EPISODE 768

What's Causing Our Epidemic of Sleep & Health Problems?

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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. There are millions of people right now that are struggling to get a good night's sleep. On this episode, we're going to be diving in and talking about the science behind our society's sleep troubles. We're gonna be looking at the cultural shifts that have impacted our sleep. We're going to look at what's causing our mass sleep problems and also looking at some of the impacts that this is having on our mental health, our body composition, and so much more. Plus we're going to be talking about nutrition.

Related to improving our sleep quality, what foods and nutrients can help us to get a better night's sleep. And we're going to look at our culture around food as well. Why is it so much more difficult apparently to be healthier today, to be fit in our culture right now? Why does it seem to be more complicated?

So we're going to unpack all of that in this incredible. I had the tables turned on me and I was featured on one of the fastest growing shows in the world called Modern Wisdom. Now, Modern Wisdom is hosted by a brilliant guy named Chris Williamson. And not only does he have an incredible British accent, but also he asked some phenomenal questions and created an environment that was super cool to go to.

You know, he invited me to do the show and it was just an awesome experience hanging out with him and the Modern Wisdom team. And it was just an incredible experience hanging out with him and the Modern Wisdom team. And this conversation, there are so many insights is so powerful that I absolutely wanted to share this with everybody possible So I wanted to share it with you here today, right now.

And I think that you're going to absolutely love this. It's going to be informative. It's going to be inspirational. And also, this is hopefully going to help you to cultivate and prioritize better sleep. I want you to understand some of these impacts it's having on your health. And also, some of the practical things that we all can do to improve our sleep quality.

Sometimes. Instantly, but more so developing some healthy sleep related habits. It's one of the things that so many people can get a lot of benefit from. So be ready. We're going to go ahead and dive right into this conversation that I had on the new hit show, Modern Wisdom with Chris Williamson.

CHRIS WILLIAMSON: Andrew Heumann mentioned in an interview that I did with him recently. that the potential mental health epidemic that we're seeing at the moment could be downstream of poor circadian rhythm, dysregulated sleep, disrupted sleep. How much truth do you think's in that?

SHAWN STEVENSON: Ooh, circadian medicine is really top tier science right now. We're synced up with the 24 hour solar day. All of our hormone production, our neurotransmitters, we're synced up with what the universe is doing. And The funny thing is humans can kind of hide out from that interface, but our genes are really expecting us to be in constant communication with what's happening outside.

And humans are really interesting. We can create our own habitats. We're kind of like big hairless beavers, or many of us are hairless. Even when we're creating, it's still nature, because we're a part of nature, but we can essentially hide out and create a 24 hour day, artificially. And so, our circadian timing system is getting really screwed up.

So, absolutely, I agree with him. And here's the rub. Right now in the United States, estimated about 115 million Americans are regularly sleep deprived. To boot.

CHRIS WILLIAMSON: Out of 330.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yeah, so it's a sizable amount. And we're talking about on a regular basis, like essentially daily. And my big thing is always looking for what is the connective tissue?

Why should people really care about this? And I always like to tie it to metabolic health and how we look, right? And a really fascinating study was done, and this was actually published by the American Academy of Sleep Medicine. And they looked at people's biometrics. And use CT scans to look at their belly fat for five years, tracking a group of people.

And they found that people who were sleep deprived gained over twice as much belly fat in that five year period. And sleep deprived in this particular study was less than six hours a night. All right, so kind of, there's something about six as being that sweet spot. And by the way, There is no cookie cutter amount of sleep.

That's one of those things that, you know, we just kind of drink eight glasses of eight ounce water a day. Like, it's very superficial. Is that the same for Shaq? And for Simone Biles? It's going to be different. And the same thing holds true with sleep. It's not just the number of hours, it's the quality of those hours.

It's a lot like the calorie conversation. You know, yes, calories matter, but the quality of those calories definitely matter. And I've been a big proponent in pushing into popular culture, this term epicaloric controller recently, which we can circle back to and talk about. But in particular with sleep, I want to share one other piece too, because especially.

Right now in this energy equation and how important this is and some of your friends and colleagues as well. Like Dr. Gabrielle Lyon, a really good friend of mine. We're looking at how important testosterone is not just for maintaining our muscle mass and our energy but for longevity. This is critical for men and women is finally really shifting gears to be all encompassing of humanity how important testosterone is Now listen to this, this was published in 2011 in JAMA, the Journal of the American Medical Association, top tier medical journal here in the United States, and they tracked young men, average age about 24, alright, and they brought them into the lab and they put them in, it's a ward study, so they sleep deprived them for just one week.

Alright, so they basically got five hours of sleep for one week. That one week period, their testosterone dropped 15%, alright. Now that might not sound like a lot, but suddenly, that's as if they're 10 to 15 years older as far as their testosterone production is concerned. This is the power of sleep.

Testosterone is Right next to HGH, our most sleep duration dependent hormone, it's kind of like you're a human Tesla jacking into your charging station at night and filling up the testosterone. There are things we can get little spikes during the day, but basically when we get up, testosterone is just going down. And when we go to sleep, it starts rising again.

CHRIS WILLIAMSON: So, if you are not performing in the bedroom or in the gym in the way that you want, it might be because of how much sleep you're getting on a night time.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Absolutely. And it's always the first thing to go, unfortunately, you know, and it's just part of our culture, but fortunately, things are changing, you know, this has become a big part of our popular conversation, especially in health circles, and it tends to trickle its way out to the larger culture scape eventually.

But, you know, my first book came out in 2015, I believe, and it was the first sleep wellness related book to become an international bestseller. It had never been done before. It's just like the public wasn't necessarily interested in that topic. I argue against that. It wasn't that we're not interested in it.

We didn't know how much it mattered and it wasn't framed in a way that made sense. And that's kind of my story of going to a conventional university and having biology and having kinesiology and nutritional science, but really not understanding how that is applicable to me as a human being. Right. So when we're.

in biology and we're looking at the human cell. My professor did not know, nor had they made that revelation, nor did any of the students, that as we're looking at the mitochondria, that mitochondria is made from our meals. As we're looking at the cell nucleus, that's made from the nutrients that we eat.

As we're looking at the cell membrane, it's made from our menu. All of the things we're looking at. It's made from food and that interface between our diet, our sleep, our movement, all of these things are impacting the cells that we're actually building right down to the level of the genes. And for probably about 10 years now, I've been really keeping my finger on the pulse of something called nutrigenetics and nutrigenomics.

So these are fields of science looking at how our nutrition is impacting our genetic expression. And one of my mentors. incredible, incredible thinker, uh, pioneer in epigenetics, Dr. Bruce Lipton. He's a cell biologist and he really impressed that the term epigenetics into popular culture. He's the guy. And one of our early conversations, he was sharing with me that, you know, when they did the human genome project, we just knew there was going to be like a million different genes for humans, right?

Because there, there's bananas that have more genes than us. There's corn that has more genes than us. They found about 25, 000 genes. And the question was, how are we so diverse? How do we look so different? How are personalities so different? Are different levels of health and functionality? All these different things.

What's so remarkable about us, that he highlighted for me, is that, with one epigenetic influence, like a bite of food, it can change genes, because in school we were taught, DNA to RNA to protein. So, eventually we're printing out proteins. One bite of food can change what proteins are getting printed out to the variety of about 3, 000 different options of what type of proteins are getting printed.

So basically copies of you that are getting printed out. 3, 000 options with one gene. So that's the power of food, it's the power of sleep. These are the top tier things to pay attention to, but we tend to run out, let me get that new supplement, let me get that, you know, whatever, we're looking for all these external, you know, inputs. But, truly, for my money, that's it. I'm

putting it on optimizing your sleep first and foremost. And then let's work on the other stuff so you can be a badass while you're awake.

CHRIS WILLIAMSON: Yeah, the performance enhancer that you're looking for is not in a supplement store, but it's at your bedtime and your wake time.

What, uh, what is it that's causing this mass dysregulation? Like, I can throw bro science out there and guess what I think is going on, but is there any longitudinal research looking at the average amount of time that people used to spend asleep, do now, quality of sleep, micro awakenings, REM, deep, etc. What are we looking at kind of across time with regards to sleep over the last 50 years?

SHAWN STEVENSON: Ooh, such a good question. So as you know, things have changed dramatically in the last about 50 years. And one thing to kind of transition into that, and part of the reason that My first book, Sleep Smarter, was so successful is that I understood the missing link between all this incredible insight and all the science we've gained the past 50 years and making it applicable for people, which is we need to make this simple because it is.

And so coming from a conventional education, I started off my career, I've been in the field for 21 years now, speaking in the language of academia, and a little not so fun fact is that it takes, upwards of about 15 years for us to have like a gold standard, randomized, placebo controlled, double blind study, all the things that might affirm, you know, what we're talking about today with improving your sleep quality before it gets like put into conventional education.

All right. It's a huge lag. And this is in the age of the internet. All right. It doesn't make any sense. And so what I did was. Because of working with people, which is very different than just, again, working from theory, which that can be true, but it's different when you sit face to face with somebody, and they're depending on you to help them to get where they want to be.

And I knew this really interesting secret about humans, which is We want change. We want change. We want the results, but we don't want to change much to get it. And, okay, I'm gonna say that again. We want change, but we don't want to change that much. We might not be happy with where we are or who we are, but we're comfortable with that.

And so changing too much at once creates so much turbulence. And so we really, what we would ideally want is to take who we are now and give us the new body. Take this person, give me the money, right? I don't have to qualify myself to have it. And so knowing that this is the case, I started looking for what are the lowest hanging fruits, right?

What are the things people can do to optimize their sleep quality without having to turn their life upside down? And so I was looking for things that were science backed, but very simple. Now saying all this to transition this, this into this question. In the last 50 years, we've seen the onset of hustle culture, right?

There's always, throughout humanity, there's always been a certain guild of people who are, quote, burning their midnight oil and looking out and, you know, standing guard for our tribe and whatnot. But that's a small sect of humans. For the most part, nighttime, danger. We don't see like other animals do, like that lion can see you at night.

You can't necessarily see it. We're not really hardwired for nocturnal activity. With that being the case. Optimizing what we're doing during the day is going to help us to actually sleep better at night, and that's really the key. So, one of my tenets is that a good night of sleep starts the moment that you wake up in the morning.

And understanding we've kind of devolved from our state of seeking shelter, seeking comfort at night, in a safe place, and waiting for the sun to rise, basically, so that things are safer. Now we've created this situation where we can basically, like I mentioned earlier, create a 24 hour artificial day and we can just be up whenever.

So this is a new opportunity for us as people. Yes, there were people back in the day they got, they had a lot of candles, you know, but it's still very different. We evolved even with fire for quite some time. And that candle light, here's a really interesting study. And this also points to like one of the things that we can do to improve our sleep quality.

Some researchers at Cornell took a test subject and put them in a completely dark room, all right? They wanted to track their actual sleep quality. So they were looking at their brainwaves, they were looking at what their brain was doing. And they put a light the size of a quarter behind their knee. And that wasn't enough to throw them out of their sleep cycles. So it was disrupting their sleep quality just by that light exposure behind their knee.

CHRIS WILLIAMSON: Is there something special, photoreceptor modulation behind the knee? Or is this the same as if you did it on the palm of my hand or the back of my shoulder?

SHAWN STEVENSON: It could be pretty much anywhere because our skin from head to toe has photoreceptors that pick up light and send signals to every other cell in our bodies.

CHRIS WILLIAMSON: Because this particular subject was so deprived of any light, the very small amount of light was, we have no signal. Oh, we do have a signal and it's behind the knee and we will follow that based on, and we will then run the circadian clock off that.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Because all of our other cells are trying to figure out, what time is it? Right? There's this light coming in.

CHRIS WILLIAMSON: The knee knows. (laughter)

SHAWN STEVENSON: Knee see. Yeah, yeah. All right. I knew a girl named Knee see. So here's the thing. When we understand this really remarkable influence, if you talk even with, you know, Andrew Huberman in our conversation, really talking about this advent, this new term called light pollution, and How light is top tier as far as really syncing up our, ourselves, our biology with all of life, right? I mentioned that we're kind of lined up with a 24 hour solar day. And so it's light is really the kind of tip of the spear. And so using that to our advantage, recently, because we simply didn't know, we just started Consuming, you know, like there's a lot, we're in the golden age of television, there's a lot of great stuff to watch, we got our devices, and, you know, we got FOMO. There's also, there's so much going on, we don't want to miss out, and so we're constantly having this influx of light information, and it's completely throwing our clocks off. I know it, when I'm in the studio, for example, all day, under artificial lights. I can have, I see a noticeable detriment to my sleep quality that night. It is just, it is what it is. And I do, but now of course, I know little things that I can kind of help to optimize this. And so pointing to a tip, like what is one, what are one of the things that we could do knowing that our skin, and by the way, let me give a very logical example.

When the sun is hitting your skin, it can literally change the color of your skin. All right. You have photoreceptors that are picking up light. All the time. All right. And the sun is very different though. The lux, the, the, the power of that light is so otherworldly, it is such a special thing, man. Like, it's like, that's how we have life here.

And now we, of course, in our culture, we've been sort of programmed more so to fear the sun. Right. And so we need to have a more balanced perspective, but at the same time, of course, respect it. It's very powerful. With that being said, it's not moonlight that disrupts in the same way that artificial lights do.

Which the moon can seem kind of bright, like it's a bright moon, but it's the luxe of that light, the way that it's, the way that that light is emanating, we evolved with that as well. It's like cellular data that makes sense, like it's nighttime.

CHRIS WILLIAMSON: Andrew Said that firelight doesn't disrupt circadian rhythm.

SHAWN STEVENSON: There it is very simple. And so if we look at what we have had thousands upon thousands of years next to as far as a light that we create, well, not that we created, but we can generate with fire. That is a different hue, right? It's kind of this orangish reddish, like it's a, it's a softer tone of light.

And so if we Do want to have some form of light in a room, maybe like a, a good salt lamp or something on a low dimmer for night light versus the bright a** , like the nightlight that my grandmother gave me, you know? So here's my point. One of the best ways, and the first way that I noticeably improved my sleep quality, and it was one of those launching pads to writing the book in the first place, is when I got some blackout curtains for my room.

All right. Total darkness. Never really slept in total darkness before, except when I was at like, if I go to travel to speak at an event and they had like a really nice hotel room and the blackout curtains, I was like, man, this, this, and I would attribute it to the place, like this place is great, but it's the sleep quality that happened in that environment.

And so I got some blackout curtains and that night, man, my sleep was phenomenal. And so. If you are okay with the dark, which most of us are, but of course some people have, you know, some neuro associations where they want to have, you know, maybe a little bit of light. That is one of the fastest ways to improve your sleep quality because melatonin requires basically two prerequisites.

One is darkness. And the other is kind of a cyclical nature, right? Being able to be produced at the same time, essentially, closely, day to day. This is why we have this new term of social jet lag as well, where, you know, again, we kind of stick to a routine, but on the weekend, everything is like whatever.

And then we have that lag on Monday. You know, I got a case of the Mondays. It's not the fact that we're going back to work, it's that man, my, my whole sh is thrown off and I'm sleep deprived now.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Got a quick break coming up, we'll be right back. Our microbiome plays a huge role in the health of our immune system, brain health, metabolic health, and so much more. And there's one beverage that has been proven to support the health of our microbiome. A recent study published in the peer reviewed journal Nature Communications uncovered that a unique compound called thea brownin found in traditional fermented teas called pu erh has some remarkable effects on our microbiome.

The researchers found that thea brownin can positively alter Our gut microbiota and directly lead to a reduction in something called lipogenesis or the creation of new fat. Another study published in the journal of agriculture and food chemistry found that pu erh may be able to reverse gut dysbiosis by dramatically reducing ratios of potentially harmful bacteria and increasing ratios of beneficial bacteria.

What's so remarkable about pu erh is its concentration. of polyphenols that are incredibly important for healthy gut flora. The only pu erh that I drink is a fermented pu erh that's wild harvested, making it even more concentrated polyphenols. And it's also triple toxin screened for one of the highest levels of purity.

Not many folks realize that a lot of conventional teas, even organic teas contain things like heavy metals and toxic molds. This is the only company that is going above and beyond to make sure that this is the highest quality tea available. And I'm talking about the folks at Pique Life. Go to PiqueLife . com/ model. That's P I Q U E L I F E. com forward slash model and use the code model at checkout and you're going to receive up to 15 percent off Free us shipping and you can even get a free sample pack of 12 teas Along with their wonderful pu erh bundles. You're going to get access to over 20 delicious award-winning flavors .And of course they're amazing Pu erh and Pu erh blends go to PiqueLife. com/ model. Again, that's P I Q U E L I F E. com forward slash model. Use the code model at checkout for up to 15 percent off. Plus many other bonuses. And now back to the show,

CHRIS WILLIAMSON: Beyond light pollution, which I think everybody can kind of see 50 years, uh, you know, go back a hundred years. I don't even think that you would've had, uh, lights within the home be widely available.

Adventive radio, which is stimulation, but no, no light TV devices, blue screens. Tons and tons of screen time. What else have been the biggest changes? I mean, you mentioned even sort of cultural impacts, like the desire to hustle and grind. Um, What else do you think have been the biggest movers and changes, aside from light pollution, over the last 50 years?

SHAWN STEVENSON: Such a great question. You said the key word. You said the C word.

CHRIS WILLIAMSON: Culture.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Culture. Exactly. Let's define culture. Culture is defined as the shared attitudes, values, beliefs, and behaviors of a group of people passed from one generation to the next. Alright? Culture is functioning as an invisible hand that's guiding our decisions.

Here in the United States, we have aspirations of freedom. We believe that we are totally free. But our freedom is based on the choices that we've been exposed to in our culture. There are certain choices that we don't even know exist.

CHRIS WILLIAMSON: You're free within the constraints of what you're aware of.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Exactly. Because even Our cravings are cultural. The food that we crave is cultural. It's based on the things that we've been exposed to. There are people in other cultures who crave different things because that is what has been impressed upon them is human food. Like, there are folks in Cambodia that will gladly eat a deep fried tarantula. And it's real talk. You know, it's a real thing. Delicacy. Have you had it before?

CHRIS WILLIAMSON: No. Have you?

SHAWN STEVENSON: No, I haven't. No. But apparently it tastes good, all right? There are folks in Iceland eating fermented shark, you know. There's folks in Kenya eating Yama Choma, barbecue goat meat, all right? The list goes on and on.

Some of these things might seem very strange to us, because here in our culture, and you ask what another one of these big changes are, according to the BMJ, And we're talking top, top tier, peer reviewed journal. Approximately 60 percent of the average American adult's diet is now made of ultra processed foods.

Alright? Humans have been processing foods forever, for thousands of years. Cooking a food is processing the food. Whether it's cooking a steak, baking a sweet potato, taking an olive's impression, pressing the oil out. That's all processing. But those are minimally processed. They're not denatured so much that you can still Tell where they come from.

They still have an essence of something real. Ultra processed foods, on the other hand, is when you see a field of wheat. And somehow, someway, that becomes fucking Pop Tarts. You see that field of wheat, and it becomes frosted flakes. Right? It's like, where If I was to present that box of Pop Tarts, or those frosted flakes, to someone living in Cambodia, or like a rice patty in Thailand, and just like, where did this come from?

They're not gonna have any clue at all. Because it's like, it's not real. That doesn't come from anything real. And so not to mention, The processing that it takes, yes, but let's not forget about all of these newly invented synthetic ingredients that are added along the way.

CHRIS WILLIAMSON: How's this impact our sleep?

SHAWN STEVENSON: Oh, such a good question. This is such a good question. So there's two really interesting things that is coming out in the data. So one part is what we're not getting, all right. There are certain, you can have a good sleep in darkness. You can have the most fancy pants mattress.

CHRIS WILLIAMSON: I do, I do.

SHAWN STEVENSON: You can check all the boxes for all the things. Yep. But if you're deficient in the key nutrients that build your sleep related hormones and neurotransmitters, you are still going to have disrupted sleep quality. If you don't have the stuff that literally builds the stuff that makes the magic happen, you're gonna have problems. And I saw this again and again and again, working with real people in the real world.

Just for example, vitamin C. So, A lot of folks, of course, we know about vitamin C free immune system, all right? Now, that is putting vitamin C in a very pithy box. It's responsible for so many things. For our skin health, it's a big contributor for our skin health, but it is a huge contributor to our sleep quality.

And one study was published in PLOS One, Public Library of Science One, and they uncovered that folks with a vitamin C deficiency were more prone to disrupted sleep. They didn't have problems falling asleep, but they had problems staying asleep. And so knowing this, what we tend to do is like, I want to make sure that I'm getting my vitamin C in and we get a vitamin C supplement.

I went to a conventional university. I had the big auditorium, nutritional science class. I paid for this sh*t . I paid for this miseducation. I'm about to tell you in that class, we were taught. Very rudimentary things, and first and foremost, based on the food pyramid, all right? So I went to college in the late 90s, all right?

That's when I first went to college. And within this, they said, you know, my teacher would be like, get the hallmark of the diet, 7 to 11 servings of healthy whole grains. And make sure also that you recommend for yourself and patients, if you work with people, to take a multivitamin to get all your vitamins and minerals.

And so I was taught that vitamin C is one thing. And I can just get it from this multivitamin. Of course, there's vitamin C in foods as well. What we were not taught and what most people,

unfortunately, have not realized, and that's changing today in this conversation, is that there isn't just one form of vitamin C.

There are multiple forms of vitamin C. There are multiple forms of B12. Multiple forms of vitamin D. The list goes on and on. Multiple forms. And we're still. We just know maybe like 5 percent of what's in food now. There's so much we don't know. So the question is, are you getting the vitamin C that is actually usable by your cells?

Now, here's where this gets a little bit, uh, sticky. So looking for that vitamin C to support our immune system, our sleep quality, a lot of times we'll grab those little packets, you know, those little energy, emergency, whatever. And we don't realize that Over 90 percent of the vitamin C products sold in the United States are made from genetically modified cornstarch and corn syrup.

It's ultra processed in every sense of the word and one of the studies that I actually share in my new book, the Eat Smarter Family Cookbook, looked at what happens when we're taking real whole food based vitamin C versus synthetic. And this was published in the Journal of Cardiology. And so what they did was, They took people who were doing a behavior that would cause a lot of inflammation and oxidative stress, namely smoking, shout out to Smoking Mark, alright, namely smoking, alright, and so they take these test subjects and they give them A concentrate of vitamin C in a form of this, really, I, I, superfood has been really drugged through the mud, alright, truly.

This is the most vitamin C dense food ever discovered. So, if anything's gonna fit in this category, it's camu camu berry. C A M U C A M U. So they used a whole food based concentrate of camu camu or a conventional vitamin C synthetic supplement. So they're continuing their behavior, they're checking their biomarkers, they track their data for a week.

They found that when the test subjects took the real whole food based vitamin C, they had a significant reduction in inflammatory biomarkers. You know, things like C reactive protein, oxidative stress, and there were no changes. with the synthetic run of the mill vitamin C supplement. It didn't impact them at all.

And as a matter of fact, that synthetic form of vitamin C, and this is another study that I mentioned in the book as well, doubles the incidence of developing kidney stones. Alright? The question is, Can my cells relate to this nutrient? Is it real? Is it recognizable? Just because the chemistry is the same does not mean that they are the same in the human body.

We evolved interacting with food chemistry, but today we have all of these isolated synthetic versions of things and it simply doesn't function the same way.

CHRIS WILLIAMSON: I think a lot of people are pretty well aware, or at least they've got an idea they're supposed to have a morning routine, right? Whether it's the 15 minutes of sunlight in the eyes and the cold plunge and the grounding and the meditation and the breath work and all that sort of stuff.

Far fewer people have a cool down sequence at the end of the day, an evening time routine. If you were to give the big movers for somebody who just spends a typical amount of time doing typical things, some time on their phone, some time on their screen, exercise an adequate amount, but it's not insane.

They're not professional athletes. What would you say? When do you begin getting ready for bed, for sleep time? What are the do's and what are the don'ts? And how big is this territory of time leading up to bed? What would you, how would you prescribe someone's pre sleep ritual?

SHAWN STEVENSON: Ooh, we could get the sexiest, juiciest sleep of our lives if we follow what I'm about to share. It starts with dinner. It starts with dinner. That evening routine, because the dinner table is potentially the most powerful down regulator of that kind of sympathetic fight or flight nervous system. And this is based on some of the strongest science that we have, period. I'll share two quick studies. One of them was a colleague of mine, Dr. Robert Waldinger, we had a fascinating

CHRIS WILLIAMSON: He's been on the show.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Okay, Robert Waldinger, there you go. He is the director of the longest running longitudinal human study on longevity. And their data indicates that beyond beating obesity, beyond exercise, Great diet, all the things, and these things matter. The number one determinant on how long we're going to live is the quality of our relationships. Couple that with a new study that I highlighted in the Eat Smarter, Family Cookbook, conducted by researchers at Brigham Young University. This was a meta-analysis of 148 studies, 300, 000 people, and they found that our relationships led to having healthy relationships, or what they called healthy social bonds, led to a 50 percent reduction in all cause mortality.

So that means a 50 percent reduction in death from Everything, you know, prematurely. And so there's something special about human interaction and relationships. And what it really is, just a sidebar, is that our relationships, more than anything, influence what we eat. It

influences our sleep habits. It influences our exercise habits, how we relate to ourselves, how we think about ourselves, how we feel, our emotional stability.

It's the tip of the spear. And so here's how all of this ties together around the dinner table. The dinner table really functions as a unifier to bring people together. This is something we evolved doing into the evening, even in tribal constructs. And if anybody's been to Hawaii, for example, they do this kind of dramatization of a luau, right?

CHRIS WILLIAMSON: They don't like geeky beach, I've seen the exact thing.

SHAWN STEVENSON: There you go, like we did this hunt, we got this food, you know, we're all dining together, we're telling stories. That's really how human history was passed along before the advent of books. And we're celebrating, right? Through our evolution, we hunted, gathered together, procured our food together, prepared the food, ate together, and celebrated together.

That was the time of human bonding. It's deeply ingrained in our DNA. We expect that, our genes expect us to do this. And so this is where dinner is the first domino because when we're eating with people that we care about, friends and families as well, family and friends are included, there's this really remarkable switching over from the sympathetic fight or flight to the parasympathetic nervous system.

That's what the data is indicating, which is so exciting. One of the reasons is we start to produce more oxytocin, right? And so oxytocin. It's got a couple of nicknames, Cuddle Hormone, Love Hormone, but why it really matters in this context is that it's been found to neutralize cortisol. So to help us to downregulate and we're very good We're very, very good at going zero to a hundred.

Alright, real quick, shout out to Drake. But we're not very good at going a hundred to zero. At all. Being with people that we love does something for our nervous systems to help us to down regulate faster than anything. So take advantage of that. And how does this play out in the data? Do I have any data to affirm this?

You know I do. Alright, so, really quickly, I'm gonna rattle these off. Researchers at Harvard tracked human eating behavior, family eating behavior, and food intake, all right, for years! And when I found this data, I was like, why doesn't anybody know this? And so they found that people who eat together with their family on a regular basis have dramatically higher intake of real, whole, unprocessed foods, and by nature, Significantly higher intake of vital nutrients that prevent chronic diseases and help us sleep better, by the way.

And those family members consumed significantly less ultra processed foods, namely chips and soda. What about for kids? Published in the journal Pediatrics, they found that eating with our children, just three meals per week, or more, but three is that effect, minimum effective dose, which I'm a big fan of, knowing that we want change, but we don't want to change that much.

Eating with our kids three times a week led to dramatically reduce incidence of those children developing obesity and eating disorders. What about for us as adults? Tech workers at IBM were tracked, looking at their family eating behavior around dinner, being able to quote, make it home for dinner.

Regardless of how much stress they were experiencing at work, if they were able to consistently eat dinner with their families, their stress remained negligible. It was manageable. It was neutralized. Work morale and productivity stayed high. Stress stayed manageable. But as soon as things started cutting into their ability to eat dinner with their families, Stress levels went up exceedingly high, work morale went down, productivity goes down.

Alright, there's something special about eating together with, with people that you care about. I mentioned oxytocin, I mentioned the switch over to the parasympathetic. Here's the key word tying all this together. The nickname of the parasympathetic nervous system is rest, rest and digest. Do you hear me?

That is, that's the nickname of this part of the nervous system. And this is a binary system. It's either this or that. It's on or off. You're either sympathetic, parasympathetic. And so switching over, being with people that we care about, especially under the context of good food. It is incredibly special.

Last part here is the psychological benefits to be able to help to offload and downregulate. When you are feeling seen, we have a deep human need for significance and being able to see your child or your loved one and for them to feel like they matter versus, you know, what we're doing now is this, because not only did we devolve from tribes to neighborhoods Well, we start to get more separate, but when neighborhoods were The advent of that, we still had extended family in close proximity.

Then we started to get isolated to our nuclear family only. And then in just in the last couple of decades, as we. Leaned into this whole conversation. We've become even more divided within our own household because of our devices. Our devices have divided us. And, not to

villainize these things, of course, but we need to keep them in context. We need real FaceTime with real people.

CHRIS WILLIAMSON: When it comes to timing here, I remember, and it's something that I follow just because it's easy to remember, a 3 2 1 rule for sleep. Three hours before sleeping, no more food. Two hours before eating, try and limit fluids. And then one hour before, uh, two hours before sleeping, try and limit fluids.

One hour before sleeping, uh, try and limit light. When it comes to us going from eating on an evening time, have you got a rough that you try to follow between food time and sleep time and then let's continue this sexiest night of sleep of your life protocol all the way up to getting into bed.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yeah, that's a great question. So, um, this is going to be situationally dependent. It's going to be unique because there are some folks and now we have the advent of like, you know, continuous glucose monitors where you could track this. If I eat Too far out from dinner for myself, I noticed that my blood sugar goes significantly low at night and it can pull me out of sleep.

Alright, so, and I'm talking about like more than five hours before sleep, which doesn't seem, that's not a lot of time. And so for me, it's like finishing my last bite of food, maybe. Two to three hours before I go to bed is ideal for me personally. Now I've done all kinds of stuff. Again, 21 years being at this level, I've experimented a lot.

So I've done all kinds of fasts. I've done 21 days. I've done all kinds of stuff. I don't want anybody to have to go through. I found it. I found my way to sleep. You like your body will sort stuff out, but you got to find what's optimal for you. All right. So in the transition into this from the dinner table where, where we left off, and by the way, all of those studies are featured in the new Eastmarter family cookbook.

There's over 250 scientific references in a cookbook, which has never been done. But then also we talk about what are we eating so that we can get those good sleep nutrients in. And I'll just throw this out here really quickly. There's, well, I'll share two really quickly. One of them, dark cherries, all right, there, there are a couple of studies looking at cherry juice.

as an implement for improving sleep quality, but the sugar can be a little bit, you know, that can be sketchy. A couple of the studies I share in the book, first of all, cherries are one of the most dense sources of naturally occurring melatonin of any food. Cherries are, dark cherries in particular, pretty rich in melatonin.

On top of that, One of the studies looked at the anthocyanins in these cherries and found that they have the potential to shrink fat cells. And so it's cool. Like you found this stuff and I put my emojis next to every kind of benefit. So for the metabolic health, fat loss is like a little muscle emoji.

There's a sleep emoji there. Then you go back to the associated food. Like, okay, what do I do to eat this food? And we've got like a couple of, you know, cool recipes. One of them is a Cherry frozen yogurt pop that you can have after dinner. Um, my kids love it and they're fun. It's like fun stuff to make too.

And they're very simple. That's another thing about this is making it easy as well. I don't want a recipe that's got 37 ingredients. Like let's just make this simple, delicious, and there you go. But another food, which is really a great kind of nighttime routine. And there are many, and you don't want to necessarily eat this.

Dish every night. But salmon is really something special when it comes to improving and supporting sleep quality. Salmon's got a moment in the sun right now, for sure. A lot of people are aware of some of the benefits. But those omega 3s are one of those things where a deficiency in omega 3s is clinically shown to disrupt our sleep cycles.

All right? So it's not just this like, Oh, it's good for your brain. No, no, no. Like seriously, your brain needs these omega 3s. They're responsible for Creating structural fats in the body, not as energy, but like to build, rebuild and support your brain cells so they can talk to each other. It's kind of important.

And one of the studies used fMRIs and tracked people's, like actually looked at their brains. Which is again, instead of guessing. And they found that people who ate less than 4 grams of DHA and EPA, these are animal based omega 3s, 4 grams or less had the highest rate of brain shrinkage. 4 grams is that minimum effective dose and you can get that in a high quality wild caught 8 ounce.

Peace of salmon and every we've all had nice salmon filet. That's great. I've got a honey sriracha salmon in the book, which is great. But what about a salmon burger? All right, so that's probably one of my favorite foods right now are these salmon burgers, but like turning these great Um, sleep supporting foods, having delicious food experiences, have all the dinner table benefits.

And now we transition into the next thing. And so again, this is going to, I'm going to say generally two to four hours before bed to finish your last meal, ideally for most people, but

they're going, there's going to be outliers. All right. So now what do we do? Do we get off? Do we finish dinner? Let's say the goal is to go to bed at 10 PM, just in this context.

And I finished dinner at seven 30. Alright, now do I want to go and jump right back on my screen, watch a show, whatever? I could, that could be part of my brain's reward, like I watched 30 minutes of a favorite show. Right? Or I go and game with my son, play 2K, and bust his a** . He's pretty good too. Right after, again, creating that post meal reward for sitting down and eating together, right?

But now you might want to pop on some blue light blocking glasses. You know, you might want to do that.

CHRIS WILLIAMSON: So, It's starting to think about light pollution three hours before bed?

SHAWN STEVENSON: Depends on the person. I just, that's why I put the word might.

CHRIS WILLIAMSON: Just rough hewn heuristic, around about three hours before bed, start thinking about the light you're expected to.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yes, exactly. Start thinking about it. At least. And then, from there, you know, again, if we're popping back on, whatever, for me, I'll just tell you what it is from my kind of light curfew, which is one hour. It is. And I've, I might be the person who's Impress that in popular culture, because again, I wrote about this almost 10 years ago, um, at least, that's the, that's the minimum for me, ideally 90 minutes to two hours, ideally.

CHRIS WILLIAMSON: I think a lot of people would have a question of, okay, especially now, right, we're approaching winter, you guys are losing daylight savings, that's just, that's getting axed, uh, evening times get dark. Pretty early. And the more northerly you get, I'm from Newcastle in the Northeast of the UK, which is the last city before Scotland.

So around December, mid December time, it can be. sunset at 4pm, right? So it's really dark all the time. It's not sunrise until after 8. So it's a very, very, very short amount of time. How am I supposed to exist? I don't want to bump into things, right? I've got fear. I'm also this, let's be real here.

I don't want to be bored. I don't want to be bored for the last 90 minutes of every single day. If I want to Uh, I, you saying it's probably a bad idea for me to watch a screen, but if I read a book, I need a light to light the book, is an e reader going to disrupt my circadian rhythm? Can I use my Kindle?

What if it's on warm? Like, What can people do to actually enjoy the last two hours of their day if they also need to be conscious of the light pollution?

SHAWN STEVENSON: I love this. This is what really I think is made my teaching of this information more relatable and doable is because we've got to, we've got to put the neurotic behavior to the side. All right. And we all, especially when we're working to get healthy and to achieve certain things, we do go through a phase. I think everybody does of being neurotic about these things. We've got to chill. We live in the modern world and there's stuff, there's stuff going on. And there are certain things that can help us enjoy that stuff even more if we feel better.

And so if we can create an evening routine, For the majority of the time that works for us, where we still can do some of our favorite things, because that's what life is all about as well. We've gotta get that juice.

CHRIS WILLIAMSON: Well, yeah, what's the point in optimizing your sleep if you sacrifice the enjoyment of your spare time in order to get it?

Like, what's the point of getting good sleep? Presumably so that you enjoy life. And if you sacrifice the enjoyment of life to sleep well in the hopes that sleeping well will give you an enjoyment of life, like, you're shortcutting everything.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Exactly. You just said it perfectly, you know, so we've got to come into this with some balance, with a balanced perspective, and give ourselves some grace, and some wiggle room, and some enjoyment. And if we can do little things, like again, throwing on some blue light, blackened glasses, we do have any brands that you prefer? I don't want to throw brands out.

CHRIS WILLIAMSON: Okay, well Raw Optics, Matt Maruca from Raw Optics.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Boom!

CHRIS WILLIAMSON: I like Raw Optics. I know that he's done an awful lot of research. They're not cheap, but it seems like a lot of the blue blocking glasses that are cheap, that don't have a very heavily colored lens, if you can still see all of the normal colors with a little bit of a blue tinge, that's not really doing very much.

According to him, you need to be, it needs to be like, offensively Colored, and you can get them in yellow or red, and I noticed anecdotally, if I put them on, and I know this is the same

with some of my other friends, any high quality blue blocking glasses, after about 30 minutes, you almost feel this down regulation.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yep. Interesting.

CHRIS WILLIAMSON: A palpable effect that I noticed. And I was using it in the UK, remembering that it gets dark early in the summer, uh, in the winter, but in the summer, it really overcooks it. So you can have the sun set at 10. 30 at night. Uh, so for me, I would pop them on and go for an evening walk, maybe 9. 30, and I would find while I was on this walk, I would get this regulation down. So. We're looking at some blue blocking glasses, again, if we're going to be exposed to light.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yeah, I've got, I have some from him as well. And, you know, and you just said it, there's going to be a varying degree of how effective this is, but also part of it can be the neural association as well to putting those on.

And because that's one of the things that I noticed definitely early on in testing these things is that as soon as I popped them on, I started to get a little bit sleepier, you know, and human, the human brain is always looking for a routine. It's always looking to automate behaviors. And so what's said is that neurons that fire together, wire together.

And so that behavior of like, I'm having this evening routine. I care about my sleep. I'm giving it some respect. I'm popping these on. I'm still, you know, dabbling and, you know, watching a show or, you know, doing a little bit of stuff on my phone. And I mentioned playing a video game with my kid, right? Now we have to look at the other part of the stimulation though.

Right. And so this is where we do want to have, give yourself that screen curfew of at least an hour to just like get off of the screens, do something else. And by the way, there's thousands of other things you could do. All right. But we just like, ah, you know, so there's thousands of other things that we can do.

And I'm going to share a couple with you. So you mentioned like reading a book. Yes, we can have some dim light, you know, read a book, read a real books are still out here on the streets. They still do exist, but even more so, this is a good time to just. If you can, chat with somebody. You don't have to stare at a phone or a screen to talk with somebody that you care about if you're not in person.

But if you're in a relationship, for example, and you're in the house together, this is a great time for my wife and I just to chat, catch up, talk. And also, one of the chapters in Sleep

Smarter, which it just happened to be on page 69. was about sex. I didn't know, somebody who bought the book told me, they were like, Sean is slick.

He thinks he's slick. But it was talking about orgasm and how that impacts sleep quality. And so we've got some kind of, um, cultural memes about people falling asleep, whatever, afterwards. No, like seriously, you're producing a cocktail of different chemicals, chemistry, that does support sleep quality significantly.

Um, we've got, I mentioned oxytocin. Before, we've got prolactin, for example, and men, one of the studies that I mentioned in the book, actually produce like four times more prolactin when they have an orgasm with their partner versus having one by themselves.

CHRIS WILLIAMSON: Wow

SHAWN STEVENSON: And prolactin is very, very heavy for optimizing, improving sleep quality, and making people sleepy. That's part of the reason even like the going another round is like the prolactin equation. And so, What's so interesting here is that, and by the way, it's like some people like, you know, with a partner, I'll go right to sleep versus like by myself, I go eat a bowl of cereal. Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. And so...

CHRIS WILLIAMSON: You've been watching me. (laughter)

SHAWN STEVENSON: And so just understanding that the big O is the chapter, the name of that chapter does in fact, again, in that time gap, maybe. You can have sex. That, hopefully, hopefully that's better than, you know, I don't know, Yellowstone. Or whatever else, you know, people are watching. But, um, you know, just with that, just being able to invest in your relationship, which is, again, that pays back so much. And that's just, I'm just throwing out a couple of things. There are so many things that we can do.

CHRIS WILLIAMSON: Have you got any insights? A lot of the people that are listening to this may, uh, listen to podcasts when they fall asleep. I sometimes find if I'm listening to something that is too cerebrally compelling and demanding that it puts me into a kind of sort of lean in curiosity state on an evening time. Uh, whereas if I get some nice Uh, fiction or some narrative nonfiction. Uh, I like, um, you know, stories, uh, history documentaries about, uh, stuff like World War II and bits and pieces like that, uh, that to me kind of puts me into more of a, what feels like a narrative story mode that feels like it primes me more for sleep. Have you ever, is there any data to back any of this?

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yes! There absolutely is.

CHRIS WILLIAMSON: Fantastic. I knew it wasn't bro science. Yeah.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Specifically fiction, you know, reading fiction, listening to, this is how we evolved. It's having those stories in the evening, like our genes, it's an input, it's something we've done for a long time, and we have this cultural, you know, kind of iconic thing of like reading your kids a bedtime story.

We're just big adult babies, if you really boil down to it. Instead of a nice bedtime story, now we're just stressed. Like we're just thinking about all kinds of sh* t to stress us out. Instead of giving ourselves the opportunity to like, let me switch over. Like literally our brain is functioning differently when we are engaged in a story, you know?

And so absolutely, there's some really cool science that's already been affirmed on that. But also So, you know, this is an opportunity to, as you just mentioned, I love that, of listening to a podcast as well, because you don't have to stare at a screen to listen to a podcast. And the same thing holds true with, there are people eating lunch right now watching us. Oh yeah. All right. And shout out, if you are, leave a comment down below. Tell us what you're eating.

CHRIS WILLIAMSON: What were you eating? Yeah, exactly. Was it from the cook? Was it from the new cookbook?

SHAWN STEVENSON: Oh, right. If that part, if you're from eating something from the new cookbook. The thing is I've been known, especially on a lunch break, to like pop on something on YouTube, like, you know, Conan O'Brien clips or something, random thing, you know?

And so again, it's not to be neurotic and I've structured my life in a way I've created a microculture in my household. Where I have real face time and eat together with the people that I care about on a regular basis. So it's a, it's a both end world. This is the point. We don't have to be either or. We don't have to, you know, like to be completely a tech addict or a Luddite.

It's a both end world. What we do need to do is listen to our bodies, listen to our minds, acknowledge where we are feeling this kind of dysfunction or turbulence within our spirit, because oftentimes it's like a guidance system because there are certain inputs that we are missing out on and other inputs that we might be getting too much of.

Stop using synthetic vitamin C supplements. Those days are over. A 2013 study published in the Journal of the American Medical Association found that participants taking synthetic

vitamin C supplements had twice the risk of developing kidney stones. That's no good! Another study from researchers at USC found that Daily use of synthetic vitamin C thickened the walls of participants arteries 2.

5 times faster than those not taking the synthetic supplement. Now, am I saying not to use vitamin C? Of course I'm not saying that. Vitamin C is one of the most important nutrients for the health of our nervous system, our skin health, and our immune system. The list goes on and on and on. As a matter of fact, vitamin C is one of the most powerful antioxidants.

That protects our bodies from oxidative stress and inflammation literally helping to keep us youthful and healthy But where the vitamin C comes from is of the utmost importance We want to get vitamin C rich foods into our diet on a regular basis Absolutely, but utilizing a vitamin C supplement is one of my favorite things, especially when I'm under a lot of stress especially when I'm traveling especially when people around me are getting sick But food based vitamin C supplements is the key.

And this is shown in real world data to affirm that this is the key to getting the results that we want. A randomized placebo controlled study published by the Journal of Cardiology had folks who were doing a pretty inflammatory process. A process that can make them pretty sick, which was smoking, and they had them consume either a whole food concentrate of vitamin C or a synthetic vitamin C supplement.

Over the course of this one week study, taking the whole food based vitamin C supplement significantly lowered oxidative stress and lowered inflammatory biomarkers. What's more, there were no changes in these biomarkers in people taking the ordinary synthetic vitamin C supplement. And as I mentioned, taking synthetic vitamin C supplements can actually have some potential downsides.

Now, the vitamin C superfood utilized in that study was from camu camu berry. And when you combine that with my other favorite vitamin C dense superfood, amla berry. A study published in the Journal of the Science of Food and Agriculture demonstrated that antioxidants in amla berry were found to have significant free radical scavenging activity and protect against cellular reactive oxygen species, helping to defend against cellular damage and accelerated aging.

Amla berry, camu camu berry, the number three vitamin C dense superfood, acerola cherry. These are all combined in the incredible essential seed complex from paleo valley. Go to paleovalley. com forward slash model and you're going to get 15 percent off their incredible essential seed complex. There's no binders, no fillers, no synthetic ingredients, just the most

incredible whole food based vitamin C supplement ever created. Go to paleovalley. com forward slash model. That's p a l e o v a l l e y. com forward slash model for 15 percent off store wide. And now back to the show.

CHRIS WILLIAMSON: One of the things, it's funny that you mentioned the ancestral disposition that we have or the evolutionary sort of priming that we have to hear stories around the campfire before we're about to go to sleep.

Uh, and this is absolutely bro science, but if someone wants to do the study on it, it works for me. Radio dramas. as they're called technically. So a full cast rendition of a story. Um, there's my favorite author, uh, fiction author Pierce Brown, who does Red Rising and is slowly releasing all of his books in full unabridged, but with an entire cast.

And this is soundscaped with all of the sounds and it's so immersive and there's a different character for each voice. And I find those [00:59:00] to be, if I really, really want to fall asleep if I'm on a plane or if I want to do whatever, if I drop into one of those, it's, it's, it's outrageous and I wonder whether that almost mimics in some regards the typical campfire, uh, surrounding.

Um, but yeah, I mean, from my side, that sort of falling asleep, listening to something, I, the problem is, As with a lot of the issues of technology, it's so compelling that it can actually start to push that sleep window further and further away, right? I'll do one more chapter, one more whatever, right? So the discipline to be able to say no to it is also, again, neither the luddite nor the addict.

It's somewhere, somewhere in between. Um, what about, this is something I think which is a very, very common issue and hopefully earlier in the day people have exercised, got sunlight, done all of the things to wind down. Even having done all of that, I've noticed periods in my life where I struggle to fall asleep. If somebody is Regularly getting into bed and having, you know, an hour plus of latency before they're able to fall asleep. What are the, what are the first few culprits or places that you would be looking at in order to try and optimize this?

SHAWN STEVENSON: Alright, it's like the Matrix right now. There's a hundred different things that it could be.

CHRIS WILLIAMSON: Rank order the top five.

SHAWN STEVENSON: It's, it's gonna be situation dependent. I'll rank some of them. But, even with you mentioning that, the full cast and the story, the ancient tenet is to know thyself.

Know thyself like that's top tier importance because we're so unique And so I just want to throw in a little parentheses as well of like by the way It doesn't have to be a fiction. It could be a personal development thing. It could be a sermon. It could be whatever Helps you to make that transition is into sleep Whatever works for you give yourself some space and some grace to try some different things now with sleep latency so I'm gonna tell you the first thing period and You know, this is, it encompasses so much, but oftentimes it's just stress, it's excessive stress, and us not metabolizing that stress efficiently.

CHRIS WILLIAMSON: What do you mean when you say metabolizing stress?

SHAWN STEVENSON: So, being able to, you know, cortisol for example has kind of been drug through the mud and given this bad name, but cortisol is not bad. It's, I like to think of it like the Incredible Hulk. You know, it's like, yes it can smash some shit, and like, but also it can get stuff done, it is powerful, it gets us up and going.

And it can get a little bit out of hand, especially if there's a lot of Hulk, you know, and so we need Hulk to turn back into Bruce Banner, basically, this is a great analogy. I just came up with that one just now. All right. And so to down regulate actually in the movie, the first Avengers movie, uh, Scarlett Johansson's Avengers.

Yeah, the character, uh, Black Widow, she would do this little kind of, uh, rhyme, like this little kind of song, this little kind of technique to help the big guy to down regulate and soothe him and bring him back down, all right? A lot of times we're just kind of running too hot, we've got a lot of adrenaline, you know, epinephrine, norepinephrine, cortisol is not the only stress hormone, but we've got a lot of that just pumping through our system based on our thoughts.

Our thoughts create chemistry in our bodies. Instantaneously, and a lot of times, one of my really good friends, Dr. Daniel Amen, he calls them ants, automatic negative thoughts, and we just get on these loops of these, you know, things that can just weigh on our spirit. We've got to be able to, when I say metabolize, really I'm talking about to, to, to neutralize, to shift gears over to that parasympathetic, and it depends on you what that's going to be, what the treatment's going to be.

So this could be a simple change in perception. You know, sometimes it's just a reality check. And I'm a big fan of that one, personally, which is like, I might be thinking about the ten things that I need to get done. Like, I just did Good Morning America, uh, a couple days ago, and I was in with my publisher the day before, and she was like, so, you know, are you excited, da da da? And she's just like, I would be a nervous wreck. I don't even know how

CHRIS WILLIAMSON: Hey! Thanks. Hey, real good pep talk.

SHAWN STEVENSON: But for me, it's just like, because I just don't perceive it like she does. And if I was to be like, Oh my God, I gotta, I gotta, I have, I have a very short window of time. I got to get up super early and I need to whatever, dah, I'm just going to be like, there's nothing I could do about it right now.

Chill. Just doesn't matter. I'm here in my bed. None of that matters. Just chill. So I could speak, I know how to speak to myself, you know, and again, it's a reality check for me that these things that I might be pining over, there's, and here's a really cool thing, too, is that it's during sleep that so much of our problems are solved, and we got some really cool data on this.

Um, even REM sleep in particular, in dreaming, like dreaming is some freaky stuff, man, you know, and we, we, we think we've got some good ideas about what's happening, but during REM sleep, we know that Uh, this process called memory consolidation is taking place. So like things from our short, short term memory kind of like, or for the day of getting converted to our short term memory and being, becoming more retrievable.

But also there's this kind of like play as we're playing out, it's kind of like our brain in a way is keeping us entertained while it's fixing sh*t and one of the things that I do, and I'm just going to share this tip, another way to down regulate is if I'm, if I'm dealing with the problem. I'm not just going to sit there with it and worry about it.

And this is from Thinking Real Rich, Napoleon Hill. And it changed my life years ago. And actually the person who introduced me to is Bob Proctor. And I had multiple conversations with him. It's just like, man, just to even say that stuff coming from where I come from, to be able to share time with people like that is mind blowing.

I have a meeting with my board of trusted advisors. So as I'm laying in bed, if for example, it's a challenge with, uh, let's just give an example of if it's somebody with their health, all right, if they're wanting to deal with a health issue, they can pick maybe. you know, a table, like a long table like this.

And there's three people on one side, three people on the other. And who are those trusted advisors that would sit at your table to offer you counsel? You know, maybe this might be, um, you know, um, Andrew Huberman. Maybe this might be Dr. Daniel Amen, neuroscientist. Maybe this might, I might be at the table with you.

And then on the other side, maybe it's like, you know, your friend who's really into health or whatever the case might be. And then you just go through and you ask them what, What is their opinion on what you should do to get better or to feel better? Because the thing is, you already know what they're gonna f* cking say.

You know what they're gonna say. But sitting down and doing this practice and allowing them to speak to you through your mind is so remarkable.

CHRIS WILLIAMSON: But the depersonalization of that tactic, right? Of removing yourself from being both judge, jury, executioner, uh, the, the evidence gatherer and the person that is supposed to coordinate this entire charade.

Yeah. It's so important. Like I've got written on my fridge. What would you want tomorrow to do? And the reason that it's so useful is it gives you that perspective, just a tiny, tiny little bit of distance between what's happening now and what's happening tomorrow and what you would want to do.

And, uh, yeah, I like that. Okay. So we've got, um, looking at the stresses, the kind of, uh, open loops that as of yet, we haven't found a way for yourself.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yep. to help to metabolize their stress, to downregulate instead of, you know, going into the, you know, the rattling.

CHRIS WILLIAMSON: I think that most people, when they're trying to fall asleep and struggling, what's happening is they will ruminate aggressively. Very few people are struggling to fall asleep while their mind is perfectly peaceful and blank. Right? They are, uh, trying to keep their heart rate low whilst doing very intense exercise, all mentally, right? I'm trying to keep myself calm and yet I'm doing the opposite thing of keeping myself calm and very active.

Is there anything else? Are there any of the other main culprits for this, uh, sleep latency issue? Absolutely.

SHAWN STEVENSON: So just to put a cherry on top of that, again, stress is the number one thing and it comes in many different forms and fashions. So finding something for yourself to process all of that inner chatter.

That's what my mother in law, uh, calls it. She gave me that lexicon. Got a lot of inner chatter. And this could be something, usually it's actually going to be before you get into bed, by the

way. And I want to offer up, so here's another way. Is To do a form of meditation even, you know, if anything because with meditation It's one of those ways we can kind of glimpse into theta and delta Potentially like if you're a really skilled meditator, but this is a way so we can kind of start to tip the scales into more like anabolic, in a Sleep is truly the anabolic state that we're in, but we can kind of tiptoe our way into it. Ideally, because of the neural association, you might not want to do that in bed itself, but you can. Know thyself.

CHRIS WILLIAMSON: Oh, right. So you're saying the bed is to be reserved for sleeping and having sex rule over again. We're not watching TV. We're not working. We're not doing the thing.

SHAWN STEVENSON: I like that. But, a meditation in bed, like there's a body scanning meditation.

You can go down and tense and relax and that kind of thing. You could do that in bed, but know yourself. If doing meditation in bed might not transition into sleep the way that you want. And I love a meditation for if we wake up and have trouble falling back asleep to lay and just, yeah, just try to keep bringing your attention back to your breath.

All right. Um, but also, okay, so what can be another thing with sleep latency outside of stress? The other thing, which is a form of stress, is nutrient deficiencies. All right, again, you can have the best sleep routine if you're not providing your body with those raw, those raw materials, those building blocks to help with the conversion of serotonin into melatonin, which serotonin is the prerequisite for making melatonin, by the way.

That all has to do, most of your serotonin is, is in your gut. And so what are the things that you're doing nutritionally that could be screwing up that process?

CHRIS WILLIAMSON: What are the sleep superfoods?

SHAWN STEVENSON: Oh, good question. I mentioned cherries earlier. That's a top tier, uh, good sleep food. Salmon, another top tier good sleep food.

And I'm going to share another one with you that, you know, it's one of these foods been around for a long time, but, and also it has number one, the mega threes are there as well. Eggs. Great. We identify it oftentimes for as like a morning food. It's not the fact of any of these foods you're just going to eat and fall asleep.

All right. But eggs are remarkable in the choline. Choline is involved in the sleep process as well and those omega 3s are really helpful and also just amino acids because when we're talking about When I've said hormones and neurotransmitters several times today, these are essentially Cellular DMS. All right, it's enabling your cells to talk to each other.

That's what a hormone is and at its core Hormones are proteins If you're deficient in certain amino acids, you can't even make that sh anyway. So, your body will do a patchwork job, but if you provide your body with the amino acids it needs to build those things, you're gonna be in a much better favor.

Okay, another one, tryptophan. Alright, tryptophan, that's where it gets the association with the, what we call, from where I'm from, itis. Like being sleepy after you eat food, especially on Thanksgiving and the turkey and all the things. Yes. Turkey is a rich source of tryptophan, but there are, you know, certain plant foods as well, but yeah, turkey, we'll just put, throw that on the list there.

So chicken, turkey is a song that has that in it, but those are going to be a couple of other ones because tryptophan. Amino acid. All right. And it's deeply involved in our sleep process. And so what is that? Is that four of them?

CHRIS WILLIAMSON: Five. Cherries, Salmon, Tryptophan,

SHAWN STEVENSON: Eggs. Turkey. Okay. We said turkey already.

CHRIS WILLIAMSON: Eggs, Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Let me give you a drink. There's so many here. Again, we're not talking about guzzling a pint of water. We're talking about like a Serving of like a teacup. We know about chamomile for downregulating, for relaxing. We know about kava kava. One of my favorites is reishi. Reishi tea. A dual extracted reishi tea.

So this study was published in the journal pharmacology biochemistry and behavior and the researchers found that Drinking reishi just prior to bedtime. We could say an hour before bedtime, 30 minutes, an hour, maybe a little bit longer, was able to number one, improve sleep latency, meaning you fall asleep faster.

It improved overall sleep time and it improved the quality of test subjects' sleep, namely improving their non REM deep sleep time. All right. So that's pretty remarkable. And Reishi has been utilized for thousands of years.

CHRIS WILLIAMSON: Do you have a brand that you prefer for that?

SHAWN STEVENSON: Four Sigmatic. My guys, Four Sigmatic. It's a dual extraction of the Reishi. That's why. Primarily. So that means it's an alcohol extract and a hot water extract. Because different things are gonna get pulled out of the mushroom based on the extraction method. And if you're just getting one, you can be missing out on like, the hot water extract to get a lot of these antioxidant components, beta glucans, things like that, but the alcohol extract can get some of these more hormonally, uh, pointed compounds.

CHRIS WILLIAMSON: You've mentioned the window there. How important is eggs? Does eggs have to be later in the evening? Does salmon have to be later in the evening? It's just throughout the day we can create the building blocks that are good for sleep.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Exactly. Your body knows what to do to store things away when it needs.

CHRIS WILLIAMSON: Cool. Okay. So, we've looked at stress. And we've looked at nutrients. I think that those are two pretty big movers. We've already touched on some of the new work that you've done. Your book came out this week. Congratulations. Um, talk to me about the current state of American adults health from a metabolic and a weight perspective.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Alright. This was published by the CDC in 2022, so just about a year ago. As of this recording, they determined that 60% of American adults now have at least one chronic disease. At least one and 40% have two or more. Alright, so just to kind of. overarching perspective. Look at this. Now, one of our top tier journals that's looking at metabolic health recently published some data, and it's been making the rounds on the Internet, and they established that only 12 percent of American adults are metabolically healthy.

So 88% of adults are not metabolically healthy. And this is looking at certain biomarkers You know, whether we're talking about hormones, whether we're talking about the role of insulin and leptin and the list goes on and on. And so now to, what does this look like in the real world? Like what do we see?

Well, prior to pandemic related shutdowns, we were at about 42.5% of American adults being clinically obese, and it was projected to reach 50 percent by 2030. But when things shut down, there was a mighty jump. The data hasn't come out yet completely, but we're, we're probably very close to that 50 percent already.

And if we're talking about overweight and obesity, then we're looking at about 75 percent of the population right now. dramatic has happened because, and also, we can't leave out kids in this conversation, by the way. There was a study published in the New England Journal of Medicine, and it looked at 200 years of diabetes, as the title of the paper.

And essentially, type 2 diabetes, which used to be called adult onset diabetes, because kids didn't get that sh*t. But now, a lot of kids, younger and younger and younger populations, are getting heart disease, are getting diabetes, are developing obesity. And so, but it was, Within about a 40 year time span, just like in the last 40 to 50 years, rates of type 2 diabetes essentially quadrupled in the U.S. population. And along with that, childhood obesity just in the last 30 years has tripled. All right. Let alone us as adults, like this is trickling its way down to our little ones, which is incredibly abnormal. And so just a couple of other quick stats. Um, I mentioned earlier about the sleep deprivation stat, but right now our number one, our leading cause of death is still heart disease.

And I gotta throw this in here as well, a lot of people don't know this, but Alzheimer's is number six. It is just charging up into the top five leading causes of death in the United States. It's an epidemic and it is scary. And a lot of times we don't think about like, how is that killing people? Like, loss of our cognitive function like that, man, like that is such a terrible way to die.

And researchers are now calling Alzheimer's type three diabetes. Because it's so related to insulin dysfunction in the brain.

CHRIS WILLIAMSON: That's literally what Mac said. Yeah. That's literally what Mac said. Yeah.

SHAWN STEVENSON: And so, I wanted to mention that, but heart disease being the number one killer, now, according to, again, published data, about 60 percent of American adults have some degree of heart disease onset already.

Like, that can be, that can be Tracked. Simple blood test. We could see, okay, you're on your way to die from a heart attack.

CHRIS WILLIAMSON: Is the most common precursor to heart disease, obesity, or being overweight?

SHAWN STEVENSON: That's a great question. There's definitely some interplay. Here, let's talk about obesity, because, you know, right now we're living at a time where people are There's a framing around obesity, and working as a clinician and working with real people who are

struggling with their weight for many years, a lot of people are trying, they are trying very, very hard to lose that weight.

But they're existing in a culture that is fighting against them. And so We place a lot of judgment cognitively if we are healthy or of a healthy weight and don't understand the struggles of people who are really trying hard. Now there are some people who don't give a f *ck, and I'll tell you what, even with that, even as I'm joking about that, I've never met one person who doesn't want to be healthy.

If they had a choice, the person who apparently doesn't give a f *ck, and they're 350 pounds, if they had a choice, They would be healthy, they would be of a healthy weight, they would have an ideal body and energy and all the things that they want. What happens is, we develop something called learned helplessness.

On top of that, we have these stories. Like sometimes it's literally about worthiness, it's about what's possible for me, it's about access, it's about money, it's about all these things. My mother, for example, You know, I grew up in a low income environment. A lot of times, like, my mom would sell her blood.

She'd go to the blood bank, sell her blood, get 20, and get us some fast food. A lot of times. And she, you know, we got food from charities. You know, there's a place called [01:19:00] the Hosea House. We'd get, we'd get food, you know, government assistance, all the things. But she was working. She worked overnight at a convenience store.

And one of those nights Somebody tried to rob the store and she was stabbed multiple times, but my mom is different. She's alive and well today. She actually detained the guy and he ended up getting arrested. Yeah, I mean, no, I'm not. I'm, I'm, I'm not kidding at all. . I'm not kidding at all, man.

CHRIS WILLIAMSON: You picked on the wrong mother.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Like, listen, I'm not kidding. I got, I got so many stories. My, listen, I'm, I'm trying to, I'm trying to hold back and tell you some of the crazy shit she's done . But here's why I'm sharing this story is that when she went in. for, you know, surgery, get the stitches and all the things. Afterwards, the physician was examining her.

CHRIS WILLIAMSON: Because the depth of penetration of the knife would have been closer to vital organs.

SHAWN STEVENSON: So her story is, my fat is my safety.

CHRIS WILLIAMSON: Yeah, I can see I can see how that's a double edged sword for want of a better term.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Damn! So here's the thing too, again, we have these stories and for some people that Excess that they're carrying is protection. Maybe it's protection from an assailant. Maybe it's a protection from a family member Maybe it's a protection from attention, unwanted attention. There are so many different reasons Why folks are in the state that they're in and I want to remove the judgment and just talk about the biology.

Fat cells are phenomenal. It's enabled us to be sitting here today. It's because of our ancestors and these badass fat cells. We evolved our capacity to utilize stored energy in times of famine. And something, a little fun fact about our fat cells is that our fat cells can actually grow and contain about like a thousand times their own volume.

Like the size of it itself, a thousand times its volume. It can hold. Energy, essentially. We didn't evolve containing that much, however, but today, because we never have a famine, we just keep filling and filling and filling these fat cells, and what happens is, we start to have this unwanted immune response.

Because that, the stress of that fat cell is getting expanded. Unnaturally, and never getting a chance to offload, is essentially sending out a false distress signal to our immune system that this cell is infected, essentially. You know, there's something abnormal happening here. And as this is happening, this is contributing, and we saw this even during, you know, pandemic related things with a significantly higher incidence of severe outcomes, hospitalizations, and death when we venture into obesity.

And a part of that is the dysfunction that happens with our immune system. Now on top of that, with the immune system dysfunction, what about cancer? Because part of the ability of cancer to progress is an abnormal relationship with our immune system. And being able to catch things early in our immune system to basically take out rogue cells that, you know, have reached the hayflick limit.

They're not supposed to replicate all the things and take that, take them out. What we see in the data, we see about a doubling, doubling of the risk of breast cancer, doubling of a risk of prostate cancer, five times greater risk of colon cancer, seven times greater risk of endometrial cancer when we develop obesity.

It's crazy. And so this is not about vanity. This is about a state of our biology, a state of our physiology, a state of human health that is subjecting us to all manner of disease and dysfunction.

CHRIS WILLIAMSON: So, I'd like the input of trying to remove the moralizing from this. It's what I learned from Max when I first spoke to him last year. And he reminded me that there are lots of different ways that people can get fat. Uh, good example of this, Robert Plowman, the guy that did the largest ever twin studies in the world. Uh, every single pair of twins born between 1991 and 1994 in the UK was contacted about being enrolled in his study.

He's the father of behavioral genetics. Uh, and he was talking to me and he was saying that he has the predisposition to be fat. And he said that when he walks past a bakery. Some people aren't that bothered, but he smells bread and his ghrelin response just goes through the room. It could also be that you don't really like exercise that much.

And it could also be that you don't really enjoy eating foods that are a little bit leaner. And it could also be, you know, there's lots of different ways to get the Keiko equation to work against you from an obesity, uh, perspective. And just because I come from, I have a background where I would be like 63 kilos if I'd never been to the gym.

That's not the same disposition that everybody has. That being said, there is an awful lot of agency. Like ultimately, if you don't put it in your mouth, it doesn't go into your body, right? So finding this balance between, um, empowerment and reminding people of the sovereignty and agency that they have over their health and fitness whilst accepting that the base that people are working from is not the same.

The difficulty, some people are swimming upstream and some people are swimming downstream, right? Uh, and I think again, from Max, I'd be interested to know if you agree with this, that as far as he's concerned. The current world that people find themselves in, if they want to eat foods that do not cause them to be obese, if they want to not eat beyond satiety, they are finding it harder to do now than ever before because of how ultra processed foods are hyper palatable, they're more calorie dense, they're quicker and easier to put into your mouth and get into your stomach, they're more readily available, you're able to graze throughout the day.

All of the things, again, that get this Keiko equation, the balance to just lean more and more and more toward surplus calories. It's never been more difficult to be underweight or to be of a healthy weight.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Exactly. And also, even with all those things you just shared, we have this new category, a huge list of obesogens. So these are obesity .

CHRIS WILLIAMSON: Obesogens.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Obesity causing agents that are affirmed, in particular, They're riddled with obesogens in ultra processed foods. So it's similar to a carcinogen, a cancer causing agent, which, according to the WHO, for example, glyphosate, which has been on a lot of people's conversation lists recently.

Glyphosate, according to the WHO Is that the lawn killer, the weed killer stuff? Yeah, yeah, Monsanto. And I'm from St. Louis, home base. I went to work there after college. And so glyphosate, according to the WHO, is classified as a class 2a carcinogen. That means that it probably causes cancer in humans.

That's why there's so much unrest about it, but this has been known for quite some time. And by the way, this is in the Eastmarter Family Cookbook too. Because, what does this translate to? Am I really getting exposure? Well, the Environmental Working Group took a bunch of the most common grain products on U.S. store shelves and, and glyphosate content. They found 80-90 percent of conventional grain products were contaminated with glyphosate, a probable human carcinogen. Again. Again. Carcinogens, obesogens, these are going to be things that are often found in significant content in ultra processed foods.

CHRIS WILLIAMSON: So I don't understand, the obesogen thing, is that just a, uh, component of food which makes it more likely to be overeaten?

SHAWN STEVENSON: No, these are, these are, these are synthetic chemicals that literally alter our metabolic function and, and, and contribute to the process of weight gain. Give us some examples. One of the most ominous sounding obesogens that we're all getting exposed to pretty much every day is bisphenol A. Alright, so this is in food packaging.

And so this is a plasticizing chemical. So, plastics are made from fossil fuels and I see plastics every I mean you can't. So much of this is Made from plastic. It's made our lives. You know, it's the material, you know It's like the look, the feel of cotton, the fabric of the look, the feel of plastic, the death, the killer of our lives. Plastics are awesome in their own right. In regards to their interaction with our food is a serious problem.

I just had a conversation with a board certified toxicologist who worked in the flavor and fragrance industry. And she shared with me that, you know, even for example when we go to

a coffee shop, you know, you get that to go cup and it's a paper cup. Why is that hot liquid not like melting the cup? Or like breaking the cup down. It's because the inside has a certain type of plastic.

CHRIS WILLIAMSON: Oh God.

SHAWN STEVENSON: And the data now, she shared a study with me that you're consuming from any given cup of coffee, regular serving size of coffee, at least 25, 000 Microplastics, 25, 000 and there's microplastics and there's nanoplastics and she shared with me that these microplastics, again, bisphenol A is just one plasticizer chemical, there's bisphenol S, there's so many, but we can get tricked because it's health washing saying this is BPA free.

But she said that this, they can interact with our cells directly and function sometimes like xenoestrogen compounds. So activating estrogen pathways. This is why we see the correlation with breast cancer. We see the correlation with gyneomastia, with breast tissue development with men. And so we've got that aspect, but she said the primary thing that's happening we're seeing in the data is that it's contributing to inflammation. And so I'm saying all this to say with our food supply, it isn't just the food itself. It's also what the shit is packaged in.

CHRIS WILLIAMSON: Wow, so you're saying that even if I avoid the soy when I go to Starbucks, there's still other estrogens floating around in the thing that they give it to me in?

SHAWN STEVENSON: And even with soy, again, soy's been utilized for thousands of years by humans. When you look at the data, and I used to, again, because as soon as I heard xenoestrogen with soy, I immediately put it on the do not disturb list, you know, and the reality is the way that it functions in the body is not quite like we kind of create that superficial term of a xenoestrogen and like all these bad things messing up testosterone. That being said, Traditionally, people were not guzzling soy milk and eating soy dogs and having a tofurkey for, you know, Thanksgiving.

CHRIS WILLIAMSON: I'm going to guess then that the storage of food, especially if someone, a lot, a lot of guys that are listening to this will be gym bros, they'll be doing their food prep perhaps on a Sunday or perhaps each morning, they need to be looking very carefully at what it is that they're storing this food in, especially hot food, taking it from the pan.

Um, Yeah. into their Tupperware container, uh, I blitzed all of mine and pivoted. They do this. So Tupperware does glass based, uh, storage containers. So you can do that, but even that has a plastic lid. So I'm trying to find a solution now, if anyone knows one, of a all glass

storage container. Would probably need to be a litre and a half, I think, litre and a half to two litres seems about right, because you get some spinach and throw that on top and do all that, you want room.

Uh, But yeah, dude, for a decade, I thought that health was, and you know, stepping over, uh, dollars to pick up pennies. It's probably better to be eating good food that you've cooked yourself, that you know. And being like, oh, maybe there's some BPAs in this Tupperware as opposed to, oh, well, I'll just go and continue to order on UberEats each day or whatever it might be.

But yeah, even if you're cooking your stuff at home, what are you storing that in once it's done? It's hot, it's going directly from the pan, straight into, so what's your solution? You must, you prep food, your entire new cookbook is all about this. What's your solution? You're on the road, you want to make sure you're eating well. How are you storing your food and taking it with you?

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yeah, I mean a simple thing if you don't want to throw all your plastics away, by the way, for your food storage, which I haven't, we still have some stuff, we're cycling it out over time. Being phased out. You know, and you do want, at least let your food cool down, because we do know that the heat interaction, so a recent, like this study was just published, and they, the researchers put food into a quote, microwave safe plastic container, and microwaved it for three minutes, and they found that in a three centimeter space.

Of that container released literally 50, 000 plus microplastics and we're talking millions of nanoplastics into the food and that's just from a three centimeter space of it. So just, we're not, we're not heating our stuff up in the microwave in a, in a three centimeter thing. It's large. It's a lot.

So this is real. It's a thing. We don't want to be too neurotic, but if you can avoid it, avoid it. Don't make hot food. Don't put your hot food in there or don't heat it up in there if you can. What do I do? I love stainless steel. Stainless steel containers for food with a silicon lid is great. Do you have any brands that you use? You know, I did, I put some in the bonus resource guide for the cookbook and actually I talk about this in the cookbook, like food storage as well.

CHRIS WILLIAMSON: It's interesting. We spoke about culture right at the very beginning and this, again, we're trying to play this game of not moralizing, of bringing people along for the ride, of not, you know, pointing the finger and accusing people of stuff.

And yet there is a, like making health normal again. Seems like such an, like an odd pivot. It was, it would almost have to reverse this, uh, accounting for, and, and acclimatizing for poor health outcomes, whether it be, uh, changing the size of plane seats or whether it be the, the, all of the different changes that people are looking to do with menus, with [01:34:00] accounting, all of this stuff. It's very strange to think about, okay, what would a set point healthy society look like?

SHAWN STEVENSON: Krishnamurti said that it is no manner of health to be well adjusted to a profoundly sick society. Amen. Yes. Yes. That's what we're experiencing right now. It is normal to be unwell. We are living at a time, this is the first time in human history, where if you are healthy, you are not normal.

And this is a fact, but our definition of normal, of course, is very complicated. We want to normalize health. We want to create a culture that makes it easy to be healthy. And that's what's possible. I spent many years again, I've been in this field for 21 years trying to address the larger culture and I've made a remarkable impact coming from.

Somebody who I went to, when I went to college, I lived in Ferguson, Missouri. A glorified food desert of the highest order. And I grew up. I had multiple chronic illnesses myself. Chronic asthma, hospitalized every year. I had an arthritic condition, advanced arthritic condition diagnosed when I was 20 years old.

My spine was breaking down. I broke my hip at track practice. Like, that's crazy. That shouldn't happen to a child. To come from that, to write the first sleep wellness related book to become an international bestseller, I think we've got Maybe 25 foreign, separate foreign book deals. Like, it's crazy. It's like in libraries in China.

You know, it's crazy. It's crazy. But that's what's possible. I have made a dent in the bigger larger in the bigger culture scape. But, that is A tremendous task. It's heavy. It is life sucking and energy draining to do that. And it's very, very difficult. It is, like, I get, I'm right now conjuring up an image of Atlas. Alright.

CHRIS WILLIAMSON: Or Sisyphus, maybe.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Right, yeah. Yes. Now, with that being said, let's address that. But let's first and foremost address, I just had this great conversation with a man named Greg Hardin and, um, man, I'm so grateful to have met this man. He's really the first mentor in college for Tom Brady.

Michael Phelps, Charles Woodson, the list goes on and on. He's like a superpower for them. Meeting him changed the course of their lives. Tom Brady was like fourth string when he met Greg, what Greg said to me. And he said, when he said it again, it hit different because we've heard this before, control the controllables.

Control the controllables. Tom was so concerned with trying to change things that he couldn't control. What he could control was the way that he was training. What he could control was taking advantage of the opportunities that he was giving no matter how small they were. The starting quarterback was getting 20 reps.

Back up 10 reps. Tom was getting like two. He was like, make those two the greatest two. Humanity's ever seen. He framed, reframed it like that. He put some power back into his hands for him to control the controllables. What is it, what do we do in this context with a larger culture scape that is unwell? Focus on your microculture.

Intentionally create a microculture around you that makes health easy, that makes movement easy, that makes good sleep easy. Right now, Again, stepping out our door, it's very difficult to control those things, but within under our own roof. And by the way, I'm, I wanted to make this clear. We are products of our environment.

We can't help it. We are influenced by the things in our environment. All the time. But humans are also creators of our environment. We can create an environment intentionally. That's what makes us so remarkable. We can create an intentional environment that makes this stuff easy. With that said, the environment starts with us.

The culture starts with us. We are representation of our culture. Gotta shout out Gandhi in this one. To be the change. Like people say that seriously, we want everything else to change outside of us. The truth is, it's an inside job first and foremost, because here's the cool thing. When you take yourself, like, you're from across the pond.

When you come here though, you're a representation of your culture. You can't help it. It's beaming off of you. The suaveness, the accent, all the things, it's just coming off. Please, come on. Alright? When we show up anywhere, we bring our culture with us. It's infectious. We have this, we attribute contagious things to just negative things, but wellness is contagious as well.

And we've got data affirming that too. The Framingham Heart Study, for example. And so, let's focus on creating a microculture in our household. What does that look like? I shared, for

me, the core of that, which is community, family and friends, because it's the biggest leverage point. It feeds into itself.

When you can focus on creating healthy relationships, especially in close proximity to you, which is something we're never, we're not taught about. How to have good relationships, which is the most impactful thing on our lives. We go to school and we learn about like,

times tables or whatever, you know, like, that's cool. That's cool. That's not going to impact my life more than how do I learn how to be a good listener? How do I become a person of value so that people want me in their relationship, right? So for me, it's focusing on controlling the controllables and be the type of person of value who can have great relationships. That's part of listening to this right now.

What you've created is helping us to be better people Right, so investing in that, you're already winning. You're already starting the process and building on that process. Also, in your own microculture with your food, know thyself. If you can't have Cheetos in the crib without having orange fingers, definitely don't bring them in.

And, we don't have to villainize Snickers. If we want to, if we want to dabble in that, I got Snicker Bites in the cookbook. Higher quality ingredients, real food ingredients. We've got, I mentioned, the cherry frozen yogurt pops if you want a sweet frozen treat. Right, let's upgrade the ingredients. We know our culture, we like that stuff.

We like popsicles, you know, we like burgers. We like chocolate. Let's just, okay, that's cool because the processed food industry are the ones that really f ked it up for us, all right? Humans, we innately are driven to eat things that taste good to us. I know the top guys in all the different diet frameworks.

One of my guys is the eat to live, don't live to eat guy. I couldn't be any further from my perspective on that. Not based on like, that just doesn't sound good, but because of biology. We have this really immaculate, intelligent, flavor Receptor system that's the art the human knows and in the in our palate the interface there is so cool We can taste things that are just mind blowing with that like Gary Vee and the f*cking wines Like I test it's a hint of like a hot wheels car and like dirt Like, there are all of these subtle flavor notes that we can identify, and that helped us to survive.

Because we can taste whether or not that food was good for us. And, there's this phenomenon called post ingestive feedback. Have you heard of this before? No. Post ingestive feedback is essentially whenever we, through our evolution and today, if we were to

eat a food, our cells, our biology would take notes, essentially, on what it just got from that food.

And flavor is the language. It's like the label. It's a flavor label. So, for example, the cherries that I talked about earlier. We eat the food. Okay, we get some bioavailable melatonin. We get these antioxidants. We get these particular amino acids. We get this vitamin C. Your biology is taking notes. That flavor is attached to those nutrients.

So when I become deficient in those nutrients, I'll develop a craving for that flavor. That's how we're hardwired. Food scientists have f*cked that whole thing up. One of the inventions of gas chromatograph can isolate flavors based on the chemistry. Like this cherry flavor. Here's the chemistry to make it.

Now we can take that flavor and add it to ice cream. We can add it to soda. We can add it to candy. We can add it to all this shit that is not cherries. And so it muddies up these metabolic waters.

CHRIS WILLIAMSON: I learned today about Mountain Dew flavored hot dogs.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yo, Frankenstein is here, walking around, he's in the form of a wiener. Alright? It's real. It's real. Like, this is where we are today, where our, our biology doesn't even understand or recognize real food anymore. So we've got to take back control because the lie is that that shit tastes better than real food. That's not, that's not even close. Our most memorable meals. are oftentimes the ones that are prepared by somebody that loves us and they're made from real food.

They're quote, made from scratch. Real food meals. We don't often have super memorable moments with a bag of Cool Ranch Doritos. Speak for yourself. Okay, shout out to Jay Leno, who was in the first commercial for that. That sh*t was good, alright? And with that being said, you know, this, what we're talking about here is my guy Mark Schatzker, you know, and the Dorito effect.

And looking at, again, being able to take the flavor of a taco and putting it on a chip, it's, But now you're not getting the potential veggies, the grass fed meat, the whatever else might have been in the real thing.

CHRIS WILLIAMSON: Even the conversation with the guy in the food truck that made it. There you

SHAWN STEVENSON: go, we're missing all, we just go right straight to hand in the bag. Mm. Mm. You're jacking that bag off. Yeah.

CHRIS WILLIAMSON: Alright. Again, speak for yourself.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Alright. So, here's the bottom line. We want to take back control of our palate. And to do that, food isn't just food, it's information. When you're bringing in more of these real foods, And in ways that are absolutely delicious should be a no brainer, but in ways that are fun, that create incredible like food memories and experiences like taking the salmon and having a delicious salmon burger right now, we're getting in all that vital data from those foods.

It's changing what's happening with our genes. We normalize that in our environment because instead of whatever the f k else we were going to have, as far as a burger was concerned, now we've got this. I made a batch of them, got them in the freezer for whenever I want. Like we start to create an environment again, that makes it easy to make healthy choices.

So know thyself, if you can have some Cheetos at the crib and not go ham on them when you're stressed, that's, that's cool for most people. Don't bring that shit in anymore, but treat yourself. Treat yourself good. Make sure if you know you're if you like if you're a sweetie pie, like my wife, she's a sweetie.

She loves sweets. Knowing that we make sure that we keep a stash of the good stuff for her if she ever has that inclination that she wants some, you know, some chocolate or whatever. We got a higher quality chocolate bar in there. We've got a, you know, a higher quality, you know, the snicker bites. We've got this superfood chocolate bark, you know, we got all these different things that she could have to address that desire. So focus on microculture.

CHRIS WILLIAMSON: Hell yeah. Sean Stevenson, ladies and gentlemen. Sean, I really appreciate you, man.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Thank you so much for tuning into this episode. I hope that you got a lot of value out of this. Definitely check out Modern Wisdom. Really, really great show. And listen, we've got some absolutely incredible guests that are coming up for you.

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