



EPISODE 827

The Truth About Protein Supplements, Alcohol, & Fat Loss

With Guest Alan Aragon

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SHAWN STEVENSON: Can protein supplements like branched chain amino acids and protein powders really make a difference with your body composition? Is it possible to build muscle and burn fat at the same time? What's the real metabolic impact of drinking alcohol? We're covering these topics and so much more with one of the world's leading research scientists today.

He's one of the very first people to publish research reviews and educate the general public about published science. I'm talking about the one and only Alan Aragon. Alan Aragon is a nutrition researcher and educator with over 30 years of experience in the field. He's known as one of the most influential figures in the fitness industry's movement towards evidence based information. His notable clients include world champions like Derek Fisher, Pete Sampras, Stone Cold Steve Austin, and countless everyday individuals looking to improve their health and fitness. His work has been published in major peer reviewed scientific journals and of course, tons of major media as well. Let's dive into this conversation with the one and only Alan Aragon.

First of all, thank you for coming out in a 108 degree weather. All right It's crazy. Like we thought summer was over here in LA and then the heat was like no Wait, I got something for you. So thank you man. I know it's a lot.

ALAN ARAGON: It's such an honor to be here, man. Honestly, thank you so much for inviting me.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Of course So obviously the diet wars the past couple of decades have really revolved around carbohydrates and fats, right? That's where the primary conversation has been. And nutritionists and the public alike are just having these battles. But protein has been like a footnote, during this time. But now there's this big resurgence and so many incredible studies are being conducted. And the very best people in the field of nutrition are really shouting from the rooftops the importance of protein. And the importance had never left but I love to start this conversation by talking about why that is. Why is protein making such a resurgence in the health conversation right now.

ALAN ARAGON: Okay, so protein kind of is the MVP of the macronutrients, if I can hype it up. It is both underrated and overrated. So it's overrated in the sense that the fitness and bodybuilding community probably consumes a little more than what's required to maximize muscle growth. However, in people's overconsumption and high balling of protein, the sort of

unforeseen side effect is fat loss. And this is some really interesting research that Jose Antonio and his colleagues have spearheaded, and there's four to five studies now, depending on whether you want to count the fifth one as a study. It's a case study. They have been feeding folks pretty much between above three grams per kilogram of body weight.

So like a gram and a half per pound and beyond. Right around that amount, three, sometimes up to four. And interestingly, when you take a group of people on a resistance training program, so resistance trained subjects, relatively athletic, at least recreationally athletic. And you tell them, okay, just maintain your habits, but we're going to add 50 to 100 grams of protein on top of your current habits. Really interesting thing happens. They don't gain any total body weight. Their body composition doesn't significantly change. The protein just seemingly disappears, but obviously it doesn't disappear. So either that happens, either nothing at all happens, or they lose fat. It's and the other interesting part about the fat loss part is it has been accompanied in one study by a slight gain in lean mass.

So the whole recomposition phenomenon, the increase in lean mass and reduction of fat mass simultaneously has happened as a result of just kicking protein up to these high ball levels like over a gram per pound up to about a gram and a half. Per pound of body weight. So that's some really interesting research done by Jose Antonio and he's replicated it several times. I want to qualify that and temper that research because people will say, okay, so are you telling me that I can't get fat by just adding protein to the diet? Not exactly. This was a very specific free living set of conditions with resistance trainees, and they just happened to either improve body composition or maintain it as a result of just stacking protein on top of their habits. Now when you put sedentary subjects in a highly controlled setting, which George Bray did 10 ish years ago, and compared escalating amounts of protein in hyper caloric conditions, highly controlled, no training metabolic ward type conditions.

Then body fat was gained along with these escalating doses of protein that I believe went up to three, 3.5 grams per kilogram, something like that. So when people are not training and they're tightly controlled conditions and they're sedentary, not resistant training subjects, different things can happen and protein can facilitate fat gain if it's, if it contributes to an unused caloric surplus. But in free living conditions and resistant trainees, several studies now showing that stacking the protein on just essentially is a good tool for either dieters, who want to take a break from the restrictions of dieting, or people who want to push the recomposition angle.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yeah. So you started this off by saying MVP, most valuable protein, and like this doesn't, this wouldn't make sense just looking at this from this lens of calories just calorie management. Now, obviously we know how important calories are as one of our tools

in managing our diet. But protein seems to do something you said it seems like the energy from it is disappearing in a way.

ALAN ARAGON: Yeah. Yeah. Okay. So the speculation on what happens with this extra in "disappearing protein" is that when people add it to the diet it increases their satiety, so it controls hunger, it reduces hunger, makes them feel full. And then there's this subconscious reduction in the rest of the macronutrient intake in the diet. And that's one thing that could possibly be happening. And then the other thing that could possibly be happening is an increase in energy expenditure, either through exercise pathways or non exercise pathways or both. And so with that combination of increased satiety and increased energy expenditure, you basically have a reduction of energy in and an increase of energy out. You're sneakily and by default influencing the energy equation towards weight loss and fat loss. By adding protein. So it's an interesting kind of phenomenon that goes on.

SHAWN STEVENSON: And what about the energy expenditure, digesting the protein?

ALAN ARAGON: That too. If you compare diets that are drastically different in protein. Protein is just going to have a higher energetic or metabolic cost of processing in the body. And so it's just a more calorically expensive diet.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Awesome. Now, again, hearing these markers of where we want to be on this protein spectrum for a lot of people, they find it difficult to get in that amount of protein. Again, active people. They're trying to do all the things, especially if it's coming specifically from whole food forms of protein. And so one of the reasons I want to have you here is to ask you about what about, what about supplementation? What about BCAAs? What about whey protein supplements? Can those things be a part of this equation? What is your opinion on them? Does one work better than the other? Should we be leaning more on one? What do you think?

ALAN ARAGON: Okay. So protein supplements, if we're looking at things like whey protein and even some of the plant based proteins, like pea and soy and those kinds of products. They're essentially food. I look at them as just a powdered form of food. And yeah, there's a certain degree of processing that goes in with them. And just from the classification of food types perspective, technically protein powders are an ultra processed food, but really what you're doing is you're taking the most nutrient dense part of milk and you're isolating it away from the milk and you're, Dehydrating it and here you have this highly nutrient dense and overall beneficial food stuff.

I think that protein powders are a really good tool to help people get to optimal protein intakes which are around double the RDA. So like 1.6 grams per kilogram of body weight or about 0.7 grams per pound of ideal body weight or target body weight. And the use of amino acids is an interesting thing you bring up because it's ..

SHAWN STEVENSON: So this is the BCAAs.

ALAN ARAGON: Yeah, BCAAs. Generally speaking, high quality proteins already consist of somewhere between 18 to 26 percent BCAA. As it is way, 26 percent BCAAs. And if you have enough total daily protein, in the diet, then you already have an abundance of branched chain amino acids. And so supplementing branched chain amino acids on top of a pre-existing sufficiency of total daily protein is going to be superfluous.

Okay, but there are some potential applications on the fringes. Of using the full spectrum of essential amino acids. So for the listeners, branched chain amino acids are the most highly anabolic essential amino acids. Leucine, isoleucine, and valine, and then there's six other essential amino acids that make up the full spectrum of the essential amino acids. Now, supplementing with the full complement of EAAs. It's actually more anabolic, more anti catabolic as well compared to just supplementing with leucine or, leucine, valine and isoleucine, the BCAAs. So there's been some research over the years, and some breaking research, showing a higher anabolic response of free form essential amino acids compared to whole intact proteins like whey even the high quality ones like whey.

And so it's more anabolic and you can consume less of it. So when anabolic, I'm talking about how much it stimulates muscle protein synthesis. So muscle protein synthesis is a short term indicator of what over time could result in muscle growth. EAAs are highly anabolic and are very potent at stimulating muscle protein synthesis.

And when you compare a dose of whey versus a much smaller dose of EAA, the EAA can keep up with the two to three times higher dose of whey for stimulating muscle protein synthesis. So there's some interesting stuff in that direction to where we can potentially use EAAs as a tool to help people who either want to consume a really easily digestible substrate for preventing muscle protein breakdown, or stimulating muscle protein synthesis during training. Or to people who just simply have a tough time, and don't like, you know protein powder. And just can't get their total daily protein together and they want to supplement the diet with a small dose of something to be on par with people who are consuming larger amounts of protein. And this idea might apply to you older adults who are at risk for sarcopenia. It might apply to clinical populations and it might apply to athletes who want to push the envelope during a dieting phase.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Man, this is fascinating. So if I had to put you on the spot, which one are you going with? You going with the BCAAs or the whey protein?

ALAN ARAGON: I'm going to go with the whey. I'm going to go with the whey only because the full intact, complete protein like whey, not only does it have all of the essential amino acids, including the branch chain amino acids. But it also has other compounds in it that could potentially benefit health and immunity and, just longevity overall. I would go with whey. Whey is like BCAA plus.

SHAWN STEVENSON: That's powerful. And that's another thing that we don't usually think about or talk about is like the immune factors, right? When we're missing out on some of these other essential amino acids and also I think a big part of this conversation that's happening right now is revealing, it's not just about muscle. It's also about Cell signaling, right? So our hormones getting built like certain peptide hormones, for example. Like we need amino acids to do so many things in our bodies and we could be missing an opportunity to get those in to make stuff. And this is another reason why Protein is so important right now.

We've got a quick break coming up. We'll be right back. There are several types of protein supplements available on the market today, from plant source to animal source. But the vast majority of clinical evidence supporting the benefits of using a protein supplement are from studies done on whey protein. A randomized, double blind study published in the Journal of Nutrition found that overweight test subjects who were instructed to consume whey protein daily for 23 weeks lost more body fat mass, had a greater loss in waist circumference, and a greater reduction of circulating ghrelin levels, which is our major hunger hormone compared to test subjects taking daily soy protein or an isogenic carbohydrate drink. Now what's really interesting about this study is that the test subjects were not instructed to make any other dietary or lifestyle changes. Just adding in more whey protein led to these results. Now, whey protein has actually been utilized.

For centuries, dating back to Hippocrates, the father of modern medicine, he utilized whey protein in his practice and referred to it as quote serum. Now, today folks are utilizing whey protein, mainly in the domain of supporting muscle gain and really leaning into the metabolic benefits. But the key here is making sure that you're getting it from a great source. Ideally, you're going to be looking for grass fed whey, that's easily digestible and highly absorbable and a whey protein that doesn't come along with unnecessary high glycemic sweeteners. And the whey protein that I've been utilizing for years. It's from the incredible folks at Onit, go to onit.com/model.

And you're going to get 10 percent off their incredible grass fed way. That's Onit.com/model for 10 percent off. They also have an incredible plant protein as well. Now, again, the data affirms that. Certain types of plant protein can be effective for supporting metabolic health. It's just that whey tends to outperform everything else. But, if you're looking for a plant based protein, they've got one for you as well. Head over there, check them out. That's Onit.com/model for 10 percent off store wide, including their amazing grass fed whey protein in two incredible flavors. Pop over there and check them out. And now back to the show.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Now this is another thing, and this is so cool to have you here, because you've got a lot of experience around this subject matter. Conventionally people that are looking to put on a lot of muscle mass and proactively do that through strength training and through diet. The general framework is to do bulking, right? To bulk up and then to cut. So to spend time putting on muscle and it's accompanied by fat because we tend to, maybe they're overeating. They're just really focused on bulk, "bulking". I'm putting that in air quotes. And then you cut later, "cut". So you bulk and then you cut. Is that really necessary if people are wanting to put on muscle and lose fat, like that's the ultimate goal because usually it's a maze, right? You go through the maze, you do the bulking phase and then the cutting phase later. Is it possible to do both at the same time? Can we gain muscle and burn fat at the same time?

ALAN ARAGON: That is a really good question and it depends on a few things. Number one, it depends on your starting training status and body composition status. So we'll build an individual who really does not need to focus on a bulking cycle followed by a cutting cycle and so on and so forth. So we'll say that this person has an extra or excessive amount of body fat and they are either untrained. Or they're deconditioned and haven't trained in a number of years.

Okay, so overweight or overfat, untrained or deconditioned. This person doesn't necessarily need to have a dedicated bulking cycle. They just, just relative maintenance for total caloric intake. Optimize the macronutrient targets within that maintenance framework, and just train progressively. And then watch yourself go through recomposition. And just progressively resist and strain. Make your gains slow and steady gains in strength as you add volume to the program. And without hurting yourself. And basically watch the body composition improvements happen. Okay, so that's person A.

Alright, so if we go all the way to the other side of the spectrum, person B. Who would benefit from bulking and cutting cycles, is somebody who their starting training status is high. So they have a high training age, they're relatively close to their potential. They're not closing in on their potential, but they're further along in their potential for muscular gain.

And not only that, but they are, they don't have the body fat to spare. They're already relatively lean. We take this person. It might be more productive for this guy who's closer to his potential in both leanness and muscle size to do dedicated bulking cycles and dedicated cutting cycles so he could focus on one goal at a time.

And this person, person B, this highly trained person who's lean will inevitably have to put on some body fat during the bulking phase and an acceptable amount of body fat. This is arbitrary, but it's just based on observation. It's not a big deal for every two pounds of muscle that you gain to gain a pound of fat and up to two pounds of fat. A one to one ratio at most of lean mass gain and fat gain during a bulking cycle. Preferably, of course, pie in the sky. You'd want to be just 100 percent lean, but the reality of it is in more advanced trainees. You're looking at a two to one ratio of lean gain to fat gain during the bulking cycle.

If you do it right and everything goes right and I'm, I wouldn't be upset if somebody is really advanced and during the bulking cycle, they go one to one with fat gain and lean gain. Because heck, when you're really advanced, you really only can put on a quarter pound of muscle a month, a half if you're really lucky. Okay, so that's the first piece is beginning training status and beginning body composition status. Those are two things that'll highly influence whether or not bulking and cutting are productive things to do. And so the next thing that would influence these things are how much room do you have in your program to improve the actual protocol? The actual training protocol and diet protocol and supplement and or supplementation protocol.

So if somebody is already advanced and they have not really looked at, let's say they have advanced training status, but they haven't really taken a look at how to improve their diet in terms of just calories, macronutrition, food selection, and supplementation. If there's room for improvement there, then they don't necessarily need to, push the hypercaloric bulking angle. They can just make improvements there. And, or they can look at their training program and see, okay what kind of deficiencies or suboptimal aspects of my training program have I been just skating on complacently. And maybe I can just make improvements there in that direction and then that would exempt them.

If they have a margin for improvement in training programming, then they wouldn't necessarily have to go, okay, time to bulk before I cut. Because the whole goal of bulking and cutting is to gain muscle and with this almost inevitable level of fat gain for a period of time and then you cut and the goal is to get rid of the fat that you put on while you gain the muscle but keep the muscle. And that is a perfectly fine thing to do and it is a necessary thing to do for more advanced folks.

So the art and science of actually doing that is a whole. Other conversation, but the way that you know, I'm just going to throw this in, the way that you know that you're retaining muscle tissue during the cut is if you can maintain your strength and your lifting capacity, or close to it during the cut compared to when you were bulking. And that way you'll know with relative rough accuracy that, okay, I didn't diet away all the muscle at the same time that I'm losing the fat. So strength, lifting capacity, reps, sets, load would be a proxy for retention of lean mass during the cut.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yeah. That's my next question because you work so hard to try to. Gain this muscle and then to lose it as you're cutting would be catastrophic. Yeah, you know, it's really demoralizing.

ALAN ARAGON: Brutal. Yeah.

SHAWN STEVENSON: So what are a couple of principles that we need to know when we're looking to lean down so that we're not losing our muscle in the process.

ALAN ARAGON: Yeah, aside from making sure that you maintain your lifting capacity, sets reps, load. That you were able to do during the bulking phase while you're cutting. Another way to make sure or at least maximize the probability that you'll retain your lean mass while cutting is to make sure you limit those weekly fat losses or weight losses to about a half a percent to a full percent of your total body weight per week. So for most people that number will be somewhere between one to two pounds a week.

SHAWN STEVENSON: So you don't want to lose weight too fast.

ALAN ARAGON: You don't, you generally don't want to lose more than 1 percent of your body weight per week because if you do that chances are that, you know, getting rid of some lean mass. And so I'm a big proponent of keeping things relatively slow on the cut. There's a time and a place for rapid fat loss and weight loss. And some people can do it without losing lean mass. But the leaner you are, the more highly trained you are, the closer you are to your potential for leanness and or muscle gain. Then the better it is for you to take things slow when you're cutting.

SHAWN STEVENSON: And what about dietarily? Different people are taking different approaches. They've been doing this for decades. But now these two camps are even more polarized. Some people are using a ketogenic protocol for a cut, and then other folks are using a low fat approach for a cut. I know that the emphasis here is probably still on protein

with that being said, but is there a diet framework that you would lean to in this process of cutting?

ALAN ARAGON: So this is a highly individual thing because there's a fair amount of research showing that lower.. Okay. So backing up a couple of steps, when you're cutting calories back to impose an energy deficit for weight loss and fat loss. You're generally, you're pretty much never going to cut from protein. And there is a limit to how much you can take from the fat allotment before you're consuming too low of fat where it can compromise hormone production. Testosterone specifically. And so therefore, carbs are the most expendable part of the diet that you can sacrifice, so to speak, in order to impose this caloric deficit.

So really it comes down to personal preference. Some people really prefer to low ball carbs to the point of ketogenic levels, which would be 50 grams a day or less with carb grams. And they find that it helps them stay more focused and control hunger better and simplify the whole process because they're just, in essence, avoiding carbs. And so it's a simple prescription. Whereas other folks will find that hard to sustain because they just have more of a knack, more of a tendency to want to consume higher carb foods. And for those folks, attacking the fat side of the diet would be a more viable and sustainable thing.

I think that, as long as you consume a minimum of roughly a third of a gram per pound with body fat, with dietary fat, a third of a gram per pound and you don't go below that, then you probably won't be critically compromising your hormone production. And there's no systematic research on this stuff that I'm talking about. This is observational and connecting the circumstantial evidence. But yeah, that's what I would advise, as long as you consume that minimum, you can go keto or you can go not keto. As long as you have protein right and the caloric deficit is in place, you go with personal preference.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Got it. MVP still. Here we go. Yeah. Yeah.

ALAN ARAGON: Pretty much.

SHAWN STEVENSON: There's another macronutrient that definitely doesn't get talked about or even thought of in this context of being a macronutrient, and that's alcohol. Our bodies can use alcohol to run certain processes, but we don't store it like other stuff. There's this really interesting phenomenon of fat sparing, where your body would just jump into action to use the caloric energy you took in from that alcohol. And I'm wondering within this context, because some people, even as they're doing their training, whatnot, they enjoy some alcohol.

Other folks maybe swear it off while they're cutting or, and then after their show, they're doing a bodybuilding thing, and then they have some alcohol afterwards. Let's talk about alcohol. In the context, because obviously there's a caloric impact, but is there any other metabolic impact that alcohol has on us, besides just the calories?

ALAN ARAGON: Okay. Yeah. There's alcohol is quite the web, quite the complex topic. So first of all alcohol is different from the other macronutrients in that it is addictive and it can obviously lead to problems for a concerning proportion of the general population. The statistic is that about 10 percent of the general population has some degree of alcohol use disorder. Now the general population, adults, for the most part. Knowing that one in ten people in any given room has a potential issue with alcohol addiction. That is a concerning statistic. And that right there can impact things like fitness, health, training, quality of life, a full range of things. That has to be taken into consideration.

The other thing about alcohol that makes it different from the other macronutrients, similar to protein in that there's no big storage pool for it in the body, right? The body sees it essentially as a toxin it needs to get rid of. So it has a high thermic effect. So it's on high priority for the body to just oxidize it and get it out. The thing about alcohol is, it has a "disinhibiting effect" in the literature. It's been called the what the hell effect. And in the real world, it's called the ah, eff it effect. And so with alcohol, it basically removes your top speed limiter and your judgment on what you're going to follow that drink up with in terms of the 2am hot wing, deep fried platter in front of you, or the pizzas, or the donuts, or the other foods at, within the presence of alcohol in your disinhibited state.

And that is what kind of gets people who are trying to stick to a certain structure of diet, especially when they're trying to control caloric intake. You basically take the discretion off with alcohol. And depending on who you are, this can happen to a detrimental degree or some people just don't really get affected all that much by it, and they can just discipline themselves to not let it affect them too much. So yeah, those are a couple of the things with alcohol.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Makes sense.

ALAN ARAGON: And oh, this was interesting. The World Health Organization has an arm, they have a partnership with the IARC, the International Association of research on cancer or something like that, the IARC.

SHAWN STEVENSON: I think you nailed it.

ALAN ARAGON: They, okay, the World Health Organization, they're supposed to be an authoritative body. And everybody presumably does their best, right? Despite, whatever lobbying is influencing recommendations here and there. But the WHO has classified alcohol, the IARC of the WHO, has classified alcohol as a class one carcinogen, a category one. And that's right there with asbestos and tobacco and radiation. And the World Health Organization will put out, they recently put out this press release that alcohol is a class one carcinogen. And so, a little amount is better than a lot, but zero is better than a little.

And so there's really this narrative that puts alcohol in a really bad light that was put out by the authoritative World Health Organization and the IARC. But that doesn't apply to well, A, I think that they're just going overboard with that. I think that they haven't done a diligent enough representation of the evidence on the issue of alcohol. And not only that, all alcohol drinks are not created equal. So wine, red wine in particular, is not only neutral on the cancer front, but it actually, there are multiple studies showing anti cancer. effects, anti tumorigenic effects. There's highly tightly controlled experimental mechanistic research showing anti cancer effects.

And, there's population based epidemiological research showing lower incidence prevalence risk of cancer, over time and in these large populations. There's a convergence of experimental data as well as observational slash epidemiological data on red wine. That does not put it in that supposed class one carcinogen category that the IRC painted it out to be. The information out there on alcohol is messy as far as public health messages go, but I will definitely concede that, hey, one out of 10 people is going to have, probably going to have a problem. And that itself is a public health problem. And number two, not all alcohol is created equal and you can't just call it a carcinogen because the IARC did. And number three, everybody's different. So you have to find out, you have to F around it, find out, or, some people do. They're in the find out phase right now. Yeah, it's a complicated web.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yeah. Wow. Thank you. You really articulated a lot of parts we don't think about. That's, and also just that the impact that it has on our brain is in particular the executive function. Our decision making, social control, our choices, and that kind of loss of inhibitions. Our inhibitions are tossed to the side and this just got me thinking about all those times leaving the club and seeing everybody like literally really there and white castles are packed. I don't know about white castles here in LA, but yeah, in the Midwest it's big, you're getting the chicken rings and the sliders and all this stuff.

And it's just, it becomes a whole after party at white castles and just seeing people make these crazy decisions. Eating stuff that you normally wouldn't eat, and this is after, and it's not just because it's 2am and you're hungry. This disinhibition that takes place and we're just

literally not ourselves, right? So you're, the adult in the room is no longer present. And so you're just going to start making choices like a kid a lot of times.

ALAN ARAGON: Yep, yep, you're acting on your primal id. And whatever, malware, bad code you might have floating around in your psyche. It doesn't have those layers of discretion that would be on top there without the alcohol.

SHAWN STEVENSON: You know what else they do? They sit outside the club door with the hot dogs. They do that here in L. A. too. You leave the basketball game, The hot dog guys are out here thick, like they're just ready for you. You want this wiener, you want this. And the potato chips and the sodas and all this stuff that you normally wouldn't consume for a lot of people that are trying to, "stick to diet", you go to the game, have a couple of beers, like your choices start to change. And I think that's a big part of this equation when people think about the phenomenon of what we call a beer belly. For example, it's not like the alcohol is just driving straight to your belly. It's this web, as you called it, of different ingredients that create this manifestation.

ALAN ARAGON: Yeah, absolutely man. And yeah, you're a soft target out there at 2 a. m. with a, for the hot dogs for sure. But yeah, the.. It's hard to be somebody who loves drinking without looking like somebody who loves drinking. Okay. It's hard to be somebody who loves, it's a beer lover, without looking like a beer lover. For the reasons that we discussed. And the concept of alcohol and moderation is a very delicate topic. And because one to two drinks a day is the standard moderate amount for a small person. So the standard moderate amount for a large person, two to three drinks a day. But everybody's different with that one person's three drinks could be another person's six drinks, you know, in terms of how they respond, and in terms of the impact and the consequences of that . Yeah, individual response to alcohol is something that really has to be paid attention to.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Awesome. Thank you for sharing that man, you shared with me that you decided to quit drinking alcohol.

ALAN ARAGON: Yeah.

SHAWN STEVENSON: A few years back.

ALAN ARAGON: Six years ago.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Why did you make that decision?

ALAN ARAGON: Because me and alcohol were a bad mix and we're a bad mix. I'm very much a creature of habit and repetition So that's a good thing for fitness and exercise, and productive habits, but it's a bad thing for things like drinking. And the reason it's particularly bad for drinking alcoholic beverages is because you build a tolerance to the buzz, to the euphoric effects of alcohol over time.

And so in order to hit the same level of buzz, so to speak, that dose just increases over time. You have to increase the dose in order to get the same effect. And so after a certain level of dosing, then you can actually shut down enter a blackout area. So alcoholic blackout is a, it's a phenomenon that's obviously tough to study because you can't just get a group of people and just bleep face them and then just try to measure what's going on and stuff. But alcoholic blackout is a very real phenomenon and it is basically at a stationary level, a stationary dose of intake. And the amount that was required, for me personally, to get the same buzz, my tolerance grew so high to the point that kind of the comfortable buzz was up here and then blackout is right here.

And so I just had to keep drinking more and more to get the same effect. And then after a certain point, and of course with blackout, bad things happen. Bad judgment happens. And I was just one of those, one in 10, who had the perfect storm of who knows, perhaps the right genetic disposition. The right environment and the right, just general habitual conditioning for consuming something. If I like something, I'll have it every day. Like I can have, I love coffee. I can have it every day for the next 80 years and love it, on the 80th year. Same thing with chocolate and eggs. Every day for, until I made it and love it every time. That was the case with alcohol, but the problem was build tolerance of it.

Dose has to go up. Blackout stays at the same spot. And when you, when you start courting that blackout level enough, it's bad physically, obviously for your brain, for your body, for all bodily systems. And then of course, there are relatively obvious risks personally and professionally. And hitting rock bottom is different for everybody. And so my rock bottom six years ago was basically me train wrecking my life and going, Okay, got to make a big change here. And so that big change was, just cut the alcohol out. I didn't like being dependent on it and it felt really good to just take off those shackles, set them down and walk away and say, ah, I don't need that.

So it was an interesting thing, man. So I made a commitment to quitting. And I never went back on that commitment. And now I'm at a spot six years later where I don't even, I don't even crave it. So the first three years were a little tougher in terms of, that would be really cool to have a drink or, just, whether it be socially or like the temptations were a little bit more frequent during the first three years. Like people will warn you, they'll say.

Okay. Yeah, you might feel like Superman, three months in, it's going to, it's going to get you, it's going to hit you. So three months passed. I'm like, I'm good. Three years though, the three year point started thinking what would it be so bad to just be a normal person, moderation and all that.

But then I played the scenario out in my mind. People ask me. How did you not have a single drink for the past six years? What are your tactics? So my tactic is playing the scenario out in my mind of having the drinks and getting the buzz, drinking an amount that would satisfy the craving. I would play that out in my mind and then I would play out, okay, what would happen? Oh, it would wear off. In about two hours, two to three hours, I would still have the calories and I would also potentially have regrets. And then what? And so whenever I play that scenario out in my mind, when I got a craving, it just led me back to the logical conclusion that, okay, I don't need to do that.

And I didn't want to breach my own sense of logic and reason and do something. That I knew would be foolish. So I just sit back, play the scenario out. It worked every time. I know it's gonna be different with everybody. Everybody's story is different. Everybody's battle with alcohol and their triumph over alcohol, how they did it is different.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yeah, thank you for sharing that, man. Was there any noticeable changes with your health as a result?

ALAN ARAGON: Oh, dude, yes. Yes. First of all probably the biggest side effect of quitting cold was insomnia. Because I used alcohol as a band aid for many things. A band aid for anxiety. It's a really good escape from reality. You just numb things out and just tone things down. And so the other thing I used it for was to just get sleepy to go to sleep at night.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yeah, it's a sedative.

ALAN ARAGON: Yep. Yep. And so when you cut that out, Yep. You have to figure out new and creative ways to fall asleep. And so that was one of the things that I had to deal with and get better at was falling asleep. And that took, I don't know, a few months to really overcome and get some normal sleep back. But the other great thing about quitting alcohol for me was that I no longer had the extra thousand alcohol calories a day. So I just instantly improved body composition over the next, over the first several weeks. And then not only that, but training got better, training got more focused, more productive. I had to channel my energies, my, my anxiety. Just my ritualistic efforts. I had to channel it towards something else.

So I channeled it towards training. And so when you get into a consistent and good training routine, it has this sort of bi directional effect on how good you eat. So you don't want to mess up all this training effort with a whack diet, right? So the diet became much improved, training approved, body composition improved. And, one of the, one of the great things about not drinking at all is you don't lose any moments of reality and lucidity. So I spent a lot of, when I was a drinker, I would spend, like two hours out of the day, just like essentially not fully in my right mind. And so that's, that's time lost.

And so in the weirdest sense, Shawn., reality, lucidity, hyper awareness. It's a rush to me. If I know I have 12 different tasks in front of me, I sit there and I soak up the stress of it. I soak up how it just, I take it in. It's a rush. This is life. This is reality. We're busy. We're doing things. It's not whereas before I would just reach for the drink, put the band aid over the stress. Oh, I don't have to look at it anymore. Yeah, we're relaxed. We're fine. No, it's a different kind of rush being hyper aware and lucid. And so it's all a net positive for me in particular. I'm not saying that I'm not going to get on a pulpit and say, I, everybody's got to try this abstinence thing, because most people don't.

90 percent of the general population doesn't need to take this route. But I can tell you from personal experience. Since I quit, I lost about 25 pounds of fat and I gained about 5, maybe 7 pounds of muscle, and it's night and day. I used to really dislike pictures of myself. I'd be like, oh who's that? And so it's different now. My sense of self worth, self esteem, sense of focus and purpose is really different compared to when I used alcohol as a band aid for stress.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Do you ever feel like your brain is running on low battery? Batteries themselves provide energy from chemical reactions that involve electrolytes. Electrolytes are minerals that carry an electric charge and electrolytes play a major role in providing energy for your brain. Take sodium, for example. Sodium is an electrolyte that actually enables your brain to maintain proper hydration. Our brains are mostly made of water. It is so important for the form and function of our brains, but we can't maintain that hydration to do all the things that our brain does without an adequate supply of sodium.

Not only does sodium help to maintain proper water balance, but A study conducted by researchers at McGill University found that sodium functions as a quote on off switch in the brain for specific neurotransmitters that support optimal function and protect the brain against numerous diseases. That's just one important electrolyte for the brain. Another critical electrolyte for your brain for providing that electrical energy for your brain is magnesium. A fascinating study published in the journal Neuron found that magnesium is able to restore critical brain plasticity and improve cognitive function.

And a double blind, placebo controlled study published in the Journal of Alzheimer's Disease found that improving magnesium levels in adult test subjects, who were in an at risk population for Alzheimer's, these folks were between 50 and 70, improving magnesium levels was found to potentially reverse brain aging.

By over nine years getting functionally and structurally younger brain electrolytes are that important. Now there's one company that has hundreds of thousands of data points for the optimal ratios of electrolytes. And that company is LMNT. Go to drinklmnt.com/model, and you're going to get hooked up with a free gift pack, a free sample pack with every single electrolyte purchase. Hook yourself with any of their electrolyte flavors, and you're going to get a free bonus pack. It's an awesome opportunity to get the very best electrolytes in the world. Without any artificial colors, without any binders and fillers, no nefarious sweeteners, anything like that. Just the highest quality electrolytes on the planet.

And by the way, LMNT is actually fueling athletes in every single professional sport. Many professional sports teams from the NHL, The NBA, especially the NFL, have now switched their teams over to utilizing LMNT for their team's electrolytes, even though they might have NFL contracts to have those other brands like the Gatorades, the Powerades, the Haterades, they might have contracts to have their containers on the sidelines. But many of these teams are now utilizing LMNT again, go to drinklmnt.com/model. And with every electrolyte purchase, we're going to get a free sample pack, head over there and check them out. And now back to the show.

SHAWN STEVENSON: It is, it's like many things that you've been talking about and how things are feeding into each other. And, you talked a little bit about basically learning how to sleep again, and we know that a lot of people, a lot of people are using alcohol to help them to "unwind" and also to help to essentially knock them out. And it is very good at doing that. It's very good at doing that. But we also know, and there's a ton of data on this now, that even the sleep that you get when you are using alcohol to try to put yourself to sleep, it's not the same.

Those minutes is like the calories. Those calories are not created equal, and the sleep minutes are not all the same, and it's this REM rebound effect. And I, this is also part of this blackout effect too. It's a little piece of it. And being able to remember what happened the day before, because a lot of memory processing takes place. When you're going through your REM sleep in particular and REM sleep is just completely muted when you basically pass out from drinking. But then there's a rebound effect that eventually comes on in the later stages of sleep. But that initial like memory processing converting your experiences into your short term memory are just they just don't happen essentially. And it's You know, this is one of the things that I'm so glad you're talking about this because you mentioned finding some sleep

in putting that you said, and I know I can identify with that, having essentially an addictive personality with the things that we like and being able to focus that into something.

And so for you, you focus that into your training. And that is going to help you to sleep better, and also being able to make those choices and studying what can I do to improve my sleep quality. The temperance and being able to be more patient. One of the things I love most about this conversation is your kind of limitless activity that you unlocked, being able to be present and to be here, be here in the moment. One of the things that I hear from people because sometimes you don't think about it and nobody ever talks about it. From people who drink, consistently is like, there's this kind of disassociation. There's a lag between your mind or your consciousness and your body. There's this strange disconnection that takes place and being able to be present and unified and enjoy life, enjoy the moment.

Unfortunately, we have a society's Bud Light, enjoy the moment or, whatever, like the alcohol is for you to enjoy the moment. And again, this is not to villainize it, but it's also to say there is a lot of juice in the squeeze with, without alcohol, and there's, as a matter of fact, there are many ways that you can enjoy life in a more dynamic way. Essentially is what I'm really hearing and that's what you were able to find and it's just like I'm so glad you said this everybody's unique. But finding those things for you that help you to maintain the choices that you make when it comes to alcohol. And so some of these things I never heard before to hear you articulate that becoming addicted to being present and in the moment and being able to like not miss time. That's so profound, man. And I, I really feel that. So thank you for sharing that.

ALAN ARAGON: You got it.

SHAWN STEVENSON: All right. So now we've talked about some of the diet wars, just a little, just little sprinkles of them recently. Low fat versus low carb, but the MVP being protein through all of this, but also there's a big conversation happening right now about not eating and when we're not eating and the paradigm of intermittent fasting. Now, fasting is something humans have been doing, whether by choice or not, forever, in some form or fashion. But it's the intentional application. And you've actually published some research on this. But I want to ask you specifically, how credible is the claim that eating breakfast is essential for weight management and for metabolism?

ALAN ARAGON: Not credible at all. It's false. That's, as a general statement, that's false. The only population who I would maybe push breakfast for are children and adolescents. Everybody else, it's like, Alright, let's get the big picture and with a lot of people, skipping

breakfast is a really good tactic to control total daily caloric intake. Yeah, the whole fasting topic it's huge. So yeah throw whatever questions you want to throw at me.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Alright, so you've got this study that you conducted, this was published in 2022 in the journal *Nutrients*. The title of the study is *Does Timing Matter? A Narrative Review of Intermittent Fasting Variants and Their Effects on Body Weight and Body Composition*. So I got the guy here. Does timing matter?

ALAN ARAGON: That title cracks me up because the peer reviewers gave us a little bit of a hard time about that title. And, but we insisted that we're like, Hey, you got to have a little bit of sizzle in the title, you can't. So we talked them into keeping that title. So it's pretty funny. They're like, we're talking about it, intermittent energy restriction was timing. I have to do it. And then we like to respond. Technically it is a timing thing relative to the day relative to the week. So they're like, okay, keep your cute title. So, yeah, that review.

Okay, backing up like at an aerial view of the fasting topic, we've got three main types. We've got twice weekly fasting or the so-called 5-2. And we've got alternate day fasting, which is self explanatory. And then there is time restricted feeding, which we're now calling time restricted eating. And so those are the main three that are studied in the literature. There's a fourth more obvious one like consecutive day fasting where people fast for two, three, four, five days and onward. But it's just logistically challenging and risky to study consecutive day fasting.

So with those three, time restricted eating, alternate day fasting, and twice weekly fasting. They're all viable. They all have their strengths and limitations, and so they all accomplish the same end, which is a control of total daily caloric intake that is different from a traditional focus on this sort of linear creation and sustenance of a predefined caloric deficit. Usually it's going to be, like 500 ish calories for your typical dieter. With intermittent fasting, you can introduce, with any one of these three variants, you can introduce an ad libitum approach. In other words, an unrestricted diet. intake during the feeding phases and still accomplish the control of total caloric intake by the end of the day or the end of the week.

And that's probably one of the hidden beauties of the intermittent fasting models is that you don't have to be so quantitative and precise with the approach and you can still. Achieve a caloric deficit by the end of the week or the end of the day in the case of time restricted eating. The and another benefit of, for example, the twice weekly model or the five, two model is that those five days. They don't even necessarily have to be conscious dieting days. They can be ad libitum regular days, eat as desired, but those two fasting days will still net you. A caloric deficit by the end of the week for most people.

And so it's been an interesting breakthrough to see intermittent fasting do just as well as daily caloric restriction for the improvement of body comp and body fat. There are also some clinical effects that clinical benefits that are associated with fasting, but. And this is what people who love fasting don't really like to hear. They're not significantly superior to daily caloric restriction. They are on par with daily caloric restriction. And the things I'm talking about are cardiometabolic parameters. Things like blood biomarkers of health blood glucose, blood lipids, insulin handling, insulin sensitivity, and those kinds of things. The linear daily caloric restriction model is on par with any of those intermittent fasting models for improvements in clinical parameters. So as much as some people would like to think that intermittent fasting is this messianic arrival of the protocol that's going to make people live significantly longer and healthier. It's really just another way to control total energy coming in through the week. And there are many roads to doing that, whether it's linear or nonlinear.

SHAWN STEVENSON: I think that a big part of the success with intermittent fasting is that it's another framework for people to use, and again, you're saying this being able to manage one's dietary intake through the day, or you can use this framework and basically you have more what appears to be wiggle room with what you're eating. And the amount that you're eating because you're eating in a certain window, but it's still boiling down to a similar effect. But either way, if we're going to improve our insulin sensitivity, if we're going to improve our cholesterol levels, whatever the case might be. It's still going to be managing our dietary intake in some form or fashion. And this is fascinating. Now, what about the impacts on cognitive health? Like brain derived neurotrophic factors, things like that.

ALAN ARAGON: Yeah, that's an interesting avenue of research. I don't think there's a lot of direct comparisons between two hypocaloric models that achieve the same deficit by the end of the week on cognitive effects. But there are definitely interesting lines of data showing that intermittent fasting can have positive effects on neurological parameters. And including. Brain related stuff, cognition. That is an interesting avenue for further study and direct comparisons. Time restricted eating is unique amongst the fasting variants.

Not because first of all, let me say that there is research showing ad libitum time restricted feeding being successful at causing weight loss and fat loss. But the thing about time restricted eating, and a researcher named Grant Tinsley has done a bunch of studies now on time restricted eating plus resistance training. And he has seen just unanimously good stuff with that model. And even better results compared to the control diet plus resistance training. Even while trying to equate total daily nutrition between the two groups, the time restricted eating group tend to lose more body fat. And so I don't think it's by magic.

I think it's by less opportunity to eat those calories that the whole, day long eaters. So time restricted eating plus resistance training has shown some good stuff in the literature. Every other day fasting is probably the highest risk for lean body mass loss, and understandably. And yeah, the five, two is in there hitting the sweet spot for people who want to feel like they're not dieting for the majority of the week. But are willing to tough out to really chomping at the bit days to achieve that deficit by the end of the week.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yeah, man, this is awesome. We've covered a lot of ground and one of the coolest things and not only are you conducting research yourself and sharing that with everyone, you do a great research review and you've got some resources for everybody. Can you share? How people can get access to your research review and just learn more from you in general.

ALAN ARAGON: Oh, yeah. Thanks for the opportunity to, to just, I'll talk for a whole hour about it. Before I mentioned the research review, I have to bring up the topic of like people. Some people are really, some people are really emotionally invested in fasting, and intermittent fasting. And understandably, it's effective. Modality. A lot of people bring up how fasting stimulates a phenomenon called autophagy. For those unfamiliar with autophagy, it literally means self eating. Auto-phagy. And it, in a nutshell, is a process where the body gets rid of damaged cellular components. And so it's a catabolic process and it's a process that happens around the clock to different degrees. And so the claim is that fasting or intermittent fasting is superior because of it's effect on autophagy. So the counterpoint to that is number one, a caloric deficit, sustained caloric deficit period, elevates autophagy.

So that's number one. Number two, exercise elevates autophagy. Everything from endurance exercise to resistance training, both types of exercise elevate autophagy. And so therefore, chasing autophagy per se with fasting can put somebody at risk of undue losses in lean body mass. And also when you really push the elderly population to engage in intermittent fasting, then you can run into issues with the nurturing or exacerbation of things like sarcopenia and osteoporosis. So people have to be careful about that. Not, don't chase autophagy with fasting. If you're going to chase autophagy with something, chase it with exercise. So yeah, I think the autophagy angle with fasting is overhyped. And I don't think it's a valid reason to claim that an intermittent fasting model is superior to a linear daily color restriction model.

The name of the game is to go with what you prefer and can stick to. So with that said I, yes, thank you, I do a monthly research review. It's the pioneering monthly research review in the fitness industry. I was the first guy to do it. Every one of the smart people in the space copied it. . And so I was able to..

SHAWN STEVENSON: OG . OG,...

ALAN ARAGON: Elevate the game that way. And so I begrudgingly say, hey the game is elevated . But yeah, that, that's my research review. And it's a monthly look at the research that. I find it interesting and relevant in the health and fitness space and I typically have one or two all star guests, you know contributing an article there and it's just a fun thing. I've been doing it since 2008 every month, driving my Family crazy with that end of the month crunch to putting that thing out every month. But Yeah, it's my baby, my monthly research review.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yeah, and the other part of that is you're also teaching science literacy In an interesting way, because you mentioned something earlier about even fighting for the title in that study that you published. And the title seems very logical, when you're dealing with academia and people who are basically communicating to themselves and you have that language, you could speak in that language. We often miss out on, how is this applicable to me? And also how can I understand this and how can I communicate it as well? And so that's another benefit that people get with that. And so where can people access that?

ALAN ARAGON: AlanAragon. com and that's the hub of where you can find all my stuff. Social media handle is theAlanAragon. Some brilliant guy took Alan Aragon. So I got the Alan Aragon. So that's what I am on. My biggest platform is probably Instagram. Yeah, it is Instagram, but I'm also on X and occasionally Facebook.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Awesome, man. We'll put everything in the show notes for everybody. And thank you again for coming out today, braving the elements, it's we're in the Valley as well. Yeah, in california. So it's a little bit of a nature's a microwave, so I appreciate you so much for coming to hang out today and sharing your insights. It's been awesome.

ALAN ARAGON: Thank you so much. You do amazing work Shawn. I really appreciate it man.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Thank you. I receive that Oh man, Alan Aragon everybody. Science literacy, that is the order of the day. And that's the benefit of learning from folks like Alan Aragon. If you got a lot of value out of this, please share this out with your friends and family. You can send this directly from the podcast app that you're listening on, of course, or you could take a screenshot of the episode and share it out on social media. I'm @ShawnModel on Instagram. So if you want to tag me, I'll definitely check it out. And I'd love to see the love. Listen, we have so much good stuff in store for you.

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