleep. They also deal with mental health and fight infections and do more. So these guys are busy, and if we take care of them, they are going to tap into forming the right types of breakdown products of our food that our bodies need to thrive, but also that our brains need.

SHAWN STEVENSON: There's a lot going on in our gut. That's crazy.

DR. UMA NAIDOO: A whole little...

SHAWN STEVENSON: This reminded me when you mentioned the circadian aspect.

DR. UMA NAIDOO: Yeah.

SHAWN STEVENSON: It's crazy to say this now, but my first book, the first iteration of my first book, it's almost 10 years, been about nine years ago.

DR. UMA NAIDOO: About sleep. Right?

SHAWN STEVENSON: Sleep Smarter. Yeah.

DR. UMA NAIDOO: Yes, yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: And in the book, I shared some research from Caltech and they uncovered that our gut bacteria are communicating with enterochromaffin cells in the gut that are producing sleep related hormones and neurotransmitters. We're talking about serotonin, for example. It's, yeah, it's related to our mood, but it's also a precursor to making melatonin.

DR. UMA NAIDOO: Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: And our bacteria are just in close communication with these cells. It's just like this incredible interplay. But what if our bacteria are not balanced, we don't have good diversity? Then we can start to see all manner of dysfunction start to happen.

DR. UMA NAIDOO: And one of the things that... Love that book, by the way. A lot of that can actually show up as sleep in mental health. Because when your sleep is off people can be

more anxious. Their appetite can change. And I've seen this happen in my clinical practice, and one of the things that happened in the pandemic is people were calling insomnia, Coronasomnia, because it was just getting to be so bad for many people in part driven by the level of angst I think everyone was living with and just disruption. So we're beyond that now.

DR. UMA NAIDOO: So it's time, kind of time to regroup and see what can we do to move ourselves forward. I think that many of us, we often view anxiety as a negative, but we can also use it to our... We can use it to empower ourselves if we learn something like we learn a food label, if we learn how to manage it a little bit better and find these alternate solutions that are just beyond the pull, beyond that actual pull.

SHAWN STEVENSON: I'm at a place now where I'm just... I marvel at how intelligent our bodies are.

DR. UMA NAIDOO: Yeah.

SHAWN STEVENSON: You know, it's just... We're so far from truly understanding, we know some things now, but our bodies are giving us feedback all the time, you know, in regards, like you just mentioned, anxiety can be a directive, it can be...

DR. UMA NAIDOO: Yeah.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Something that we can pay attention to and to make adjustments.

DR. UMA NAIDOO: Okay.

SHAWN STEVENSON: You know with our behavior, with our environment, whatever the case might be, but unfortunately, we see it as just this bad thing.

DR. UMA NAIDOO: Right.

SHAWN STEVENSON: And I can't do anything about it, it's just happening to me, but you are

putting the power in our hands with this and really directing us to like what is one of the biggest contributing factors in our culture with our increasing rates of anxiety.

DR. UMA NAIDOO: Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: And also happening in younger and younger populations...

DR. UMA NAIDOO: Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Our diet has to be addressed, and you know with that being said, let's talk about some of these anxiety-busting nutrients and foods that we can look at adding in.

DR. UMA NAIDOO: I wanna just mention that there's so many... One of the things that I do in the book Shawn and I wanna go to these ingredients, is realizing that there are many things we're overlooking, like... I'm gonna go to this list in a second but iron, there are many women of childbearing age and many children and adolescents, I personally feel it comes back to the food system who are deficient in iron. And it's not something that we necessarily realize.

DR. UMA NAIDOO: But it is correlated with a high level of anxiety in younger folks, so I think it's just something to realize if we're not eating nutritious food, we're not getting that supply of iron that our bodies need, it might need to be supplemented, you need to speak to doctor, we need to get a level, but women as well, but I list a lot of foods that I go through in the book, but for the purpose of kind of having people just to have almost a little cheat sheet in their head, I break it down into a mnemonic comms. And again, these are only a few of the foods, but C is for choline, which you know is an important nutrient, people often overlook it, it can be found in... From legumes to eggs, there's lots of choices there of actual whole foods where you can get choline. Then its vitamin C, extremely important for several biochemical reactions, but also interacts with the next C, which is extra dark natural chocolate, one of my favorites, because it's actually contains magnesium, it has the process by which it's made, makes it has a prebiotic fibre in it.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Also iron.

DR. UMA NAIDOO: And it has iron. It is actually the largest source of plant-based iron. So, but the trick is that you need vitamin C for the absorption, and so I love to pair an extra piece, extra dark chocolate with a piece of Clementine or a piece of orange, just because it helps, there's vitamin C to help it. But...

SHAWN STEVENSON: Chocolate's a special food. Let's pause on this one...

DR. UMA NAIDOO: It is.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Even, you know traditions that used it thousands of years ago, or whether it's the Aztecs, they would combine...

DR. UMA NAIDOO: Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: ... it with things that are high in vitamin C, like peppers...

DR. UMA NAIDOO: Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: For example. You know.

DR. UMA NAIDOO: So interesting.

SHAWN STEVENSON: It's right, it's so fascinating.

DR. UMA NAIDOO: And how people have... How this has come to be, and I haven't allowed that combination, 'cause people want a little bit of something sweet, and if you can just kind of get used to extra dark chocolate, it is delicious. The other C is for chickpeas because of the tryptophan in chickpeas, so it's a good food to help these different symptoms, it's just a good thing to add the fibre and all of that, the A is for ashwagandha, one of the supplements that actually has, because it's very bitter tasting, trust me I've tasted this is a kid, it's not worth tasting it, it's actually easy to get as a supplement, but it has a good amount of evidence for

anxiety, and it comes from sort of Ayurvedic times and people have used it.

DR. UMA NAIDOO: Antioxidants, because we know that there's so many that we get through the foods we eat from spices and herbs to those colorful kaleidoscopes of vegetables, those plant polyphenols that are bringing back, you know, vitamins and micronutrients. And then the L is for believe it or not liquids. And this is because when we are dehydrated and we haven't drank enough water that day, you can actually develop...

DR. UMA NAIDOO: You can develop a panic attack, but you can also have more anxiety, dehydration is also associated with depression and a low mood, so just making sure that you know you're sipping throughout the day, maybe you're carrying a sustainable water bottle, but you're just hydrating. Another way to do that is with a calming tea, so I talk about passionflower tea and lavender tea in the book, just different alternatives for people to lean into to help with calming. Also green tea, one of my favorites. So, and then M is more Omega-3s. You know we know that Omega-3s help people wild-caught salmon or short-chain omegas and things like walnuts or flax seeds or chia seeds adoption is different, but you know just remember, we need those... We need more omegas and then the S is for spices and herbs, something we often overlook that can have powerful properties that can help calm the mind. So it's just a little cheat sheet to keep in mind when you're at the supermarket, or farmer's market, wherever you shop and then I go deeper and wider into more foods in the book.

SHAWN STEVENSON: I love this, so many things jumped out there, the one that jumped out the most though for me was the liquids...

DR. UMA NAIDOO: Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: You know, but then it becomes so logical, like what are the basic human needs.

DR. UMA NAIDOO: Yeah.

SHAWN STEVENSON: If you're not giving your body this input.

DR. UMA NAIDOO: Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: And you know your cells are dehydrated.

DR. UMA NAIDOO: Yeah.

SHAWN STEVENSON: And there's like a gauge in our brain as well, the hypothalamus...

DR. UMA NAIDOO: Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Right, this master gland integrating our endocrine system, our nervous system.

DR. UMA NAIDOO: Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: And it's monitoring your hydration levels.

DR. UMA NAIDOO: And that's an excellent point, Shawn, because one of my tricks when people are feeling super hungry when I'm working clinically with individuals, and they're like, well, you know, if I... And this often comes around when I'm trying to kind of work with people around how do you shop the supermarket so we develop this anti-anxiety shopping list. But often, you know, if you're going to the supermarket hungry and anxious, you're gonna make the wrong choices. I'm just, I don't think I need a research study to show that...

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yeah.

DR. UMA NAIDOO: But I think we've each experienced that.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yeah.

DR. UMA NAIDOO: So I'll say to my patients, you know, if you're leaving work or you're getting to the supermarket and you're feeling hungry, drink a cold, just drink a bottle of water, have a glass of water, a bottle of water, because of exactly the fact that those signals are often crossed in the brain. And so when we are hungry, we might actually be thirsty. And when you satiate that thirst, you think like, I can have dinner now and I'll be okay. I think it's a neat trick to know and very important. And it's something that we overlook because most people... I practice an integrated and holistic care model of care in nutritional psychiatry. So nutrition is the absolute pullet. It starts... It starts there, but your sleep is important. Your hydration is important. Your outdoor time, because of vitamin D is important. So all of this matters. And I just think it's... We have to pay attention to these small things and build up on them.

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

SHAWN STEVENSON: Neuroplasticity, the ability of the human brain to grow and adapt and evolve and really to unlock our superhuman capacity is driven by our experiences, our practices, our activities, but also our nutrition. Fascinating new research published in the journal Neuron found that magnesium, this key electrolyte, is able to restore critical brain plasticity and improve overall cognitive function. Again, neuroplasticity is the ability of our brain to change and adapt. Now this is one key electrolyte, but it works in tandem with other electrolytes like sodium. Sodium is critical for maintaining proper hydration of the human brain. If you didn't know this, the human brain is primarily made of water. We're talking somewhere in the ballpark of 75%, upwards of 80% water. It's so important because just a small decrease in our body's optimal hydration level, what's noted in the data, just a 2% decrease in our baseline hydration level can lead to dramatic cognitive decline.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Helping to sustain and maintain proper hydration levels in the brain, sodium is critical in that. And also, researchers at McGill University found that sodium functions as a quote, off-on switch for specific neurotransmitters that support our cognitive function and protect our brains from numerous degenerative diseases. Right now, the number one electrolyte company in the world is delivering a gift for new and returning customers. With each purchase of LMNT, that's LMNT, the number one electrolyte in the

market, no binders, no fillers, no artificial ingredients, no crazy sugar and sweeteners. My friend's son was just over at our house and my son, my oldest son Jordan, was training them, taking his teammates through some workouts and we opened the freezer and there's a bottle of Gatorade. There's a bottle of Gatorade in our freezer. And my wife's like, who's this? Cause we know we don't roll like that. We don't mess with the Gators, all right? We don't mess with the Gatorades. And we knew who it was, it was one of his friends. And he came in, he's like, well, at least this is the no sugar kind.

SHAWN STEVENSON: And then I go through some of the ingredients with him and I find those curve balls of like, here's where they're sneaking in these artificial ingredients and things that the human body has no association with. But you know, he's taking a step in the right direction by being in our environment. So you know what I did? I put the LMNT in his hand. All right, make sure that he's got the good stuff, the very best stuff. And also this is backed by peer reviewed data and a huge body of evidence. And we're talking about the folks at LMNT, that's LMNT. Go to drinklmnt.com forward slash model. And you're going to get a special gift pack with every purchase, whether you're a new or previous customer with LMNT. So again, this is a brand new opportunity, free gift pack with every purchase over at LMNT. Go to drinklmnt.com forward slash model. And now back to the show.

SHAWN STEVENSON: One of the other interesting things that you talk about in the book is leptin, right? And noting that leptin is a key link between our central nervous system and our metabolic processes.

DR. UMA NAIDOO: Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: You talk a little bit about that?

DR. UMA NAIDOO: Leptin is that hormone that helps us understand that we're satiated and we've eaten enough. And when we are... When our diet is offset by say the standard American diet and eating those types of foods, what might happen is we may develop leptin resistance over time. And disrupting leptin means that it can't do its job. So it actually can't tell you or tell us that we're full. So you might, you know, think, well, oh, hungry, I'll have some dinner.

And then you think, oh, you know that's not enough pasta. That's not enough, whatever you usually eat, you know, whatever your traditional dinner is and you need more food. That's something to start paying attention to because if it becomes, there might be just a day that you exercise more and you're just more hungry. There might also be something that you're noticing as a pattern in your life and it's time to pay attention to that. The interesting thing that I discovered in my research for this book is that the hotspots for anxiety in the brain are the amygdala and the hippocampus.

DR. UMA NAIDOO: But it turns out that metabolism is linked because it also originates and is driven by certain parts of the brain. So when we start to realize that if our metabolism is thrown off, one of the ways being developing leptin resistance or just eating poorly, so maybe setting up... Setting ourselves up for inflammation and the disruption of that hormone system, the more that that metabolism is out of whack, the more our anxiety can increase. I don't...

DR. UMA NAIDOO: I don't know that we have a study to prove this, but one of the things that happened in the pandemic is processed food sales increased remarkably in early 2020 when the pandemic started and increased. In fact, some food companies started to produce more things because of the need and other reasons, things like canned soups and other processed foods because there was an increased demand and that kind of continued through. Now, I think that we, like I said, we are beyond that now and we need to kind of figure out what is our way back to a healthier point, to a less anxious point, because all of that's been driven by many different things. But one of the things has been the food that we were consuming, including what our kids were consuming.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yeah, you know some of the decisions that we make under stress tend to get stuck.

DR. UMA NAIDOO: Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: And, you know, that's what we're dealing with right now. And a lot of abnormal behavior, responses, fear, stress...

DR. UMA NAIDOO: Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Anxiety, all these things, there are these long tail effects...

DR. UMA NAIDOO: Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Especially when it's like an emotionally driven thing...

DR. UMA NAIDOO: Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: You know into our psyche. And that part is, you know, one of the things that wasn't being addressed. It was kind of like all or nothing.

DR. UMA NAIDOO: Yeah.

SHAWN STEVENSON: One button is pushed down and we didn't approach this with some sustainability, thinking...

DR. UMA NAIDOO: Yeah.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Long term about human health. And, you know, of course, there's conversations for all aspects of this. Like we just need to mitigate.

DR. UMA NAIDOO: Yeah.

SHAWN STEVENSON: You know what is happening from a virus right now and not really think about all the other kinds of unwanted side effects or long lasting effects that we're not really looking at during times of stress. And so with that being said, having resources like this to recalibrate...

DR. UMA NAIDOO: Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Is obviously important. And right now, society at large is just not pointing at that. You know, we're looking at the next stressful event.

DR. UMA NAIDOO: Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: We're just kind of looped in because as you know, once our nervous system kind of gets trained a certain way, we're looking to feed it a certain way. And this is metaphorically and literally...

DR. UMA NAIDOO: And literally true.

SHAWN STEVENSON: You know and so with this being said, helping us, for example, like you mentioned the amygdala being a big source of this. And this is in some ways, you know more of a primitive part of our brain. It's more reactive, more emotional.

DR. UMA NAIDOO: Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: But what we don't often understand is that, you know we have this highly evolved prefrontal cortex.

DR. UMA NAIDOO: Yeah.

SHAWN STEVENSON: But it can... We can have an amygdala hijack take place pretty easily.

DR. UMA NAIDOO: Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: That part of our brain can just kind of take over.

DR. UMA NAIDOO: Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: And so some of those triggers are nutrient deficiencies, hunger.

DR. UMA NAIDOO: Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Right? We can start acting very differently.

DR. UMA NAIDOO: When we're hungry.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Aggressive, assertive.

DR. UMA NAIDOO: Yeah.

SHAWN STEVENSON: We got hangry in our lexicon now.

DR. UMA NAIDOO: Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: But this is serious. Like if we're looking at leptin.

DR. UMA NAIDOO: Yeah.

SHAWN STEVENSON: And the function of leptin, like actually feeling satiated so that we're not contributing to or exacerbating anxiety.

DR. UMA NAIDOO: This is exactly it. Exacerbating anxiety, setting ourselves up for, you know, insulin resistance and type two diabetes. It's all... It's kind of all circular, it's all interrelated. The other thing that I like that you said, Shawn, is that stress precipitates. We know that stress precipitates habit circuits in the brain. So when you are, you've had this prolonged period of stress and you continue to be stressed, that's why I feel like it's also more of this holistic approach. Because how can we manage our stress better? What can we do to step back from it? What can we do to cut through that stress cycle that we're in? Because what that is doing is you go buy fast food or you go buy something that's less healthy, but then your body wants more. And the more stressed you are, it just sets up this vicious cycle. So we do have to find a way to unpack that, understand it, but then intervene for ourselves, you

know, and help, get help from one another to say, hey, you know, probably shouldn't be eating that every night or whatever it is.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Can we talk about some things to look at nutritionally to support leptin?

DR. UMA NAIDOO: Yes. So some of the things to do are to, it's not necessarily a, it's not necessarily a huge surprise, but you want to move that diet towards the healthier norm of your whole foods. So if we were to talk about a nutritional psychiatry anti-anxiety plate, I want you to think about it as A, whole foods, B, largely those colorful vegetables and maybe some berries or, you know, some sort of side of fruit that you can enjoy, but a very large portion of your plate should be that way. Then I want you to think about, you know, a palm sized portion of a clean protein. For you that may be, you know, pasture raised chicken.

DR. UMA NAIDOO: For someone else it might be, you know, baked tofu, whatever it is, a good source of protein could be legumes, beans, lentils, all of that. Then I want you to think of your little serving of healthy fat. It can be from avocado, it can be from olive oil, nuts and seeds. And then I want you to think about a small portion of a healthy grain. One of my go-tos is now quinoa because it can be flavored up in a lot of different ways.

DR. UMA NAIDOO: I don't want you to have a ton of it. I want it to be on your plate because your gut microbes need it. And our, you know, society tends to go towards other grains which have a different glycemic load, different glycemic index, and they can impact our health differently. But I want it to be a portion of your plate. By simply doing these tweaks, you are tapping into a few things. You are fending off inflammation in your gut. You are almost eating an anti-inflammatory diet by having these whole foods.

DR. UMA NAIDOO: You are helping fend off that... Say you're on the way to developing some leptin resistance, you are fending that off because you are recalibrating your microbiome. You are recalibrating that in a way that's going to ultimately help your anxiety. And you, I think, paying attention to it becomes important. And then based on that plate, you can switch it up in many different ways, but I kind of want people to think about the ratios of

that. Whereas, things like the food pyramid and other iterations of a healthy eating plate don't quite capture that. And I feel like we need to reinvent that for ourselves, especially when dealing with conditions and in mental health.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yes. Obviously, again, this is a huge pillar because our tissues are made from food, the chemistry, our neurotransmitters, our hormones, all these things are made from food. So this is a top tier importance. But you've also shared throughout this conversation that it's more than the food as well. It's your environment, it's your exposure to sunlight and stress management, all these things. And you shared very openly in the book that you were struggling with your own metabolic health and your own mental health and a lot of people, especially in our society today, with your level of expertise and worrying about the judgment.

DR. UMA NAIDOO: Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: In what impacted you going through chemotherapy. And this impacts your metabolism. And you want to manage your own metabolic health and as I mentioned, your mental health and just feeling incongruent and struggling with that. And you shared that very openly in the book but people don't know your story. They don't know what you went through.

DR. UMA NAIDOO: Yes. Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: So can you talk a little bit about that?

DR. UMA NAIDOO: I'm happy to. Thanks for asking. I'm still honest in my life, in my career, in my own physical and mental health. I'm coming back from that, and it takes much longer than a number in a medical chart or an assessment by a doctor. And so for me, I really wanted to share with people that I come to it with a certain level of experience and honesty. When I say experience, I don't mean that I know it all. It's more that I've lived that. And at certain points I continue to because I'm not at that point that I want to be but I also believe it's a journey. And that is why I have not only hope, but I want to impart that to people. And I want to share that

we don't have to be perfect eaters, but we have to move towards that healthier direction.

DR. UMA NAIDOO: We can't avoid processed food. So for me, it was really about understanding the level of stress that I was carrying and not realizing. And one of the moments that that really changed for me was early on in putting parts of the book together, I had a medical checkup. One of my follow ups with my oncology team. And they kind of checked me out and did the exam and all of that. And at the end of it, I was kind of caught by surprise because they said, "Well, we love you. We want to see you, but we are going to graduate you." And I was like, "What are you talking about? Graduate me." But there's actually a process where you move from follow-up to the survivorship clinic. Right? Which is a big word in cancer care.

DR. UMA NAIDOO: And so I left feeling like a huge weight had been lifted that I didn't even know was there. And so just what it means is that in the future, the next follow-up was actually with a different team and they were focused on the lifestyle factors and helping you survive and thrive versus the acuteness of where your blood tests at, where's your exam at. All of that acute stuff. And it taught me an amazing thing about anxiety because I didn't realize the tension I was living with, because I had... I was functioning through it, I was writing books, I was doing all this stuff.

DR. UMA NAIDOO: And in some ways, maybe some of it was actions that were more robotic, that were divorced from my emotion and I had to catch myself. I really had to realize that integration. So I've learned the hard way, but it was a good lesson and it was a happy lesson. And I hope that people will be with me on this journey helping their own anxiety, because it is a journey. It doesn't happen overnight. But there's hope. I think we can help one another and move this conversation forward.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yeah. It's just for me, I think it's so important for us to stack conditions in our favor and also be very well aware that life is not going to go according to some linear, perfect plan.

DR. UMA NAIDOO: It isn't.

SHAWN STEVENSON: A lot of times our perfect plans, whatever that might be, there's all kinds of struggle and craziness and chaos that's qualifying us in a way for that life and it's just finding ways to grow to become stronger, resilient and carry on forward. And it's like this life is really a figuring out process for ourselves in our unique story. And you've been just such a light. Ever since you first came into this studio, into this room a couple of years ago, and actually, it was my house first is where you came the first time.

DR. UMA NAIDOO: Yes. Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: And just being able to have access to you and to your insights and we've had conversations besides the show, and it's just really special because all of this experience that you have and putting it together in a resource for us, and also sharing your own story, that's the part that a lot of so-called experts don't do. Like, do you really know what you're saying? Have you applied this...

DR. UMA NAIDOO: Have you lived it?

SHAWN STEVENSON: In practical life and found ways and found truths that apply not just on paper, but to our lives as human beings?

DR. UMA NAIDOO: Thank you. You've been a dear, extremely dear friend, Shawn, just in my own journey and my own learning as an author in this world. But it's so true. I thank you for saying that because I don't want to portray to the world that there's this perfect way to eat. It's not that. We're human. Life is to be enjoyed and finding that way forward is where the solutions lie. I wanted people to have an anti-anxiety grocery list because wherever you shop, you want to put those foods front and forward, because I had to do that myself. I had to reimagine my super-marketing. I had to reimagine things when I found that I was dealing with this metabolism in a different way, caused by other reasons. I never assume when someone is working on their anxiety or their anything in their life, any type of physical or mental problem. I never assume because I've learned the hard way what they may be going through. And so I just think it's important to have grace with one another, especially in food

and the nutrition space, because we are learning. We're all here to learn and share and help one another. It's not about you being right versus this method or that method or this food or that food. I think we have to get beyond that.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yeah. What you share is more so there are certain pillars. Right? And you share these in the book. Pillars for calming our minds. Let's talk a little bit about some of those.

DR. UMA NAIDOO: So I'm going to give you some of them. And so I have six pillars, and one of them we actually covered early on. It's something people sometimes overlook. Let's look at the foods, the anxiety producing foods that you want to... You may not realize the ketchup or the other things that we are eating that may be driving anxiety because of things like hidden ingredients like sugar. Another one is to be whole... Eat whole to be whole. And what that is, is that eat the orange, eat the apple, skip the juiced versions of them, meaning the store bought apple or orange juice has added sugar and no fiber in it. The more times that you can have a piece of salmon instead of a fish stick or a processed chicken nugget is going to be very different for that. And another one that I really want to bring forward is I developed a recipe called the "Calming kaleidoscope salad."

DR. UMA NAIDOO: Because in the book I talk about a lot of the bioactives and micronutrients that we overlook. We've touched on some of those today. But the salad is really, how do you put together that nutritional psychiatry plate, the... Enhance the biodiversity of your gut, enhance the fiber, the micronutrients, the polyphenols. And that's another pillar because I want people to kind of remember that's something they can go to all the time. And so I would love for people to check it out.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Alright. So those are a couple of the pillars that are featured in the new book. "Calm Your Mind With Food." And again, all six pillars are here. And this is basically a consolidation of things at the end of the book, after you learn about all these incredible foods and insights. But I want to ask you about one more of these pillars, which again, to hear from your perspective, these words is what I'm excited about. And one of the pillars is to find consistency and balance. Let's talk about that a little bit.

DR. UMA NAIDOO: So it's such a critical... It was so critical in my own journey and it was so critical in the journey of my patients. This is a marathon and not a sprint. You're not going to eat dark chocolate and a piece of Clementine tonight and lose your anxiety tomorrow. It's about replacing the, maybe the ice cream that you've been eating during the pandemic. Many people did that. It was a way to bring the family together and just enjoy something that felt comforting. Switch it out with banana ice cream from my first book. And you can even make a chocolate flavor. But most importantly, find a replacement for the things you love or a version of it. And still once in a while, enjoy that food because it's about the balance and consistency. We want this nutritional, psychiatry, anti-anxiety plan to calm your mind, to be sustainable, to help you, maybe lower doses of medication, maybe work with your doctor to come off medications over time.

DR. UMA NAIDOO: Or maybe you won't need the medication at all. Maybe you'll just stay the same with your medication, but still have lowered anxiety. These are powerful things. Food is powerful if you embrace it. But you need to just find a way to be consistent. Find the balance of what works for you, the foods you enjoy, the dietary pattern that appeals to you 'cause I'm not here to tell you eat this or not that, that is not my mentality because I respect people and the choices they make. And I feel like that's not my role. I can't tell you, Shawn, don't ever eat a certain food, but I can say, "Hey, could you get a healthier version of it? Could you source it from a different place? Could you maybe prepare it in an air fryer instead of this way?" For me, that's the best way I can guide you. And it's without judgment. Because I think when we get judgmental about food and we lose that consistency, we lose the balance. We start running after a certain food versus another and we lose ourselves. We get more anxious and we kind of lose the end game. So that's to me, why consistency and balance are the key.

SHAWN STEVENSON: "Calm your Mind with Food." Can you tell people where they can pick up a copy?

DR. UMA NAIDOO: Yes. You can go to my website, umanaidoomd.com, sign up for my newsletter where I give you tips every week. But you can also order the book there, but you can also support your local bookstore or your online retailer that you like. And you can find it

on my social media links at D-R-U-M-A-N-A-I-D-O-O. And I hope you'll check it out and let me know what you think.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Awesome. We'll put all the links to everything of course in the show notes. "Calm your Mind with Food." I appreciate you Dr. Uma Naidoo.

DR. UMA NAIDOO: Thank you so much, Shawn. So good to be here.

SHAWN STEVENSON: It's so amazing that food is now being utilized in major institutions. Dr. Uma Naidoo is working in conjunction with Harvard University in treating patients with food. And it's strange because this is going back to Hippocrates, the father of modern medicine who said, "Let food be thy medicine and medicine be thy food." But in our modern world, it's turned into looking at medicine through this very, very narrow lens. And in reality, food, we're talking about tons of metabolic inputs. We consume tons of food. It's a lot. And I'm not exaggerating. I mean, literally tons. In fact, right now, the average American consumes almost one ton of food annually. All right. It's a lot. Maybe, it's a bit much. But the point being that there are all of these epigenetic inputs coming in through the foods that we're choosing. Nutrigenomics and nutrigenetics are all bustling fields affirming how our diet choices are impacting our gene expression.

SHAWN STEVENSON: And we know that these foods that we're choosing are building our cells, our mitochondria, feeding our microbes, the trillions of bacteria cells that we're carrying around. This is controlling and determining the quality of our neurotransmitters and our hormones. There's really, when it comes to our health, food is so foundational. And so for somebody like Uma Naidoo to step up and to say, "The data is clear. Food is something powerful in helping patients to get well. And so it's really a cool time to be alive. But most importantly, we gotta support this work. So definitely check out her new book and again, we'll have everything linked for you in the show notes. We've got some amazing masterclasses, some world 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.

SHAWN STEVENSON: 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 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.