



EPISODE 822

The #1 Most Important Thing That Determines Your Health As You Age

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SHAWN STEVENSON: It's not diet and it's not exercise. You're about to discover the number one thing that determines how long you're going to live right now. One of the largest studies ever conducted on human longevity was completed by researchers at the University of North Carolina and researchers at Brigham Young University and published in the journal PLOS Medicine.

It included 148 separate studies and over 300,000 participants. After analyzing this massive amount of data, the researchers uncovered that adults with strong social bonds have a 50 percent boost in longevity versus individuals who do not. In other words, the researchers found that humans have a 50 percent reduction in premature death from all causes when they have healthy social relationships.

In fact, having strong social relationships was more indicative of how long people live than exercise or even beating obesity. Yes, those things matter, but there's something about having healthy relationships that impacts how long we live far more than anything else. And the question should be, Why? And if you dig into this meta analysis, the researchers point out a few very, very key factors that make healthy relationships so impactful on our lifespan. And we're going to cover them right now.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Number one, the number one thing that they pointed out is that social relationships help us to metabolize and adapt to stress. According to these scientists, healthy social relationships appear to provide resources that promote adaptive behavior changes and neuroendocrine responses to acute and chronic stressors that we experience.

So these stressors include things like illnesses, challenging life events, and life transitions. Our relationships help us to cope and to adapt to these things. Now, they state "The aid from social relationships, thereby moderates or buffers the deleterious influence of stressors on health". Now the question should be, what is it about stress that makes it so damaging to our health?

Stress is an essential part of life and it's an essential part of growth and development. We need stress to get better. So obviously stress can drive beneficial adaptations, but, and it's a big old but, We have to have time and capacity to adapt to the stressors that we face. If stress compiles and becomes overbearing, it can quickly degrade our health.

SHAWN STEVENSON: In fact, data published in the journal JAMA Internal Medicine reported that upwards of 80 percent of physician visits today have a major stress component. Stress is literally making us sick. It is a huge underlying factor in a plethora of chronic and acute conditions. Now, we might superficially think that we don't have a lot of stress going on and work's not that stressful.

But we tend to compartmentalize and put what we perceive to be stressful things into different buckets. But the human body and the human brain does not care about your different buckets. It's really pouring into one sovereign entity. And so we have an overall stress load that includes our mental stressors that includes our emotional stressors that includes our physical stressors that includes environmental stressors and many other factors. This is going into our overall stress load.

And again, if any or all of these things become overbearing, it can rapidly break us down from the inside out. And so what are these resources that our relationships provide that help us to process and to adapt to stress? Well, the scientists noted things like first and foremost, information, friends, family, colleagues, et cetera, can provide us with information that can help us to find a solution to our challenges, readjust our perspective about something, or simply provide a reminder of the strength that we have within us. Also, our relationships provide us with emotional support. It's not always what someone says, but how someone makes us feel that can make all the difference in the world. Having someone to talk to, to vent to, to express ourselves can be one of the greatest gifts in our lives.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Now, this past year, for example, has been incredibly challenging for me and my family. About a year ago, I lost my father and it was a very layered experience. You know, there's the initial experience and then there's a processing that happens along the way. And I didn't grow up in a particularly close knit family. We had a lot of dysfunction as many families do, but we had some degrees of extreme dysfunction, alcohol abuse, drug abuse that's actually what landed him in assisted living. For many years prior to him eventually passing away was due to drugs and to be able to have that moment and to see the impact that he had on other people in the nursing home, in the assisted living place that he lived in and his spiritual community that he was now a big part of and how he impacted their lives was incredibly rewarding.

I got to see that at the memorial service and to hear those stories and to know that thread of innocence and beauty that I saw in him was something that other people picked up as well. But I also, being a child and growing up in the environment, I got to see the other side. And, I could carry those things and be very conflicted in that, but I had to choose what I tend to carry in my life and to pass on to my family, to pass on to my children.

And so I made a decision to discard those things that I might have cared resent about and to focus on the gifts that he gave me he provided a presence. You know my biological father my if you saw my birth certificate. There is no father on my birth certificate and He came into my life when I was just a baby.

SHAWN STEVENSON: I was about nine months old according to legend I was you know, I don't remember I was a baby but all my recollection was him being there in my household and being an individual who demonstrated no matter what happened in life, he got up and went to work, no matter what. And he never missed a day.

I picked that kind of thing of that dedication and also the strength that I saw. And being able to really pick up how physically strong he was, he had little pieces of exercise equipment and he had these remarkable muscles that you didn't see on other people. And those are things that I picked up.

I wanted to be strong like him. He also had this again, childlike nature about him, even though he's a very tough guy. Tough man, a very tough individual, he got the Nintendo system and there's, we got it late. We always got everything late cause we didn't have money like that. So maybe a year later we get the new system when the next system comes out, but he got a Nintendo.

And of course being a kid, I want to play whatever, but he was the first person I ever saw beat a video game. It was Mike Tyson's punch out. And I was just blown away because I was like struggling with, like the fourth boxer and I saw from him that There are patterns with all these different fighters and so just being able to learn that and he wasn't the type of teacher that would tell me things.

SHAWN STEVENSON: I just learned by witnessing and this is so important for us as parents that we're always modeling. We're always modeling behavior I cannot recall a single time that he told me how to do something. I could hear the criticism when I did something wrong but I watched him cook. He was an executive chef. That was his job and I watched him make something out of nothing in the kitchen. He didn't teach me how to cook. I just picked this up by being in the environment. And so these are all the wonderful things that I chose to focus on and to embed in my life and to share with the people that I care about.

When he passed away, I actually started to experience some pain in my shoulders. I started to have neck pain because of this knot in my shoulders. I didn't feel like I had this deep sorrow. I felt more of a sense of appreciation. I'm just like, what is going on? But I knew that, growing up in this household, I had my little brother and sister as well. I was the oldest, I'm about five

years older than my brother and about seven years older than my little sister. And picking up that environment of alcohol abuse, of drug abuse, and just hurting each other. Those are the things that I wanted to see my family evolve beyond. But unfortunately, that wasn't the case.

And my expectation, my hope was that now that our father is lying in a casket, you're gonna get the picture. You're going to change the direction of your life because we don't want to end up like this. But that expectation and having relationships, and this is my point, I've always been the person that other people come to.

SHAWN STEVENSON: I've never been the person that reaches out for help. I figure it out. I find a way. And this was a moment when in my forties, I finally reached out for help. And I reached out to a friend of mine who's been actually, I'm so grateful to say. Very close and he's actually been on The Model Health Show a few times, Dr. Michael Beckwith. All right. Dr. Michael Bernard Beckwith. And I reached out and I shared this pain that I was experiencing and what is going on? I don't know why I'm experiencing this pain. And I told him what was going on. And I told him the feelings that I had about going back to St. Louis and the funeral and all the things that were coming up and my little brother and sister, and just hoping that this would be the moment that our entire family gets well.

And he shared with me that it was the expectation that was keeping me in pain. It was the expectation of other people changing because I want them to change or I see the opportunity to change and carrying that because I love them so much. That was manifesting and showing up in my body, this tension literally is not in once I've worked the knot out on one side and popped up on the other side.

And, I carried that with me until I had that conversation with him and it clicked. And the next day the pain was gone. It was as if it had never been there. And I'd had that pain all day. All through, it was about eight days that I was carrying that pain with me. It got progressively a little bit better, but it was still there.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Then suddenly it was gone. And it was my revelation that it was my expectation, but it was my ability to reach out for emotional support. And that's one of the great gifts that healthy relationships provide us with. He offered a reframe. He offered a change in my perspective and also just being there and being a trusted advisor and somebody that cares about me and me having the capacity to open myself up and not just be the person who gives, but to also be the person who receives the emotional support.

And that helps to fill our cups because again, it was a challenging year. Shortly thereafter. Right when this happened, right when he passed away, I was about to release a project that I've been working on for two years to help families, to improve the health of our families. And he was a part of that, he was a part of that because this was a cookbook and he was the first experience that I had of witnessing a chef in the real world.

His ability to make something out of nothing in these special food moments is an energy that went into making that book. And I was very dedicated to sharing this because all the unnecessary suffering with our families, with our children in particular, and to lose him right before that. And it was very difficult for me to even mention it even today and not because of sorrow, but because I'm so grateful.

SHAWN STEVENSON: I'm so grateful to have had the opportunities that I had and the exposures that I had, and it was not always, it was not always beautiful. It's not always good. Sometimes it was outright ugly. But I choose to take the good and to multiply it. And that's what this project was, but I found myself struggling to do all that I had set out to do because it was such a layered experience.

Then shortly thereafter, the book came out, my oldest son who was just turning 23 was moving out. That transition was so rocky and tough, just so much was changing at one time. And then, another thing and another thing, and it was book ended. And what inspired part of this episode today is book ended with my wife's father passing away.

And, this was a recent thing that happened in our life. And just being there with her, finding a way because it was under really complicated circumstances. Where I had just gotten back from a speaking event out of town, and now we got to try to find these flights to go to the East Coast, to Boston.

And my youngest son was going to come, and suddenly, then he got sick, and then it's just what, he can't come, so who's going to take care? And it was just so many different pieces, but we found a way, and I ended up, I got on that flight with her. And she shared with me that just being there with her, it wasn't anything that I said or did.

It was just my presence because we walked into that memorial and she could barely walk in the door. And she knew that she was going to stand in front of this Kenyan community there in Boston that he was a part of that she didn't personally meet any of these people, maybe one or two of the, near a hundred people that showed up for him and she was going to speak in front of these individuals and represent her life with him when she was younger, because she lived within the household, with him till, we'll just say till she was around 13. They

amicably parted ways. The mother and father, he went to the East coast and had created a new life, but she was there to represent who she knew him to be and the best of him and she was of course, carrying some worry about it. And she said to me, actually she didn't say this to me. I heard her talking to people on the phone and sharing this. She shared that when she walked up there on that stage on the, behind the podium, that just seeing me sitting there in the pews, sitting there made her feel like everything was going to be okay. Okay. And she had the confidence in her voice when she spoke.

SHAWN STEVENSON: And I just wanted to be there. That's it. I didn't know how much that would mean to her. And so I'm saying all this to say that it is the emotional support through life's challenges, through life's transitions, through the tough stuff, through the day to day stuff, right? Just being able to have that emotional support is part of what keeps us healthy.

It's what enables us to be who we are. to process challenges and grief and stressors and to potentially adapt and come back better. But it's a part of it. We cannot carry all this unresolved stress because it will literally tear us apart from the inside out. And so that's another one of the things that they noted in this massive study was the importance of that emotional support.

Now, we mention information that we get from our social relationships. We mentioned emotional support. They also talked about another thing that our relationships give us to help us to process stress, which is tangible things. So this is the third thing that our relationships give us to help us to process stress, which is tangible things.

We can be in service to others in the physical world and others can do things for us in the physical world. Sometimes a relationship can solve a problem or take care of something challenging for you. For example, a sudden childcare need can be supported with a relationship. And just leaning back into my wife's father passing away and suddenly having a childcare need.

I was able to call on my oldest son. And he was able to be there with his little brother. Also I was able to call on my community. I've got some really good friends.

One of them being my friend Jay and his amazing wife Valerie. But I was able to hit up Jay and just to keep an eye out for my son, for my youngest son Brayden. Just while, his big brother was working, if he needed anything Jay was right around the corner and Jay's probably listening right now.

So Thank you. A sudden child care need A sudden expense, a relationship could take care of these things and support us when these things happen. One of the things that I was able to witness that I'd never seen, I'd heard the term, I'd heard my wife talk about it, but there's this principle in her culture.

SHAWN STEVENSON: In the Kenyan culture of Harambe and individuals coming together to support each other in times of need. And so as with when my father passed away, I bear that burden of taking care of all the financial pieces because that's my assumed role in the family. And so I assumed that's what was going to be needed here as well and I was trying to find extra ways to make sure that we can take care of whatever needs to be taken care of because it was his wishes to be buried back home in Kenya. So I was like, I don't know what this is going to cost. I'm going to figure it out. But the community came together. I couldn't, I got to see it firsthand.

I was just blown away. Every member of this Kenyan community there with him. Contributed a hundred dollars, at least everybody's just a contribute a hundred dollars, several hundred people. I never seen anything like that. Every expense was taken care of and we could just focus on being there and healing.

So, when things come up in our lives, these sudden expenses, our relationships can sometimes just take care of those things for us. And we can take care of things for other people. It's just one of those other tangible things that our relationships can provide us with that help us to process stress. Also our relationships can be, again, physical action in the world can act as advocacy for us. Maybe it's for a job, maybe it's for admission into a school especially in situations with equal qualifications, a personal relationship can make all the difference in the world. There was a time for somebody like myself coming from where I come from and really again, working to figure things out on my own.

I was psychologically against the sentiment that it's not what you know, it's who you know. I was against that. I was against that. It shouldn't be about who you know. It should be about becoming the best person possible for this particular thing. So I was like If this sentiment of, it's not what you know, it's who you know, is the principle, I'm just going to know so much, it's not going to matter.

SHAWN STEVENSON: I'm just going to know so much. I'm just going to focus on learning and learning. But today, yes, absolutely. We must invest in becoming the type of person that can be put in position when those relationships enable them to, yes, qualify ourselves. Humans, we are social dynamic creatures being a part of a community and our relationships are what make us who we are.

And I was denying that part, subconsciously because my relationship structure growing up was so fractured and uncertain, but that is the greatest gift that I've received. Even doing this show for these 11 years, that's the greatest gift and I would not have thought I started this show to be in service to others.

SHAWN STEVENSON: I started this show to ensure that people are getting the education that they were not getting from their healthcare provider, that they were not getting from their conventional education because I come from those things. I received a conventional college education. I was not taught what real health is.

That was my mission, but what I received from it, it wasn't the peace of mind knowing that I'm making a difference. Yes, that was huge. It was the relationships, the good that came back to me in the form of good people, that I can't even tell you, I can't even tell you how overjoyed and grateful I am for that.

But it came in the form of people, which again, I would not have expected that. So other life needs that can be supported tangible things through our relationships are things like food, shelter, transportation. Relationships can provide all these very real, very tangible things that again help us to adapt and process stressors.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Now something else that our relationships can provide us with in the tangible sense is providing us with physical presence and physical touch. We have a plethora of studies affirming how healthy and supportive physical touch can improve brain health, immune system function, and reduce stress. For instance, a study cited in the journal Psychoneuroendocrinology took 67 women between the ages of 20 and 37 who'd been married or cohabitating with a significant other for at least one year at the time of the study.

Before exposing the women to a psychosocial laboratory stressor, participants were randomized into three groups. One group received verbal support from their partner. One group received positive physical touch from their partner. And the other group received no interaction with their partner prior to the stress exposure.

After completing the study, the researchers found that the women who received positive physical touch from their partners prior to the stressor had significantly lower levels of cortisol and significantly lower heart rate than the participants who received positive vocal affirmation or no support at all.

Physical touch matters. It makes more of a difference than anything else in the context of stress. Again, according to numerous studies, this was just a really well done randomized controlled trial. Again, it's also critical to the function of our immune system. Scientists at UCLA examined how the immune system changed over time in people who were socially isolated.

SHAWN STEVENSON: They observed a change in the genes that socially isolated immune systems were expressing. Genes that were overexpressed in lonely individuals included many that are involved in immune system hyperactivity and inflammation. In addition, Several key gene sets were underexpressed in these individuals including those involved in antiviral responses and antibody production.

So again, this physical touch component truly does help us to metabolize and adapt to stress. From the level of our brain health to the level of our endocrine system and our stress response and even our immune system response. And a little sidebar for immune system function from a nutrition perspective, because just coming back from these travels is something I always travel with to make sure that I'm supporting my immune system.

And I want to make sure that you and your family are utilizing this because it just freaking works and it's so simple. And actually this was highlighted in a meta analysis published in Annals of Clinical Biochemistry titled, Electrolyte Imbalances in Patients with Severe, Coronavirus disease, and it analyzed five different studies with nearly 1500 patients with COVID 19 and found that both sodium and potassium were significantly lower in patients with severe side effects and improving people's electrolytes dramatically improves recovery. This is known. This is well known in the hospital setting. It's one of the things that patients get. They get IV electrolytes, but this isn't something that we need to be severely ill to extract the benefits from for our immune system. And if we're talking about The context of longevity, I've got to add this in here because a peer reviewed study published in the European heart journal titled Sodium Intake, Life Expectancy, and All Cause Mortality revealed, "Observation of sodium intake correlating positively with life expectancy and inversely with All Cause Mortality"

This was shocking to the researchers and the scientific community at large, that higher sodium intake than the conventional beliefs was associated with a longer average life expectancy and reduced all cause mortality. According to this meta analysis, and this was data from 181 countries, but the question should be why?

Sodium is required to help conduct the impulses of our nervous system for our immune cells to communicate. It's required for muscle contractions. It helps our cells, tissues, and even our brain to maintain proper fluid balance. Every activity of our bodies is happening in a water medium and key electrolytes enable for signal transduction and also for our cells to maintain their fluid balance.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Again, everything is happening in a water medium. But without electrolytes, we would simply be California raisins out here. All right. We would not be able to actually hold on to water. Now, the most important of these key electrolytes shown in peer reviewed data are sodium, potassium, and magnesium, and also coming in the optimal ratios of each of those because all salt is not created equal by the way.

The electrolyte that I use has no sugar, no artificial dyes, and it's now the preferred electrolyte drink for dozens of professional sports teams, including those in the NFL, MLB, the list goes on and on. It's just really gaining a lot of traction because of the old paradigm of electrolyte beverages that were littered with sugars and artificial dyes.

Those days are over. Now, of course, I'm talking about the electrolytes from LMNT. Go to drinklmnt.com/model, and you're going to get hooked up with a free sample pack with any electrolyte purchase. Now, of course, they've got their original electrolyte mix, but now they also have these incredible electrolyte sparkling waters that are also performance beverages.

And so if you're wanting something cold to sit around and kick back, hang out with your family, or just, again, a great performance beverage, definitely check out the new sparkling electrolyte waters as well. And with any purchase, you're going to get a free sample pack. Sample pack. And as always LMNT has a, no questions asked money back guarantee. So you have nothing to lose and better hydration to gain. Go to drinklmnt.com/model to take advantage.

SHAWN STEVENSON: And now moving on, we covered how these researchers disclosed that it is our relationships that help us to process, to metabolize and to adapt to stress. So that was number one, moving on to number two of what they found in the research of why relationships help us to live longer, healthy relationships, Number two is that social relationships provide encouragement and modeling.

They noted that social relationships appear to be protective of health through means that are not necessarily intended to be helpful, or even supportive to other people directly. For instance, the researchers stated, quote, Social relationships may directly encourage or

indirectly encourage. Model healthy behaviors, thus being part of a social network is typically associated with conformity to social norms, relevant to health and self-care unquote.

So it's the modeling or the encouragement to take care of oneself that can come from our social relationships. And some of the most long lived people on planet Earth have communities and social norms that involve physical movement. Strength and mobility. For example, in one of the renowned blue zones that have some of the highest numbers of centenarians, these are people living a hundred years and beyond, and people living longer overall than anywhere else is Okinawa, Japan. And this is where they have some social norms that really stand out. One of them is the practice of sitting on the floor in Okinawa. People traditionally sit on the floor to read, eat, talk, and relax rather than sitting in chairs. Older Okinawans sit and get up from the floor dozens of times per day.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Now, as strange as this might sound, this is actually another hallmark of Okinawa for extending our lifespan. A study published in the European journal of preventative cardiology titled Ability to Sit and Rise from the Floor as a Predictor Of All Cause Mortality revealed how the ability to sit and rise from the floor is a significant predictor of mortality in people between the ages of 51 to 80. It was so telling in the data how important this ability is that every unit increase in their score i. e. Improvement in being able to do this act of sitting down and getting up off the floor. Every unit increase in their score led to an additional 21 percent improvement in their survivability. All right, so we're talking about survivability when somebody has a fall, when somebody experiences a cardiovascular event or a digestive illness, whatever the case might be, every unit increase in their ability to sit on the floor and to get up is a boost in 21 percent more survivability.

Now the question is why? This just seems very strange. Sitting on the ground is something humans evolved to do. In many ways, it's something our genes expect from us for the expression of various aspects of mobility. How we move and how we sit our data inputs sitting on the ground engages muscles, ligaments, tendons and more in certain ways that translate to more functionality while not sitting and the practical action of sitting down and getting up off the floor increases strength increases flexibility and mobility. Again, this simple act translates to so many other aspects of a healthy daily life. And that's what it's really about. It's the ability to take care of oneself. It is improving our overall survivability.

Now, combine this social input from folks in Okinawa and other parts of the world as well. Going back to, my wife's culture, and she's got these pictures of her grandmother sitting on a stool that is literally like the leg of the stool is one inch. All right. So she's practically doing a wrestling squat, making chapati. All right. So just being that close to the ground, even in her will be considered senior years and understanding this has been done by humans forever. But

if we combine this activity with the social activities that we can do on the floor, like eating together, Like just hanging out and talking, playing games, relaxing, enjoying entertainment.

And this is a social norm that other cultures thrive with that we can choose to model this behavior ourselves. So this is something you'll see. I mentioned my friend Jay a little bit earlier when Jay was over for the Super Bowl. He saw me I'm sitting on the floor hanging out. We watch the Super Bowl.

SHAWN STEVENSON: It's not that weird But if we're going out to a restaurant, all right, I'm not gonna be like I bring my food to the floor, please. All right. I'm not we don't got to be super weird with it, but the more that we can get that input from the ground, and we did a great episode with biomechanist Katie Bowman that you can actually check out right here that details how remarkable it is and all the different health inputs that sitting on the floor provides. It's a very powerful for many aspects of human health. So definitely check that one out as well. But to drive this point home, whether we're sitting on the floor or not . It is understanding that we are being encouraged and we're being influenced by the activities of our relationships, by how the people in our lives are living.

There's been a great discovery and debate about mirror neurons. for many years now. And these are essentially neurons in the human brain that are simulating us, that are modeling, that are simulating us doing the things that we're witnessing. Now there's different degrees of how that actually works. And we're still working to figure that out. But we do know that one of the earliest forms of learning from human babies or just really any species is mimicry is just simply copying what they're witnessing. And the question is, how are we doing that? How are we able to be taskmasters? All right. Shout out to the Marvel universe.

So that's the, that's a deep cut right there. If you know about taskmaster. But how are we able to model things is because of these really incredible neurons and just really the way that our systems are wired up and how they sync up with other people. So this is one of those things for us to emphasize healthy social bonds.

Who are we being influenced by? This doesn't mean that the people around us need to be super influential, doing all the stuff that we want them to do to encourage us, but it's making a conscious choice to make sure that we're getting ourselves around people that we want to model their behavior. And that's why I created this, The Model Health Show.

It's to provide that outlet if you don't have that in your life, allow me the space and the opportunity to provide a little bit of that solace, a little bit of something to aspire towards a

little bit of encouragement and inspiration and love and all those other things. And also understanding health isn't just one thing, right?

Model Health isn't just one thing. It isn't just food. It isn't just exercise. Yes. Those things matter. Isn't just sleep. But our relationships in particular, all these different things create our own unique health blueprint. And so find that however we can, right? So if that's like plugging into, you know, somebody that you trust and you learn from and provides inspiration, even if you're in the most dire circumstances, When I was living in Ferguson, Missouri, that's when I found out about Dr. Mark Hyman and I was just shocked. I was shocked that there was an MD out here saying blatantly that you can reverse type 2 diabetes. It was, you couldn't really say that. It wasn't something that was considered to be "curable". But he was saying it and he was showing the data and showing what he's done with his patients.

And so I was just shocked. Because all I knew at the time was that once you get a diagnosis for these chronic conditions, you got to live with them forever. That was the paradigm that I was coming from and witnessing that within my own family. Now I'm grateful to say that he is a great friend and colleague.

SHAWN STEVENSON: And just like, how is that even possible? Me living in Ferguson, Missouri, and having my mattress on the floor, to having a great friend and colleague who I was just, around I was spending time with virtually to be in my life today, that's the power of focus because I want to implore today and one of the big takeaways is I want to remind you how powerful that you are to have the relationships that you desire and deserve we tend to just get right into That's good for you Or that's not possible for me or it's like this for me and you don't understand You I know about that because I come from that.

And I also know that we have the ability to change things and start to see something different. Start to have a new vision on what our lives can look like. The relationships that we have in our lives, what those things can look like. This does not mean that it's not going to require work. All right. Just to be clear.

All right. We don't have a suddenly the genie, the lamp shows up, and it's, whether it's the, the Robin Williams version or the Will Smith version, the Will Smith one might slap you. I don't know. All right. Whatever genies popping out the bottle and suddenly I've got these perfect relationships.

It doesn't work like that. All right. Now that was crazy, but I just, that was crazy, but it's something that's going to require us to change as well. Because we need to become the type of person that can not just have those things, but to sustain them. And what that really is, the

most important quality, is simply becoming a person who chooses to grow now, I cannot talk about Okinawa and I cannot talk about Japan without talking about one of their other great gifts that they have within their culture that they're also providing for the rest of us. And there is a practice. There's a deeply embedded ritual and cultural norm of drinking tea, specifically drinking tea together.

And people that travel to that part of the world who and who live in that culture. They know that just going to different places. You're getting served tea. But there's a specific tea that's actually made by a Japanese tea master. All right? Now there's only like 15 Japanese tea masters in the entire world that is centered around longevity, that is centered around brain health and cognitive function is one of those other secrets that shouldn't be a secret ingredient in the longevity scene in the culture in Japan. Now, of course, you know about green tea. Green tea contains a really remarkable amino acid called L theanine that's able to cross the blood brain barrier and to interact and engage with GABA in our brain and nervous system, which helps to reduce anxiety and makes us feel more centered and relaxed.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Now, another way that L theanine works to improve our focus is noted in the peer reviewed journal Brain Topography. The researchers observed that L theanine intake increases the frequency of our alpha brain waves, indicating reduced stress, we already talked about the impact of stress, enhanced focus, and even increased creativity.

Now, I'm talking about, again, it's crafted by a Japanese tea master. It's going beyond. The norm of just green tea. This is sun goddess matcha green tea from Piquelife It's the first matcha that's quadruple toxin screen for purity There's no preservatives sugar artificial sweeteners. None of that stuff.

Just the very best matcha green tea in the world If you would like to enjoy this incredible matcha green tea head over to piquelife.com/ model That's PIQUELIFE.com/model. Not only are you going to get up to 15 percent off, you can also access things like free shipping, bonus sample packs of their award winning teas and tea flavors.

And other bonuses as well. So definitely head over to check them out. piquelife.com/model. Now, of course, Okinawans are known for their sitting culture and how they're sitting, but they're also known for being active and involved in their community, which leads us to the third data point that the researchers addressed.

Number three is that our social relationships give us purpose and meaning. The scientist noted that being part of a social network gives individuals meaningful roles that provide self

esteem and purpose in life. It gives people a "WHY" to live. It gives people a why to get up in the morning and to live life.

And their genetic expression responds accordingly. Our thoughts and our beliefs deeply impact our biology. Every thought that we think creates correlating chemistry in our bodies that inherently function as an epigenetic controller. Now, I'm not just saying this. This is coming from leading cell biologist and one of the fathers of epigenetics, Dr. Bruce Lipton, and he shared that With me right here on The Model Health Show. So again, that's another great resource to check out As well in addition to this because his work studying the biology of belief is showing that Our thoughts and our beliefs supersede other Inputs that influence our genetics like our diet Like exercise like sleep all those things matter But he shared with me that our thoughts and beliefs are the most powerful game changers when it comes to our health expression.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Now specifically our beliefs about ourselves, our sense of value, our feeling of purpose and meaning in our lives creates associated hormones, neurotransmitters, and other chemistry that create a life affirming environment in and around ourselves and having a sense of purpose in many ways directs ourselves towards living.

In a recent study conducted by researchers at Boston University School of Public Health found that having a purpose lowers the risk of all causes of death, regardless of race, gender, ethnicity, and several other factors. But here's something interesting. They found the effects were even more pronounced among women. Could this be one of the reasons why women tend to live longer on average than men? It's tied to that sense of purpose. The study included over 13, 000 adults over the age of 50, and it was co funded by the NIH. The analysis revealed that people with the strongest sense of purpose lowered their risk of premature death by 15. 2 percent compared to people with the least sense of purpose. Again, it's a powerful epigenetic influence. Now these three components of why our relationships are so impactful on how long we're going to live and how long we're going to live healthfully. Again, our social relationships impact us in helping us to metabolize and process our and adapt to stress.

Our relationships provide encouragement and modeling, and our relationships give us a sense of purpose and meaning. These three things are just scratching the surface. There are so many other aspects of why our relationships are so impactful on our lifespan and our health span. As a matter of fact, the director of the longest running longitudinal study on human health and longevity at Harvard University is the fourth director to have this baton passed to him.

The study has been going on for about 80 years. It's an incredibly massive data set. He shared with me that the number one thing from his data that he was skeptical of, and He came into this not just believing the former director, he went and analyzed massive amounts of data himself. He went to other institutions, looked at other studies like the one we just covered as well, and it was clear to him and shocking and changed his life.

That the number one determinant on how long we're going to live is the quality of our relationships, what he called healthy social bonds. When I asked him, point blank, Why is it that our relationships, our healthy relationships help us to live a longer life, more so than anything else? He reiterated that point that healthy relationships appear to extend our lifespan by helping us to metabolize stress.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Now, additionally, what has come forth in multiple conversations with these experts since then is that our relationships are so impactful on our health because they are the number one influence on our lifestyle and health related choices. Our relationships are likely the most impactful thing on what you eat.

Our relationships are likely the most impactful thing on whether or not you exercise, what type of exercise you do. Our relationships are the most impactful thing on our sleep quality, right? The list goes on and on. Our relationships are really the governing force that are influencing all those other things.

It's really the tip of the spear. And so if you've ever, if you've ever lived with someone, you've, you've ever had a significant other, you shared the bed with a significant other is going to impact your sleep habits. My wife. She don't want to go to bed. All right. If she was left to her own devices, let me go out of town.

Guess what she going to do? She going to stay up. She going to have my boys stay up. All right. That just happened when I went to Austin, guess what they did? Stayed up. All right. That's her, that's her blueprint, for her coming into this relationship. And so over time we found a way to mesh that.

All right. So people have different personalities. You got to work that stuff out so that you can co habitate and be able to blend and build a life with the people that you want to build a life with. And you know, different behaviors in the process of sleep, all these things can influence our sleep quality.

SHAWN STEVENSON: So again, that's one of the reasons it's so overlooked. For so many people, their connection to exercise is through their influence of other people. It's the same for me. I might enjoy working out by myself, for example, lifting weights by myself. I've done it countless times, but it was a relationship that sparked it.

The friend in my neighborhood, shout out to my guy, Jeff, he owns this incredible gym now. He is elite. And who would have known? We were little kids just like playing, it just, we just went out. We just went outside. It was great. We just go outside, do all this stuff, playing football when it snows in the Midwest.

You know, we, every holiday is to tackle football when, when the snow comes. All

right. It was crazy. We shouldn't have been doing that. It's crazy. Playing basketball for hours on end and just living life. But he's the first person to take me to a gym, right? He's like 15, 16 years old. He had weights. My first weight set I got from him.

Cause he got the new stuff. So I gave him a couple of dollars, a couple of dollars and was able to get those weights in my basement. And so that was sparked from a relationship and relationships over the years have furthered my education and my advocacy and my implementation of that. And my relationship with my wife, we spent so many hours training together, my relationship with my kids, so many hours training together. So again, we, I'm saying this to say that we don't want to be like, I don't need a relationship to influence me to exercise. Cause stop it. Where'd you even learn about, where'd you even get the idea to do that?

SHAWN STEVENSON: It's going to be sparked by our relationships and those influences in our life. And so again, that is. One of the most powerful things for us to focus on. That's why if we focus on healthy relationships, so many other things tend to work out and makes the other stuff easier. But nobody said the relationships were going to be easy to build because many of us come into this with very fractured and misconstrued ideas about what healthy relationships look like.

Especially if you don't have modeling for that. And so I want to provide you with, here to close things out, some very practical tips to help you to build and support healthy relationships, healthy social bonds moving forward. Now the first one, it is very practical and affirmed with science, but it can sound like it's something that you can't grasp because this is a psychological trigger for everything else. And number one is to establish an intention that you want healthy relationships in your life. We have to establish, we have to give our brain and all these different dynamic aspects of our brain, whether it's the reticular activating

system, the reticular cortex, whatever internal GPS that helps us to filter out things and focus on discovering and seeing what we want.

We have to feed ourselves. We have to provide the destination on where we want to go. The GPS doesn't work if you don't tell it where you want to go. So that's why you have to establish an intention that this is what you want. Be honest with yourself. Be courageous and state that this is what you want.

Set an intention. Set an intention. So this might, you might have a great intimate relationship, but maybe you want a great, like new friend, maybe you don't have like a bestie. Maybe life changes have happened or whatever. Maybe some drama, whatever. But you want to have a new person that can do the, whatever, the bestie stuff with, right?

Or having a great working relationship, whatever that looks like, whatever you feel like you want to have or want more of, set an intention.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Number two, if we want to create great relationships and we don't know exactly how it works, we think it's just supposed to happen. The chemistry is there, chemistry, if you know it, listen.

Billions of humans have experienced good chemistry at some point, but chemistry changes. That's the nature of chemistry. All right So it just doesn't automatically happen all the time just because of good chemistry or it's the stars are aligned or whatever the cards, the the whether it's the tarot cards or Gambits cards, whatever the cards are That doesn't necessarily translate to all this relationship is supposed to just work out.

And so with that being said, if we're serious about building and maintaining healthy relationships, we have to make it a study. We have to learn how to do it. Many of us, again, we just have this thing. We're just like, it's just supposed to work. I was just supposed to happen. Why should I have to tell you? Why should I have to, why should I have to learn?

If you value it, you make it a study, anything that's worth enjoying in life, anything that's worth having, we should learn something about it. All right. So make it a study. There are some wonderful books, they're wonderful episodes of The Model Health Show.

We've covered relationship dynamics many times but make it a study.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Number three in these tips to build and support healthy social bonds. Number three is to keep it real. Keep it real. You ain't keeping it real. You ain't keeping it gangster. Keep it real. There's two meanings here. Number one, keep it in the real world.

Now, this does not mean completely. Social media can be a great supplement. It can be a great igniter. It can be a great support for relationships, but we need each other in the real world as much as we can. Now, we have different types of relationships where we might not see a loved one for certain amounts of time.

And we have these incredible innovations that can help keep that connection going, but we have to have in our lives. real physical contact, real close relationships with people. There are so many things that we can, we evolved with these things. They don't simply disappear just because we have a smartphone.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Our genes expect us to connect with people in the real world. So keep it real to the best of your ability. And also, of course, keep it real with each other. It's another important aspect of building healthy social bonds. Keep it real with each other. Authenticity, being who you are, is one of the most important things.

You don't want to come into these relationships, what we tend to do again we, we bring forth our best self, our representative, and we like, you know, we meet a person who's like, they don't even know how weird I am. All right. They don't even know that I've got like three pairs of socks on right now.

It's just I'm just like that. All right. The strange things about us the unique quirks and all the different things, these are things for us to share and to be open about, right? To be authentic. And also having the audacity to, when I say keep it real, to keep it honest and to communicate and to share, how we're feeling, to share, who we are, what our desires are, what we want, our expectations, our standards, all these different things to communicate.

All right. So that everybody at least is aware of who everyone is, right? There's so much, there's so much hiding.

There's so much hiding and unless you're playing hide and seek. And by the way, the fun part of hide and seek, eventually you want somebody to find you or like to be able to pop out. I wanted something. You don't want to hide forever. What is that?

The whole dynamics with Hide and Seek, it's a game. You want to be able to reveal yourself to have fun. And yeah, so keep it real. Real world and also keep it real with yourself and with others. Really lean into authenticity. Number four is to listen. to learn and to grow.

One of the most powerful statements that really helped me to cultivate the relationships that I have was from Saint Francis of Assisi. And the statement was, seek first to understand and then to be understood. Seek first to understand and then to be understood. So often we're wanting to be acknowledged. We're wanting to get our point across. We want our understanding to be the understanding without understanding the other person. And we've got to understand that we are two different, unique people that have different perspectives and have lived completely different lives. Even if it's been lived together, you're seeing through a completely different point of view.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Taking that into account and seeking first to understand, create a space where the other individual feels seen and feels understood. All right. What tends to happen is that is reflected on us, especially in the context of a healthy relationship. We will be able to be more seen to feel more seen because that person we're not seeking to get something from them.

We're providing them with something. And that tends to be reciprocated. All right. Listen, listen, it's probably the most important active quality in a relationship is to be present and to listen, to be able to be there for somebody to express themselves, to just talk, to vent. But also again, just to feel seen and heard.

So this is listen, learn, it's going to be a lot of learning and grow. And with that growth, usually it comes in the form of, different things that we might not expect, you know, different challenges and obstacles. And of course, there's going to be a lot of growth through, through love and positive things as well.

But we've got to understand that a healthy relationship does not mean. That it's a relationship without conflict and without challenges. Because again, we're talking about different individuals, different human beings with different experiences and different perspectives. And the director of the longest running longitudinal study on longevity, Dr. Robert Waldinger. Here's what he shared with me about conflict and relationships.

SHAWN STEVENSON: We know that our relationships obviously have a huge influence on our lives. But I think we have this very romantic idea about relationships, you complete me and the whole thing, but what actually constitutes a good relationship? And I think it's going to be surprising for people because we think super smooth sailing, no problems.

DR. ROBERT WALDINGER: No, no. In fact, we found that like many of our most stable couples fought like cats and dogs. But the difference, so it wasn't the amount of arguing you did, it wasn't even the amount of anger. What it was when we actually watched couples on video having an argument, it was whether you could see a bedrock of affection and respect, even when people were arguing.

What we know about the best relationships is, first of all, there are always disagreements. Always. And, The question is how do we manage those disagreements? Can we find ways to work out those inevitable conflicts? I want this and you want that. Always going to happen. The question is can we find a way to work things out so that neither of us feels like we've won or lost?

That we both feel okay about each other and ourselves when we emerge from working out a conflict? That's the key. Not whether disagreements happen because those are always going to happen.

SHAWN STEVENSON: So again, this does not mean if we're talking about having healthy Relationships healthy social bonds that they're going to come with this pristine Packaging and you're not going to have any turbulence that's going to happen.

But it's as he mentioned having that solid underlying foundation that bedrock of love of trust of affection and that goes a long way. And so In closing, the final one of these tips in building and supporting healthy social bonds. Number five is to make it a priority. Make it a priority. There are so many things on our schedule that matter far less to us than our relationships do.

That matter far less to us than our family. Now not to say to remove those other things from the calendar, but Isn't your family, isn't your friends, aren't the people who you care about equally or more important than the other stuff on your calendar? Then why are they not on your calendar? Schedule it if you need to, if that's how your brain works.

Put it on the calendar, start to schedule some things out. Whether that's the, weekly, bi weekly, monthly date night, date day, whether that is family dinners, whether that is brunch, with your, with your family or brunch with friends or hikes with your friends, colleagues, whatever the case might be.

Make it a point every single week, put something on your calendar that is about your relationships. Make it a priority.

SHAWN STEVENSON: I appreciate you so very much for tuning into this episode today. I hope you got a lot of value out of this. If you did, please share this out with the people that you care about. Of course, you can send this directly from the podcast app that you are listening on or send this out on social media, you know, take a screenshot of the episode and tag me.

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