



EPISODE 908

The #1 Factor That Determines How Long You're Going to Live

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SHAWN STEVENSON: It's not poor diet, it's not lack of exercise, it's not sleep deprivation. The number one threat to our longevity is something far more insidious, and it was the subject of one of the largest cohort studies ever conducted. The study published in the Journal Nature Human Behavior was a meta-analysis of 90 cohort studies that examined the links between loneliness, social isolation, and early death. Among more than 2 million adults, study participants were followed for anywhere from six months to 25 years, and here's what they found. Adults who frequently felt lonely were 14% more likely to die early than those who did not. And people who experienced social isolation had a 32% higher risk of dying early from any and every cause compared with those who weren't socially isolated.

This should get your spidey senses tingling in a major way. Now we're going to deconstruct all of this. But it's important to understand a couple of things right off the bat. Loneliness and social isolation are actually two different things. Some people know what it's like to feel lonely, even if they're around other people, but something to take away from that is that just the act of being around other people, even if we feel lonely, is protective for our health. That's why social isolation was more than twice as likely to kill someone prematurely than being lonely. There's something really special about being around other human beings, and it's something that cannot be bottled up into any kind of drug or supplement or biohack. The act of being around other human beings is critical to our survival.

Now, the scientists noted higher rates of everything from cancer to heart disease and more when we're not connected with others. And the researchers noted that loneliness and social isolation can function like a form of chronic stress in our bodies. Now with that being said, on the other side of this equation, having healthy, supportive relationships appears to be the number one contributor to a longer lifespan. One of the largest studies on human longevity ever conducted was completed by researchers from the University of North Carolina and Brigham Young University, and published in the Journal Plus Medicine. It included 148 separate studies and over 300,000 study participants. And after analyzing this massive amount of data on lifestyle factors, including things like diet and exercise habits, the researchers uncovered that adults with strong social bonds have a 50% boost in longevity versus individuals who do not.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Said another way, people who have strong social bonds have a 50% reduction in premature death from all causes. Cancer, heart disease, diabetes, infectious diseases, you name it. Having strong, healthy social relationships is the ultimate defense against all of it. Again, the researchers were looking at things like smoking behaviors, exercise behaviors, diet, sleep behaviors. The list goes on and on, but more than anything else, having strong relationships, having healthy social bonds stood out far and above everything else. Now, it's not just that, yes, longevity is about not dying prematurely. Absolutely. But real longevity, the longevity that we are seeking is about having exceptional quality of life, fitness, and functionality throughout our lifetime.

And that's one of the biggest secrets about healthy social bonds. They don't just increase your lifespan, they increase your health span. And if you get this today, if you truly absorb this today, this is going to change. Everything for you, every aspect of your health and wellbeing is going to be improved and protected for years or even decades to come. This conversation, this insight is so important. There's so much noise out there right now. There's so many conflicting ideas about the optimal human diet and the best forms of exercise and our sleep habits and all these things that absolutely matter. Yes, they absolutely matter, but it is the quality of our relationships that impact all of those things more than anything else.

And of course, we're gonna talk more about that, but this is something that is deeply, deeply interactive with our genetic expression. Our relationships are an epigenetic controller, and again, we're gonna talk more about this, but just, I really, really want you to get this today. This is one of the most important episodes that we've ever done because this is the most important aspect of our lives as human beings, especially right now. And I've been on this mission the last few years to share the science behind this far and wide as much as possible because of the leverage. That it holds, and because of the urgency that it holds at this time in human history. Now we've zoomed out and looked at the bigger picture of what happens when we have a lack of healthy relationships and what happens when we have truly valuable healthy social relationships in our lives.

But the question is how? How? Do our relationships have such a huge impact on our longevity? Well, the answer to that question was highlighted in my conversation with

Harvard psychiatrist. And researcher and the director of the longest running longitudinal study on human longevity that's ever been conducted. It's now been running for over eight decades. Alright? Literally following people and getting their blood work and looking at their life conditions and analyzing, you know, psychological factors and really digging deep to find out what are the ingredients that shorten our lives and what are the ingredients that extend our lifespan?

In this conversation with Dr. Robert Waldinger, we discussed this point exactly like, how is this happening? Why do our relationships influence our lifespan so much? And from him analyzing mountains of data and bringing his level of skepticism into it as well, because coming into it. He didn't even believe that relationships can be so impactful in so many areas of our lives. But it just kept coming through again and again. And what he and his team have revealed is that the biggest factor of how our relationships are protecting us from premature death and extending our lifespan is that having healthy social bonds is a powerful means of metabolizing our stress. Now, what do we mean by this?

Why is this so important? Well, according to a powerful analysis that was published in the Journal of the American Medical Association, JAMA researchers were looking at why are people ending up in the doctor's office? And they uncovered that upwards of 80% of all physician visits in the United States today, have a strong stress related component. Stress is literally killing us and making us sick. Full caveat here. Stress is not a bad guy. Alright. Stress is not all bad at all. We need stress. Stress is a part of growth and development. It is a launchpad to getting better in many aspects of our biology, our psychology, and just in life in general. Stress is not bad. It makes us more resilient. Hormetic stressors in particular help to build up our strength, our capacity. So a great hormetic stressor that we all know about is exercise. But if we're doing a certain type of exercise to our detriment and not recovering from it, not healing from it, we're just gonna keep digging ourselves into a deeper and deeper and deeper hole.

But in and of itself, getting that stress input can help us to come back better. Right? So keep that in mind. And also when we're talking about stress, for myself personally, when I was first introduced to this data, and this was getting close to 20 years ago. When I heard the word

stress and how it was impacting people, I related it to work life, right? Because that's what I would experience. You know, I was about to start working as a nutritionist, and at the time I was working at the university gym that I was attending and working with clients, working with people from all over the world on a day-to-day basis, and just hearing their stress stories and it, the vast majority of time had to do with work, right?

It was work. But, stress can come in so many different forms, as I've been talking about for many years. We wanna be mindful of our overall stress load and what are the ingredients that go into your unique stress load. This could be work stress. Absolutely. This could be relationship stress, this could be exercise stress. All right. You add in all these other kinds of stress and you're just right there on the edge of breaking down and you deciding to train for a marathon can tip you right over that edge and break your body down. So we've got exercise stress, we've got diet stress. What if we are lacking in the essential nutrients that our body needs?

We're just not getting those things in or what if we are consuming things that are detrimental to our health as a stress? We've got stress from sleep deprivation. We've got environmental stress as well. We've never lived in conditions as toxic to our bodies as we exist in today. We've got obviously mental and emotional stress. You know, if you're training for something or you know, in school or just dealing with day-to-day problem solving and decision fatigue. We've got spiritual stress. If you're not feeling like you are connected, if you have a sense of purpose and the feeling of connected to something, a presence, you know, this can be something that adds to that overall stress load and many other factors as well.

And so it isn't just one thing or one size fits all when it comes to stress. But I just wanted to really lift that up and lift that conversation up for us to be more aware, because it's the power of self-assessment, we've gotta know what's stressing us out for us. And also understanding that, and this brings us back to this powerful point of this conversation today, the number one way that we're able to metabolize all of life stressors is through having healthy social bonds. Now, Dr. Waldinger assessment was echoed in the meta-analysis that we talked about earlier that was published in Plus Medicine from researchers at Brigham Young University and others. And according to the scientists, social relationships appear to provide resources

that promote adaptive behavior changes and neuroendocrine responses to acute or chronic stressors.

These stressors include things like illnesses, challenges in life, life transitions. Our relationships help us to cope and adapt to these things. Again, acute stressors, just things that are just stressing us out from the day or major life events or even chronic stressors. The researcher stated, "the aid from social relationships, thereby moderates or buffers. The deleterious influence of stressors on health." Now, again, it is our relationships and the quality of those relationships that help us to metabolize or process that could be another way for us to communicate it, to process our stressors. And this doesn't necessarily mean that we have to talk about the stressor.

It's just it helps us because all of our processing, all of this metabolizing of these life events, it happens within us, and a lot of it is unconscious. And yes, absolutely we can share these things, we can get them off our chest, but there are deeper ways that these things are providing this benefit. So what are the specific ways that our relationships help us to metabolize stress? Well, the research has noted three specific things. Number one was information. Family, friends, colleagues, et cetera, can provide us with information that can help us to find a solution to our challenges, to readjust our perspective about something or simply provide a reminder of the strength that we have inside of us.

Number two was emotional support. I love the sentiment that it's not always what someone says, but how they make you feel. That can make all the difference in the world. And having someone to talk to, to vent to, to express yourself, or just being there. Just being there can be one of the greatest gifts in this life. And number three, the research has noted that this provides tangible experience. And number three, the researchers noted that our relationships help us to metabolize stress by providing tangible experience, we can be in service to others in the physical world, and that actually helps us to improve our mental health.

There are many studies on this and process our stress and the people in our lives and the people that can show up for us at certain times, can do things for us, can provide service to

us in the physical world as well. And to provide a couple of examples, sometimes a relationship can literally just solve a problem or take care of something challenging for us.

For example, if we have a sudden childcare need, right? Having a friend or a family member who could step in and make sure that they've got your little one or little ones covered. Our relationships can provide assistance, if we have a sudden expense. And you know, maybe the community can come together or certain family members can support us when our chips are down, they can also, tangibly speaking, our relationships can also provide advocacy for us.

They could stand up for us. They could provide a voice for us and support our voice when we need it, and sometimes when we need it most. And something else that our relationships 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 our brain health, our immune system function, reduce stress and more. For instance, a study site in the journal, *PsychoNeuroendocrinology*. This is a journal dedicated to publishing data on how our mind, our thoughts, our emotions impact our production of neurochemistry of hormones as well, so psycho neuroendocrinology. So looking at how our thoughts, feelings, emotions, impact our biology.

And this study took 67 women between the ages of 20 and 37 who'd been married or cohabitating with a significant other for at least 12 months at the time of the study. The scientists exposed the women to psychosocial laboratory stressors under three different conditions. They either received no contact with their partner at all. Another group received verbal support from their partner or in an additional group. They received physical contact with their partner, and all of this happened whether it was a verbal support or the physical contact prior to the stress exposure. Now the researchers tracked cortisol levels, heart rate, and more in response to the stress, and it was only when women had positive physical partner contact before the stress exposure that they showed significantly lowered cortisol and heart rate responses to the stress.

There is something innate. There is something beyond words and critical to human development and human health, that is found in the power of proximity, of intimacy, of close

contact. Now we know the dangerous impact that can have on babies, for example, and the immense need for physical contact in the development of the child's immune system, their cognitive function, and avoiding.

This kind of overall label of failure to thrive, and we know that this carries on throughout child development, but then there's stagnation in the data until recently, of course, in the last couple of decades, more and more has come out about this and the importance of how physical touch. And how critical it is for adolescents and for young adults and for aging populations and everybody in between. This is something that our genes expect from us throughout our lifetime, is to be close to other human beings. Another pronounced benefit of healthy social bonds noted by the Brigham Young Meta-Analysis, was the fact that social relationships also give us purpose and meaning. The scientists noted that being part of a social network gives individuals meaningful roles that provide self-esteem and purpose to life.

It gives us a why, and with that, why our genetic expression responds accordingly. A continuing theme throughout this conversation is how our thoughts and our beliefs and our exposure deeply impacts our biology. I've shared this sentiment for many years that your thoughts create chemistry in your body. Instantaneously just changing what you're thinking changes your body's chemistry, and we can conjure up things that can make us very upset, that can make us feel happy, that can make us feel depressed, that can make us feel joyful. And again, everything in between. If we just focus on something or focusing on a feeling like we, that feeling that we experience in our bodies is that change in chemistry.

Now for many of us, this is just happening on automatic based on our perception of what's happening in the world around us, right? But this is something that we have the power to have some agency with, and keeping this in mind, it's an important reminder for us that we have the ability to think, the thoughts that we want to think. We have agency, we are able to tap in and to direct ourselves. Now, of course, if we've habituated chronic negative thinking as my friend, mentor, colleague, Dr. Daniel Amen shares if we have a life that's filled with ants, alright, automatic negative thinking. It can be difficult to go in and try to change the record that you're playing when you've been playing a certain type of record for a long time.

SHAWN STEVENSON: But it starts with awareness and it starts with our thoughts are not just happening on accident, it's conditioning, it's programming, and you have the power, despite your circumstances, to change the way that you're thinking and your biology will change accordingly. Now, that's what this is all about as well. You know, conversations like this, shows like this is to provide that input, that affirmation, that reminder of how powerful we are. And with that being said, staying in this lane specifically regarding the impact of our relationships, healthy relationships have this tendency to help us to think more positive, affirmative thoughts.

It's just creating an, again, an environment, a condition to where it makes it much easier to remember our agency, but also to habituate the thoughts and the feelings and the emotions that we want to have. And to tie this back to the connection with the sense of purpose and meaning. A recent study conducted by researchers at Boston University's School of Public Health found that having a purpose, having a strong sense of purpose lowers the risk of all causes of mortality, regardless of race, gender, ethnicity, and several other factors.

This power is not reserved for the few. This is built into our DNA. The study included over 13,000 adults over the age of 50 and co-funded by the NIH. The analysis revealed that people with the strongest sense of purpose lowered their risk of premature death by over 15%, compared to people with the least sense of purpose. Having a strong sense of purpose. People to live, for people to serve people, to provide that sense of connection. This in and of itself is a powerful epigenetic influence. This operates above genetic control, determining how our genes are being expressed and what the data indicates is that having healthy social connections is, according to some of the biggest studies ever conducted, an epigenetic defense against premature aging.

And today we know that we can be physically slash biologically much younger than we are chronologically. But on the reverse, we can be much older, physically, biologically than we are chronologically. And by the way, how can we actually find out how old we are? Biologically versus what our chronological age says on the calendar.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Well, most of this data is found within our blood. Leading scientists have uncovered the specific biomarkers that can give the most accurate assessment of your biological age. In fact, I just received the results back from what mine is, and I'm gonna tell you about it in just a moment. But I've been utilizing the continuous glucose monitor support from levels for years. It's amazing company named Levels because our blood sugar is something that we can track in real time. And it provides personalized data on how various foods can influence us versus other people and how things like stress and sleep influence our body's metabolic health and more.

But now the Levels team is giving us access to the very best comprehensive lab testing in the world. Now, when you get an annual levels membership, you'll also receive a 28 Marker Cardiometabolic blood tests each year and full access to the Levels app. Now, the app offers personalized feedback, food and habit tracking recipes, and some of the best educational content you're gonna find on any app by far. Along with the ability to track trends, set goals, and measure progress across key health markers. But here's the thing, you can also upgrade your membership and purchase the expanded panel, which will give you an even more detailed view with over 100 biomarkers, with deeper insights into your hormones, nutrients, stress, aging, and more.

Again, with your levels membership, you can now get a 28 marker cardiometabolic blood tests each year included, or you can upgrade to get access to an exclusive 100 plus biomarker panel, which is what I did. That gets you a full hormone panel, blood nutrient panels, and much more. Now, this data was a mind blowing for me, and what it does, it really paints a remarkable picture of what your biological age really is and utilizing all this data. Levels actually gives you, they provide you with that biological age that so many of these leading scientists are talking about. You're able to do this now, and all of us can have access to this. Of course, with my personal health and wellness habits, I knew that my biomarkers would look pretty solid, but I was honestly surprised when I found out with the most comprehensive assessment in the world that I'm actually about seven years younger than my chronological age.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Now, this was after I did this and took this incredible panel after the most stressful year of my adult life. All right? And so I was just pleasantly surprised to see how healthy I looked from this biological standpoint. And this was really a catalyst to even better health because I learned about one surprising biomarker. From my own results that I needed improvement on, that would actually slow my rate of aging even more. I just didn't know. I like, I had no idea that I was on the lower end of this key nutrient because it's part of the nutrient profile. And so I've been proactive in getting that up to par, and I see that in my performance and my energy.

It's like that subtle thing that unlocks even more energy and wellbeing. So again, just having that knowledge was a game changer for me. And the Levels team is absolutely incredible, and right now when you purchase their annual membership, you'll get an additional two months for free. When you go to [Levels.link/model](https://levels.link/model), that's L-E-V-E-L-S-L-I-N-K/M-O-D-E-L. Again, with your Levels membership, you'll become an expert of your own health with lab testing and unlimited access to the Levels app for AI powered food logging, habit tracking, and personalized insights that turn your results into daily actions. Additionally, you can purchase continuous glucose monitors and advanced lab testing through your Levels membership as well. Levels makes it easy to access the personal health data that you want to know. So again, just go to levels.link/model.

And now that we've discussed the powerful impact of social isolation and the critical necessity for healthy relationships, let's talk about how to make sure that we have them in our lives. AI is here. AI is here. I just saw a video of this robot flipping out. Flipping out, throwing bows, throwing kicks. All right now, and this is true, as of this recording now, apparently AI likes me. If you were to look up, Hey, chat, GBT, can you recommend a health podcast to help me to get healthy? Several people share with me that they did that in the Model Health Show with Shawn Stevenson came up as that top option. That's what AI was sharing with people. Now of course I went to see myself and I was just blown away. Like, that's amazing 'cause it's collecting this infinite amount of data to feed back this result, and it was me. Now of course, I don't know what the status is right now, but it's pretty amazing.

SHAWN STEVENSON: And so AI is partial to me and, and maybe it's because I say thank you, you know, maybe I talk to Alexa with some kindness. I don't know. All I know is that AI is here and it's integrated already so much into society. It's just bonkers so much, so fast, and these companies are scurrying without regard just racing to the finish line and very likely to our detriment in so many different ways.

Now, I'm not trying to paint a Sarah Connor's scenario here. Alright? I'm not trying to do that. I'm not trying to paint a eye robot scenario here, but it's hard. What I'm trying to do is to remind us more than ever, as we've outsourced our most valuable asset as a human being, our time and our attention to technology. So many of our waking hours have been spent in this meta universe have been spent on so-called social media. And it has siphoned our capacity, not just our activity, but our capacity to invest in our real world relationships. It's like literally the Matrix. There's another movie reference. Is that art imitating life or life imitating art?

I don't know, but it's happening right now. And more than ever, as AI is integrating more and more into society, and you know, many jobs and many of the things that humans have done traditionally are going to be done by technology, by artificial intelligence. So what is that going to leave us to do you the rate? At which we're going now as human beings, we're just gonna spend more and more time in this virtual reality in different versions of that. And what I'm here to do right now, to stand up and to remind you, and this is the truth. This is the truth. This isn't just based on, again, we've already covered a lot of the most comprehensive science ever in regards to human health and longevity.

The truth is we need each other. We need each other. This is our mandate. AI is here. We need each other more than ever. It is your mandate to be more human than you've ever been before. That is my ask of you. That is my plead to you. That is my mission for you. That is my reminder for you to be more human than you've ever been before. This is what keeps us healthy. It is connecting with the people that we love and developing those relationships more so than anything else. As much as we might aspire towards or tell ourselves these virtual relationships, they're not the same. Now, absolutely virtual relationships and virtual

experiences are incredible, and they can be incredibly supplemental supportive initiative of relationships.

But we do not want to mistake that for being human. That's new. Our ability to do that is new. Thousands upon thousands upon thousands, upon thousands of years. We've been together and now we're more separate than we've ever been with these organizations vying to put you more and more separate to get you on to their virtual realities, their virtual platforms, in a way from each other. And so again, that is our mandate now more than ever before. And I just wanna lean into some things that hopefully speak to your heart and provide you with that sense of urgency. I'm gonna tell you a truth. You never know when the last time you're going to see somebody that your love is going to be. You never know.

And that's just the reality. We don't like to think about it, but that next time could be the last time. And so we want to appreciate them more than ever before. We want to love them like never before. Because you never know when that last time is gonna be. So what I wanted to do today was to provide us all with some reminders and also some tips and insights about how do we do this? How do we cultivate healthy relationships? You know, many of us come from circumstances where this just wasn't a part of our upbringing. You know, maybe we haven't acquired the skills and the insight on how do we actually cultivate and create healthy relationships. How do we go about this? Like what are some of the ingredients?

And also we talked about this phenomenon of feeling lonely, even if we're around other people. And I wanna reiterate this point, that it is still the action and activity of being around others that is so protective, that feeling of loneliness. Absolutely, it can be invasive. It can be insidious, but being separate even more so.

So let's talk about some of the ingredients and how we can make this more rewarding, more fruitful, more connective, and help to elicit that epigenetic influence that makes us better, that protects us against all manner of disease and dysfunction, and helps us to extend not just our lifespan, but our health span. Number one, one of the most human things that we've ever done, that we've been doing together for thousands upon thousands, upon thousand upon, I love you 3000 thousands of years, is eating together.

SHAWN STEVENSON: One of the best ways that we can go about supporting this connectivity. Is around the dinner table or over whatever meal that might be. This is such a primal, powerful influence over our genetics. And again, this isn't just aspirational or hearsay. Study after study is affirming that the act of eating together with people that we care about. Consistently leads to better health outcomes. For instance, if we look at the impact on children, a fascinating study published in the journal Pediatrics found that when children eat with their parents or caregivers, at least three meals per week was that minimum effective dose. To make a truly remarkable difference, those children had dramatically lower incidences of developing obesity and disordered eating for parents.

An interesting study was conducted looking at tech workers from IBM. Looking at the impact of being home in time to have family dinner and their ability to metabolize stress. And what the researchers found was that when workers were able to consistently have dinner with their families to sit down and have dinner with their families, they were able to maintain higher levels of work morale, productivity and higher levels of health overall because they were able to metabolize that stress. So stress was able to be kept in check, but as soon as obligations cut into their ability to have dinner with their families, work morale plummets, job satisfaction plummets, and stress begins to soar. And we talked about why that matters throughout this episode and the ability to process and metabolize stress.

And so this is one of the primary ways that we can leverage this because we gotta eat. Just yesterday I saw somebody going to town on a burger in their car by themselves. They were going to town. It was almost an intimate act, all right? And that happens sometimes you find ourselves in situations, you gotta get it in, all right? But we need a little bit less of that because we gotta eat. And it could be in the car by yourself or with your phone, which so many people, their meals are shared with a screen today more than ever. As a matter of fact, sitting down and having a family dinner is now on the endangered species list.

According to the most recent data, only about 30% of families eat together on a regular basis in the United States. Now, let's talk a little bit more about why this matters right now, more than ever, what it's doing for us. What's happening behind the scenes, eating meals with people that we care about. It has a powerful impact on our brain and nervous system.

SHAWN STEVENSON: What the research is indicating is that we have a shift that takes place. Most of us are spending so much time during our days, during our waking hours, in fight or flight. The sympathetic nervous system is running the show. Go, go, go. And we have very rare times when we're shifting over to that anabolic recovery "rest and digest" aspect of our nervous system, known as the parasympathetic nervous system. But being around people that we love, that we care about it is this powerful permission slip or get outta jail free card for us to get out of that sympathetic fight or flight and transition right into the parasympathetic rest and digest.

Also, when we're around people that we care about, we begin to release different chemistry that is more health affirmative. And one of the hormones, kind of dual hormone that has gotten a lot of press recently is oxytocin. Oxytocin has nicknames as the cuddle hormone, the love hormone. I wrote about oxytocin about a decade ago in my first book, Sleep Smarter. And even back then, I shared notable data affirming how oxytocin has this remarkable ability. It's one of the rare things we've discovered that has this remarkable ability to help to down regulate cortisol, to kind of work as an antithesis with cortisol. And so we have that just right there, available to produce within our own bodies.

When we're around people that we care about, it's called the cuddle hormone for a reason. We don't necessarily have to cuddle, but just being in proximity, even being in the room, just spending time around people that we care about, we produce more oxytocin. In addition, if we look at the psychological aspect of this and sitting down for a meal together with the people that you care about, again, today, more than ever, we need this.

There's a deep psychological human need to feel seen, to feel like we matter, to be acknowledged that we're here, we are here, and more than ever, so much of our attention is outward focused, and we're missing out on that connection, that feeling seen because our faces are buried in our phones or into our devices. And so more and more children are developing this dysfunction, the ability to interact healthfully, but also not getting that need met of feeling seen and acknowledged and, and like we matter. And oftentimes more and more people, children include, are seeking out unhealthy acknowledgement and attention via

this social media paradigm just to feel like we matter and getting that false sense of affirmation.

That is so fleeting, that can be so detrimental and tear us down just as easily. We've gotta create an insurance policy, a shield against that with our children and with ourselves as well by pouring into their cup, filling them with acknowledgement and affirmation. And the most powerful way of doing that is simply seeing them, focusing on them, listening to the sound of their voice, listening to them speak. Really making sure that they feel heard. It is a priceless gift to give someone today, and you can't find this in any bottle. There isn't some supplement for this. It is something that we need and we can provide that for each other. So according to the data, that minimum effective dose is three meals per week, and we've got to be intentional.

You gotta schedule it, whatever that looks like for you and your family or friends. Right. This could mean, you know, friends, this could be mentors. This could be, there's so many different flavors of what this could look like, but having a meal together or a cup of coffee or whatever the case might be. But this could be Monday, Wednesday, Friday, family meals. This could be, you know, Tuesday, Thursday, brunch on Sundays. You know, there's many different ways to slice and dice this. You know, you get together for, you know, a brunch with your friends every Saturday, and then, you know, you grab meals with friends a couple times a week. Plus a coffee with a coworker.

Again, many different ways to slice and dice this, but we gotta be intentional that three times a week is that minimum effective dose to shoot for. Of course, you could do more. You could be more human than ever, but make sure to get in that three. And also, this is the secret sauce. It's making it a screen free environment. Now listen, of course we can get together, watch the game together, movie nights, all that stuff. I love that kind of stuff, but we don't want that to replace that real FaceTime. With that three times a week, minimum effective dose, because there's other studies affirming that. For example, researchers were looking at the eating behaviors, family eating behaviors and nutrition outcomes for children in the context of minority families that would be generally considered in this kind of low income environment.

SHAWN STEVENSON: And they found that when children were able to eat with their parent or caregiver. At least four meals per week. Now this could be any meal, breakfast, lunch, dinner, didn't matter. The children ate five servings of fruits and vegetables at least five days out of the week and dramatically less ultra processed foods. But the researchers noted that this was when the TV was rarely or never on. The tech becomes a distraction, our devices can divide us. And so we wanna make sure that we get that minimal effective dose of that three in for all of us. Screen free time, hang out, real face time in the real world, and we could do all the other stuff as well.

Absolutely. So that's tip number one. One of the best ways to cultivate these healthy social bonds is around the dinner table or sitting down and having a meal together. And this leads to number two of the specific ways for us to increase, cultivate, support, healthy social bonds. Number two is to get out of your shell. Alright, you are not a ninja turtle. Or of course if you are, shout Donatello and then they are listening. Shout out to you guys. But truly you are not a turtle. Getting outta your shell is just an analogy, but we've got to get out of our stagnant environment, you know, especially if we have that kind of chronic feeling of loneliness and we understand the detriment of social isolation.

We've got to get out of our shell. We've gotta be proactive, and we could just dip our toes in the water, of course. But for all of us, it's gonna be different degrees of this because if it was left to my own devices and had I not, you know, come across this research and, you know, been able to self-assess, I very much would prefer to be by myself a lot of the time. All right, give me a good book and some space. All right. And you know, I've talked about this before, but just kind of having this lone wolf energy. But I come from kind of a dysfunctional household, and so I was just trying to get out there all right and get, get outta that situation and not understanding how to create healthy relationships.

And so I've had to proactively challenge myself by putting myself in environments with other people. And so early on, this was like going to live events and things like that, and participating in community service. And there's so many ways about going about that that can fuel you, that can feel fun, that sometimes again, it could be uncomfortable.

SHAWN STEVENSON: We gotta lean into the discomfort a little bit. You know, I like to have control of my schedule. I'm not a big fan of spontaneity when it comes to like, what we're doing. Yes. I'm, no, listen, I'm not keeping it vanilla. I got, there's a lot of flavors. Okay. But I like to pick my pockets of spontaneity and because I just, I thrive with structure and you know, I'm looking for certainty, those kind of things. But I've opened myself up to more. Spontaneity and this just happened yesterday. True story. True story. This actually just happened to me two days ago. I was working, I was preparing for this show actually, and I saw my phone, which is usually not by me while I'm working, which is another little, a bonus tip, but I saw my phone, you know, his face up, and I saw it was Michael Beckwith calling me and he's been a guest here on the Model Health Show, but just been an incredible mentor and it just blows my mind.

Frequently that, you know, we have this relationship. Now he's my friend, but I saw that he was calling me, so I picked it up. I was like, Hey, what's going on, rev? And he was like, how are you young man? I was like, I'm doing good, you know, just working, getting ready for the show. And he was like, what are you doing Thursday night, which was yesterday. And I was like, uh? 'Cause in my head I'm like, I want to keep it low key. Should I knock? I don't know. What should I, you know, you don't want to just tell somebody that you're free, but it's Michael Beckwith, so I'm like. Nothing, we don't really have any plans. He was like, now you do, we're going to this concert and it's at the Hollywood Bowl.

It's Leon Bridges. And he asked me, you know, am I familiar with his music? I was like, yeah, I got him on a couple of my playlists, a couple of his songs, but you know, haven't really like, you know, and he was like, well, I'm gonna send you the tickets, you know, we'll see you tomorrow. And so that's what we did last night. We went to the Hollywood Bowl, which I've never been to a concert there. It's a really cool LA experience. And it was like this, it is like being inside of a speaker, you know, it's just like this incredible vibration, and the space, the stands were packed. It was beautiful. You're surrounded by this wilderness on the outside of the bowl, and it was magical.

One of the best times ever. And it was me getting outta my shell because. If you left it up to me, guess what I'm gonna be doing? I'm gonna be getting to bed early, I'm gonna tuck it in,

I'm getting my sleep and all the things. But we stayed out a little bit later 'cause of course, LA traffic and parking and whatnot and just enjoying this experience. And there were several times yesterday night where I just was just like in awe. How am I here? This is incredible. I'm sitting up here in this space with Michael Beckwith, my amazing wife. Right here next to me and we're just like taking all this in. The music was phenomenal and it's just incredible experience because I chose to get outta my She.

Now, that's a pretty grandiose example for somebody like myself. And just ask yourself, what are those things in your life where you can get out of your shell? What are those situations, you know, what are those events that you know about that you can go to? You know, maybe it's a community service event, maybe it's a church event. Maybe it's a volunteer experience at your kids' school. You know, that's one of the things that my wife has done this past year, which was something she hadn't, well, she did, she contributed and kind of did some things throughout, but more so this year than ever. And she's gotten some really great experiences and friendships that have been cultivated through that.

So whatever that looks like for you, find a way to get out of your shell, challenge yourself, get into new environments and hang out with people, and also the people that you love as well. Make yourself a little bit more available because as I shared earlier, you never know when the last time will be that you see someone. So really value that and invest and ask the questions. That's another thing is with these relationships, find out the things that you want to know. You know, there are so many questions that I would have for my grandmother that I never got to ask, and these are the things even for my kids. You know, my youngest son, I asked him.

What's something that you've always wanted to do as a family that we haven't done yet, and that led to the trip that we're taking this summer. You know, and it just, it's so rewarding for me because it was inspired by him. It's something that he participated in and yeah, it's just amazing. Ask the questions, spend the time and love more than you ever have. Number three, and these are gonna be pretty quick. Last few tips. Number three, understanding the power of human touch. Number three is to hug a mother lover. Alright, hug a mother lover. Hug somebody. Hug the people that you love. We know there is a direct correlation to an increase in oxytocin when we're in a embrace with somebody that we love.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Alright, so it's like free on tap when you're in a hug to increase that oxytocin, decrease cortisol. So hug a mother lover. All right. Number four is, as with anything, especially if we've had gaps in understanding this, if we feel deficient, if we wanna get better at it, we've gotta make it a study. So making sure that we are investing in learning about how to create healthy relationships to support those relationships.

If it's something that is of value to you, which at this point it better be, you've gotta make it a study. Learn about it. So this could be through books, podcasts, documentaries, television, the list goes on and on. We got access to so many cool things and resources, but make it a study. And the final tip to help us to support and cultivate healthy social bonds. Number five is the power of your intention. The human mind has this incredible capacity to find what it is seeking. So there are parts of the brain, the reticular cortex, reticular activating system. We've talked about multiple times here on the Model Health Show with prestigious neuroscientists. And understanding what we're feeding our brains is what's most important to us.

Our brain is going to seek out and filter for. And so if it is our intention to have healthy relationships and incredible people in our lives, make it an intention despite your circumstances. Make it your intention and write this down. Create the affirmation. What do you want your relationships to look like? Get some clarity on that. Feed that to your brain and that internal GPS system is gonna be on the lookout for that. So set your intention and make it a priority. This is more important than ever to be more human than we've ever been. I hope that you got a lot of value outta this. If you did, please share it out with somebody that you care about.

You could share this on social media, of course, but most importantly, as you're sharing this, like, Hey, let's get together, all right, and hang out. You can send this directly from the podcast app that you're listening on to somebody that you care about, but I just appreciate you so much for investing your time in learning about this today, and it's about action.

Knowledge is potential power. It's action. When that knowledge becomes true, power and a vehicle for change, we got some incredible masterclasses and world-class guests coming your

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