

**THE MODEL  
HEALTH  
SHOW**

**EPISODE 984**

# **Can Thick Thighs Really Save Lives?**

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**SHAWN STEVENSON:** Welcome to the Model Health Show. This is nutritionist, research scientist and bestselling author Shawn Stevenson, and I've got an incredible show in store for you today. Finally answered the burning question, can thick thighs really save lives? Researchers analyze the body composition of nearly 10,000 people to see if where they stored their body fat and their muscle made a difference in their health outcomes. Right outta the gate, the scientists affirmed what the established science already knows. When someone is overweight, a small thigh circumference is associated with an increased risk of diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, and total mortality.

And now the researchers set out to determine if thicker thighs can specifically influence blood pressure. The study cited in the journal *Endocrine Connections* investigated the association between thigh circumference and blood pressure in a population of nearly 10,000 men and women aged 40 or older. And the scientists found that if you take two people who might be the same weight and the same body mass index, the one with the thicker thighs is protected against hypertension.

They have metabolic protection against high blood pressure. The researcher stated, "Thigh circumference was negatively correlated with systolic blood pressure, diastolic blood pressure, fasting glucose, and total cholesterol compare with the lowest thigh circumference tertile group. The risk of hypertension was significantly lower in the highest tertile group, both in overweight individuals and in obese individuals." Now, why does this matter in the context of hypertension, of high blood pressure? Well, this is one of the primary markers indicating the risk of cardiovascular disease and mortality, and finding that thicker thighs can have an impact on protecting us from cardiovascular disease is fascinating, to say the least, but it's just scratching the surface.

Now, you might be asking how thick do these thighs need to be? Well in this particular study measuring thigh circumference right under the glutes, right. So right under the glutes, it was found that about 21.25 inches for men and 20.8 inches for women was associated with a lower prevalence of high blood pressure independently of age, body mass index and waist

circumference. Whereas those with a smaller thigh circumference, which was less than 19.6 inches for women and 20 inches for men, were more likely to have elevated blood pressure.

One of the authors of the study stated, "in contrast to stomach fat, leg fat may be beneficial for metabolism. The most likely cause of this association is that there is more thigh muscle and or fat deposited under the skin which secretes various beneficial substances that help keep blood pressure in a relatively stable range". The research team suggested that thigh circumference could potentially be used as a convenient and inexpensive indicator for earlier detection and prevention of high blood pressure and other related complications such as heart disease. Especially in obese and overweight people. So now we're really getting into the thick of it, and the question remains, how on earth does thick thighs save lives? We've got a glimpse with this particular study, but here's what the data is really illuminating for us that we're gonna dive deeper into today.

Number one, the fat around your thighs is a different type of fat than the visceral fat deposits around your vital organs. It's a safer place for your body to store excess energy to put it bluntly. The distribution of fat and where fat is stored on your body matters. Number two, gluteal femoral fat. So this is the fat on your legs and your glutes appears to produce less pro-inflammatory molecules than other types of fat, namely visceral belly fat and belly fat. In general, there are less pro-inflammatory compounds being produced by the fat getting stored on your legs. And number three, your thighs and your glutes, which we'll get to in a moment, are designed to make up about half of the muscle mass on your body. So this part of your body has a huge metabolic potential that.

We have the ability to tap into, to be preventative, to be protective of our health, and dare I say, improve our health. And keep in mind, it isn't just size, our leg muscles. Strength can make a huge difference in our health too, for instance. A fascinating study published in the American Journal of Medicine found that for approximately every 10% stronger, your quads are relative to your body weight. Your risk of premature death from all causes drops by an additional 23%. This is a game changer. There are very few things ever discovered that can have this kind of impact on reducing our risk of all cause mortality. Now again, this study in particular included individuals with coronary artery disease, so this is a certain demographic.

Nonetheless, this is found to be protective and it's been found to be protective across the board for all of us, as we'll go deeper into, but keep in mind, in this particular study, and this is fascinating, I want you to put this in your back pocket for later, how they were testing strength was through quadriceps, isometric strength, specifically isometrics.

Again, put that in your back pocket for later. Alright. Now here's the thing. This is something that we have so much control over and it's far bigger, far more accessible than merely being something that's determined by our genetics. Another incredible study titled Kicking Back Cognitive Aging Leg Power Predicts Cognitive Aging after 10 years, in Older Female twins was published in the Journal Gerontology. The study included a total of 324 healthy female twins with an average age of 55 and followed them for over a decade and here's what they found. Number one, stronger legs predicted better cognitive aging over the span of that decade.

The study found that greater leg power at baseline was significantly associated with less cognitive decline. Over the following 10 years in healthy, older women, even after counting for these confounding factors like age, education, heart health, metabolic factors, iq, lifestyle, the researchers found that leg strength isn't just about muscle function. It can be an early indicator of how your brain ages over time. Number two, this powerful association was not. Controlled not explained by genetics or early life environment. Again, these are twins growing up in the same environment, pretty much often living a similar lifestyle and because this was a twin study, including identical twins, the researchers could control for shared genes and early childhood factors.

If one twin had more leg power, they tended to have a healthier brain, meaning again, this relationship goes beyond heredity. Number three, the researchers found that leg power predicted brain structure years later. Participants with greater leg strength at baseline had greater total gray matter volume utilizing MRI scans performed 12 years later. Our gray matter, matters. It is essential for our memory, for processing information for overall brain function. It's truly important. There's something about having leg strength that contributes to building, supporting, protecting our gray matter. Number four, stronger legs were linked to healthier.

**SHAWN STEVENSON:** Brain anatomy overall within twin pairs, the sibling with stronger leg power tended to have smaller lateral ventricles. Later in life, larger ventricles often indicate age-related brain shrinkage, so this is a meaningful structural marker of healthier aging. The bottom line is this incredible study found that individuals who had and maintained more leg strength, more leg power were able to express a more beautiful brain to protect their brain against degeneration and atrophy. And also, having more leg strength is found to be protective of our cognition, our mental acuity. Things like memory processing and our ability to problem solve.

The list goes on and on and on. Having more leg strength, there's something about them dies. That's able to protect our brain. Now the question is, is it merely about those thighs? Do we want our thighs to be thicker than a snicker and that's the end of the story, or is there more to this? What about the booty? Well, your glutes are actually the largest of all of your skeletal muscles. Specifically, the gluteus maximus is the single largest skeletal muscle in the human body by mass. Now, your quads, so the front of your thighs are actually the largest muscle group. There's four of them, right? The quads, but as a single muscle that gluteus Maximus is the largest muscle and has incredible muscular potential and metabolic potential that I'm gonna share with you right now.

Number one, they have the ability to get really fat and to get large muscle and fat, of course. They have this ability for growth, and they're also highly glycolytic and powerful. There's so much of our movement and movement potential that's involved with our glutes and them being able to fire and to do incredible jobs for us. As far as locomotion, our glutes are a primary driver of force production. Now because of the larger size of the glutes, again, compared to other muscles, your glutes play a disproportionately large role in whole body glucose disposal. And so it is our muscle that is the primary sink, metabolic sink for glucose disposal to get our blood sugar normalized after a meal.

After interactions with foods and other items that elevate our blood sugar, it is our muscles that have the power to absorb that blood glucose and get us back to homeostasis. And so obviously with the glutes being such a large aspect of our anatomy potentially. I know, again, I know some people are like, well, what about my little clues?

**SHAWN STEVENSON:** What about my, I got the little ones. I got little cakes. It's okay. As a proportion of our body mass, even when the cakes might be a little, little, they still have a large metabolic part to play because they're still, you know, proportionately the largest muscle on our bodies. So, number one, they're a powerful driver of whole body glucose disposal. So this is helping to keep us insulin sensitive and protecting against insulin resistance. Also, our glutes disproportionately play a large role in our resting metabolic rate if we're looking at this through the lens of our lean mass. Also, again, it is a powerful driver of our athletic power output.

We've already referenced research regarding power, leg power in particular. Most of the movements we do in the real world don't just involve our legs. They involve our glutes as well. And so this lower body muscle mass, especially this glute quad complex is consistently associated in a plethora of peer reviewed studies to deliver us better metabolic health, lower cardiometabolic risk and improved longevity markers. Now let's be clear, this isn't just necessarily about having a lot of junk in the trunk. Alright? There's some context here because this could be a situation where someone might have booty do. Alright? If you're like, what is booty do? This is when your stomach stick out further than your booty do.

All right? And so this measurement here is called the waist hip ratio. And in an analysis published in the Medical Journal of Australia, scientists track the data of over 9,000 adults, aged 20 to 69 years. They analyze blood pressure, fasting, serum lipid levels, smoking history of heart disease or diabetes, and measures of obesity, including body mass index, waist circumference, and waist to hip ratio.

The research has found that waist to hip ratio is an effective predictor of cardiovascular disease and coronary heart disease mortality. So utilizing our waist to hip ratio provides some individual context because everybody's body is a little bit different. And what this is looking at is having a healthy ratio or proportion to our hips being proportionately larger than our waist. And to calculate your waist to hip ratio, you simply divide your waist circumference at the narrowest point by your hip circumference at the widest point using a simple tape measure, a result that comes out equal to or less than 0.85 for women or equal

to or less than 0.9 for men, which that number fits in the parameters of what is deemed to be a healthy waist to height ratio for both men and women.

Now the question is, what does this information instruct us to do from a practical level to improve and to protect our health? First of all, we have to keep in mind that our genetics. Absolutely will play a role in where we tend to store fat and build muscle more easily on our bodies, but our genetics do not categorically control how we ultimately build muscle and store fat. Our choices do, and also from a strictly functional survival perspective. The stronger your legs, the more independent you can continue to be in advanced age.

The very human, very functional, very practical act of simply getting up, whether it's from the bed, from the toilet, in and outta the car from the ground, if you should happen to find yourself there. This is a critical life skill and our leg strength, the strength of our legs and our glutes have a huge primary influence on our ability to do just that.

So, leg strength and functionality, also help to keep us more stable in the first place so that we don't find ourselves on the ground if we don't want to be. Also, this information is informing us to train our legs because we have so much influence over our metabolic health and our functionality if we choose to do this. Lastly, as a science firm, you absolutely can trust a big but and a smile when it comes to your metabolic health and your longevity, but not necessarily in the context of a healthy relationship. You gotta be careful. So with all of this being said, what are the tips? What are the walkaways? How do we implement this incredible science into our lives?

Well, I'm here to deliver for you, and I've got four science-backed tips that you can apply starting now. Tip number one is to proactively build glute and leg strength, use the most science-backed practices to, again, proactively build thicker thighs. What are the most science-backed exercises? It's the ones you know, it's the squat. It's a hip hinge when it comes to hip hinge. Some of the classic exercises include things like straight leg deadlifts and also hip thrust can fall into this category as well. And utilizing something like a lunge in particular, single leg elevated split squats are powerful when it comes to building our legs and glutes. So utilizing some of the most popular today, thank goodness, but also proven strategies for

building our glutes and our hamstrings and our quads. So, there's a wide variety of what squats can look at, and if we're talking about hypertrophy or muscle growth, there are tons of studies showing a wide range of the rep range that can help with hypertrophy.

This could be a lower rep range around five reps. This could be intermediate around eight to 10. This could be, you know, 15, 20 and above. Different studies say different things. In general, it's gonna be right there in the middle, somewhere in that eight to 12 rep range. But the most important thing from a very practical thing that no study can tell you is feeling that difficulty is being able to push your body past where it gets difficult and you actually have to work hard. The hypertrophy comes when your body has to adapt. It doesn't wanna feel like it can't do a thing, and so this doesn't mean pushing so far that you move into dysfunctional form and you breaking down your form.

It's getting close to that, maybe, maybe one rep in reserve. But getting past that point when it gets difficult and pushing and getting as many reps as we can, that's really where the magic happens when it comes to hypertrophy and building thicker thighs or the glorious glutes. All right, so squats, rear foot elevated split squats and various lunges as well. Many different ways to do this. Could be barbells, could be goblet squats, could be weighted vest. There's so many different paths to the goal, but making sure that we're adding these in. Ideally, you're going to be training your legs two to three times a week. Alright, this doesn't mean you go in and blast your legs one day 'cause that's a typical leg day.

You know, coming from where I come from, you just blast your legs until the next week, when you can actually walk normally again, is just getting in a few exercises with a few sets a couple of times a week. Alright, so number one, proactively build your leg and glute strength. Now something else that the data was affirming for us is leg power. So that does mean in some contexts this could mean like more power lifting type of movements, right? So this is something where it's a lower rep range. Yes, but also power is related to explosiveness, and so adding in some jumping exercises one to two times a week can be a game changer.

I love the jump rope for this, but there are a myriad of different types of box jumps and different kind of explosive step ups that you can do, but just adding in some jumping is

incredibly valuable in maintaining and even building your lower body power. Alright, so that's tip number one is to proactively build your glute and leg strength. Tip number two, in referencing back to the study that we covered earlier that was published in the American Journal of Medicine, finding that for every 10% stronger, your quads get relative to your body weight. Your risk of premature death from any cause drops by an additional 23%. All right, so referencing back to that study, the researchers specifically used isometric exercise. So tip number two is to add in some isometrics. Isometric exercises are exercises where you hold a position, and so when it comes to an isometric exercise for our quads, this can be as simple and as proven and as time tested as a wall sit.

This is where you find yourself a wall and you. Go ahead and put your back against that wall and step your feet out until your knees are at about a 90 degree angle and you hold your back against the wall and you hold that for a certain amount of time. So whether that's 30 seconds, 45, a minute, 20, if that's all you got, 10, if that's all you. But there's so much you can do with isometrics in that position. You could do one leg in that position, put your other foot against the wall. You could do calf raises in this position. You could add a plate on your legs in this position isometrics. You could do isometric holds with your rear foot.

Elevated split squats as well. You elevate your back foot and you squat down into your bottom position, and you hold that. If you stay upright, that's gonna be more quad dominant and just hold that position. 15, 20, 30 seconds, whatever you got, and then you repeat it for the other side. If you lean forward in that bottom position that's gonna target those glutes and really push your foot through the floor, you're really gonna get those glutes firing in this isometric hold.

Why these are incredibly valuable, especially in advanced ages, is that it takes a lot of the demand off of the joints, the ligaments, and the tendons as a matter of fact. These types of exercises, isometrics are very supportive in building the strength of our tendons, and so again, adding in some isometrics one to two times a week. You know, maybe three. Maybe you can add some isometrics in to all of your workouts. But adding this in is gonna be another one of those things that's stacking conditions in your favor when it comes to

building thicker thighs to save lives, in particular your life. Number three, and this is from the perspective of what we're doing with our nutrition, can make a big difference here.

Number three is to target adiponectin. Adiponectin has recently gained notoriety as one of the most potent hormones influencing your appetite and fat metabolism. Adiponectin is primarily produced and secreted by your adipose tissue, which is where it gets its name. Now, here's why this matters for us. Adiponectin has been noted to help your body move fat away from the viscera belly fat region to the subcutaneous fat regions of your body. That's incredible. And lower levels of adiponectin have been associated with obesity, insulin resistance, and metabolic syndrome. So if we're looking at ways, how can we change where our body is storing excess energy.

This is one of the few ways, again, this can be just a tiny, tiny, tiny impact that something like this has, but we're working to stack conditions in our favor, and so with this being said, something really cool was found by researchers at the University of Pennsylvania, and they discovered that optimal levels of adiponectin can potentially support fat loss without increasing your appetite. So how can we utilize our nutrition to help us to target adiponectin well? Data cited in the European Journal of Clinical Nutrition reports that Omega-3 fatty acids have anti-obesity effects, and they're found to improve levels of adiponectin.

Again, noted to help our bodies to move fat away from the viscera belly fat region to more subcutaneous fat areas on the body, and one of those being, of course, the legs and the buttocks. Shout out to Forest Gump. Now, where are we gonna get these? Omega threes We're talking about DHA and EPA, DHA, and EPA. These are not the plant versions of omega threes. We can find this of course. Many of the studies are done on fish oil, and we also have krill oil, which is a microscopic shrimp that's very concentrated in omega threes and astaxanthin as well, which is protective of the omega, omega threes. And we also have algae oil if you're taking a plant first approach.

So what about whole food versions? Well, we know about omega threes. Oftentimes people associate that with fatty fish. The macros of the world, the salmons of the world of course.

Then we have foods like egg yolks. We have foods like grass fed beef that can be a viable source of Omega-3 fats that, again, are helping to target Adi.

But again, the emphasis is grass fed meats if you're going to use that as an Omega-3 source, because research published in the British Journal of Nutrition found that beef from animals fed an abnormal diet of conventional grains and other things that are utilized in conventional farming practices. They contain up to five times less Omega-3 fatty acids than what's found in grass fed beef. And so if you choose to utilize animal foods like these for your omega threes, you better know the difference. And this is one of the things that I love. About the incredible people at Wild Pastures because of the transparency that they put into their food.

Wild Pastures delivers 100% grass fed and grass finished beef pasture raised pork pasture raised chicken and wild caught seafood. Directly to your door. All born, raised and harvested entirely in the USA, raised on regenerative family farms and raised on pastures, free from pesticides and other chemicals.

No antibiotics, no added hormones, no added steroids, no feed lots and absolutely no GMOs. They're going above and beyond and food like this will obviously be at a premium, just getting this from just any old grocery store, and this is why utilizing a Wild Pasture subscription is so powerful because it will give you 20% off for life, plus free shipping. And if you're utilizing wild pastures for the first time, you're gonna get \$15 off your first order. To take advantage of all this, just go to [wildpastures.com/model](https://wildpastures.com/model) right now. That's W-I-L-D-P-A-S-T-U-R-E [s.com/model](https://wildpastures.com/model) to take advantage. Truly, truly incredible people definitely just head over to that link and just check them out.

Look at what they're doing, look at the integrity behind what they're doing and the people behind what they're doing. And I'm telling you, you're gonna be inspired. So again, go to [wildpastures.com/model](https://wildpastures.com/model) to take advantage. And now moving on, if we're looking at targeting adiponectin, what else? What else can we do nutritionally? Well, we can target high quality fiber. A meta-analysis of 52 studies uncovered that by simply increasing fiber intake, you can boost adiponectin levels by 60 to 115%. Incredible. Incredible. What does this speak to? We went from animal-based omega threes two plant food and plant fibers. This speaks to, it

doesn't have to be either or it can be both. And this is how humans really evolved as omnivores and eating plant foods and eating animal foods and finding what works best for you and giving yourself permission to do what works best for you in that amazing body of yours where you are right now. And so you don't want to go from 20 grams of fiber a day to a hundred overnight.

You don't want to go zero to a hundred real quick because it might make you real sick and it's just adding in, you know, add in some more diversity when it comes to fibers and adding in different fruits occasionally, or different veggies or different seeds and different nuts and things like that. You know, and a great way to do that is simply adding in something that's seasonal. You know, that's something you can look up online. And again, with targeting adiponectin fiber. Omega threes and fiber are two science-backed keys. And also, here's another valuable insight. When you eat certain macros can significantly influence adiponectin and your health overall. A study published in a peer-reviewed journal, obesity took overweight test subjects and put them on either a general reduced calorie diet or a reduced calorie diet.

Where the majority of their carbohydrates, about 80% of their carbs that they have in a day, were all eaten at dinner. At the end of the six month study, the study participants who ate most of their carbs at dinner lost more weight, had a greater reduction in waist circumference, and had a greater overall reduction of body fat mass compared to the conventional calorie restricted dieters. Plus the later day slash dinner. Carvers also had greater improvements in their fasting blood sugar, better insulin sensitivity, improved cholesterol ratios, reduced inflammation, and improved levels of leptin and adiponectin. All right, so back loading. Our carbs can be beneficial when in the context of adiponectin and also, wow. I mean, this study is crazy.

Holy moly to have all these benefits by back loading our carbs in our day. Not saying no carbs, but there's something remarkable metabolically that happens when we're starting our day with more protein and fat focus and then having the carbs towards the end of the day. Now we're at tip number four and really taking advantage of the science that we covered today.

And number four, when it comes to building size and strength of those thighs from a muscle perspective, protein is obviously critical. A recent study titled Perspectives regarding the role of dietary protein for the promotion of muscle hypertrophy with resistance exercise training details, the role of protein in building muscles.

The scientists affirmed quote, skeletal muscle supports locomotion and serves as the largest site of post-meal glucose disposal. Thus, it is a critical organ for physical and metabolic health. They go on to say, "skeletal muscle mass itself is regulated by the processes of muscle protein synthesis and muscle protein breakdown, both of which are sensitive to external loading and amino acidemia". Essentially, the researchers know that we need the loading slash resistance signal resistance training to start the muscle building process. Then we need the optimal amount of protein to build the muscle back better. Now, what is that optimal amount? The researchers found that we need ample amounts of protein to induce muscle protein synthesis, but too little and too much protein can reduce the maximum mobility for muscle to grow.

It's far more likely, however, that most people that are proactively wanting to build muscle are not getting in enough protein. So the too much is the issue for some people, but for most people targeting building muscle, the issue is more likely not getting in enough. The researchers honed in on about one gram of protein per pound of ideal body weight per day to effectively build muscle. So those are the four practical tips for us to utilize to get the most out of this incredible science. And remember, more than anything else, your legs are not merely about local motion and movement. They are metabolic engines. Our legs and our glutes are a reservoir of hormones and neurological signaling hubs, and they may be a resilience marker when it comes to our brain health, when it comes to our cardiometabolic health and when it comes to our longevity.

So train your lower body like your cognition, depends on it. Because it just might. I hope you enjoyed this incredible episode. If you did, you already know what to do. Share this out with somebody that you care about. And listen, we are just getting warmed up. We've got some incredible, incredible masterclasses and world leading experts coming your way very, very soon. So make sure to stay tuned. Take care, have an amazing day, and I'll talk with you soon.