

FAMILY HEALTH AND FITNESS SUMMIT

GUEST: Laila Ali

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SHAWN STEVENSON: Welcome to the 2023 Family Health and Fitness Summit. This is about family, this is about empowerment, this is about education, and I've got somebody, for me, this is a highlight of this experience to be able to share her voice and her experience with everybody. We've got superstar in multiple domains, it's not just boxing, but except we talking about a different level when it comes to your accomplishments. But a lot of people don't know, surprisingly, that you also are, not just an incredible cook, but you won the TV show Chopped dos times, twice. And you were about that life. When I got a chance to eat your cooking firsthand, by the way, we were also, we were making recipes of yours before we even met at our house. So when I got to eat your food, it was like, ah, this is real. Welcome to the Family Health and Fitness Summit, Laila Ali.

LAILA ALI: Thank you so much. You just warmed my heart. When you're a cook, it just makes you feel so good for people to say that they enjoyed your food, because food is love, and that is what I love to do. I love to cook for the people that I love.

SHAWN STEVENSON: That's what I'm talking about. And I see that love just being in your household, with your kids and your phenom... I love your husband, man, he's my guy. And I know that family health is really important to you. So can you talk a little bit about that. Why is family health and wellness so important to you?

LAILA ALI: Health is super important to me for myself, so of course, when it comes to the people I love about, I'm going to be looking out for their health as well. I learned through the sport of boxing how much food really fueled you. It was really all about the performance in the ring, and it really came down to the foods that I was putting in my body. Not just how much I was training, not just how much I was sleeping, not just my mindset, and then as I evolved as a fighter, as a person, a mother, and all of that, I started doing more research about non-GMO food and organic foods and just high quality foods. I'm always talking to my kids and my husband about it. In fact, I get on their nerves because I'm always going around saying, what, you going to eat that? No, you had enough of that. I'm managing everybody's intake.

SHAWN STEVENSON: That's right, somebody's have got to look out for everybody, and you play that role. And also one of the things I've noticed is you've integrated these healthier practices, into your family and into cooking and still maintaining some of the legacy that we have from our families in the meals that we're making, as soul food, for example. And just really just finding ways to upgrade the ingredients and things like that. But my biggest question for you that I'm not asking everybody else straight up, Laila, how do you do it? Because you are one of the busiest people that I've ever met. You've got all the plates, you know what I mean. You're

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spinning, whatever, you got a lot going on, but you still find time to make dinner for your family on a regular basis. How do you do it? Tell us your secret.

LAILA ALI: You know what, the truth of the matter is that we all do what we make our priority. Cooking for my family is a big priority for me. And some other things slip, like people do say, how do you do it? How do you manage it all? That's a conversation that we're constantly having as women, 'cause we wear a lot of different hats or just people in general now these days with so many different things taking our time and our attention. And a lot of times our health and our wellness and what we're putting our bodies is the last thing that people really commit time and intentionality to. But for me, I truly understand the importance of it. And at the core, I want to be in control. I want to be in control of my health and my wellness, and I truly believe that so much of that has to do with the choices that I make. That's why it's so important to me, now, in terms of doing it all, honey, I don't.

LAILA ALI: I got laundry in there building up, I got a stack of papers that need to be taken care of. I got some projects and emails that I need to send, but guess what, after I get off this call, I still have to run to the store and get something and I'm cooking dinner and everything else just has to stop. And if I get a little more time later to do it, I will, or I have to do it tomorrow. But there's just certain things that I always do. Now, don't get me wrong, there are times when I'm not able to cook or I'm like I need a break and I'm not going to beat myself up about all that. But most of the time I do prepare meals for my family. In fact, I have an organic garden outside that I can go harvest some, all of the ingredients from the salad we're having tonight from right now.

SHAWN STEVENSON: That's so special, so special. And what I'm really hearing is, first and foremost, what you prioritize will be the thing that gets the best of you, and obviously there's so much going on in our lives, but really just calling out and saying, you know what, and this, I saw this, and working in clinical practice, working with people on a day-to-day basis and asking people, what is the most important thing to you? Why do you want to take care of your health? Nine times out of 10 they would say, it's my family. My family's the most important thing in my life. But then if you look at how they're living their life and talking about that, like let's look at your schedule. Is your schedule saying that your family is your priority? And a lot of times there'd be a mismatch.

SHAWN STEVENSON: And a lot of times we'd have breakthrough moments and just saying, you know what, if this is my priority, I need to prioritize it. And so that's the first domino. And the practicality is, you know what, even when we are long gone, the day that we leave this planet, we're still going have stuff on our to-do list. It don't stop. Can't stop, won't stop. Shout out to Puffy. But here's the thing, even with that and just understanding some things are going to get pushed to the side. As long as you maintain that priority, you'll find a way. And here's the craziest part, is that, that love and that connection overflows into the work that you're doing.

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SHAWN STEVENSON: That's like, it's a superpower that we don't often get access to. And so one of the things I want to highlight for everybody in this summit is that a lot of times, this is an energy management thing too, sometimes, we'll... Family dinner's not happening because we're just tired. We don't want to deal with it. We don't deal with, the personalities is a lot. But when we are taking care of ourselves and filling up our own cup, then that's oftentimes where, and just a little bit at a time doesn't have to be overnight, we start to find more energy to do those other things, and it starts to create like a virtuous circle instead of a vicious circle. Now, I want to ask you, what are some of the things that you've done personally to create a culture of health and connection within your family?

LAILA ALI: Well, I would say the first thing that I've done is be an example that the rest of the family can follow and look up to. I'm consistently living that life myself. That was the first thing. Then I have made a commitment to cook and provide healthy options for the family. And I also get the kids involved. They're very picky, right? They always have something to say. This one doesn't like Turkey Burgers, this one doesn't like beef burgers. I'm like, really? This one doesn't like the baked macaroni. This one likes the saucy cheesy macaroni. And so I'm like, wow. I'm like a short order cook around here. So I'll say, okay, tonight is your night. What do you want to have? And then it can be the other one's night. And that has been really helpful as well, to make sure that I'm actually preparing meals that they like.

LAILA ALI: And since they were little, I've been sneaking in veggies. In my cookbook, Food For Life. I even have some secret sauces. Like if I'm going to, even if you're going to open a jar of store bought spaghetti, that's fine, get a good organic brand that's low in sodium, doesn't have added chemicals. You can still roast some vegetables, you can get some red pepper, you can get some onions and garlic and zucchini. And then you can put it in a blender and add it to your sauce and add extra nutrition that way. And then the kids won't even know. So when you kind of take the extra time to think like that, but also just get ideas and tips and get educated from shows like yours, cookbooks like ours, then you can be on the road to success.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Amazing. Amazing. I love all that. And it seems so practical as well, like having more of a democracy with the meal selection because growing up in, where I grew up, low income, all the things, it was just like eat it all or you're not leaving this table till you better... That kind of thing. And I rebelled especially once I got the chance to not be forced to eat things I didn't want to eat, I went so ham, so hard into all this crazy fake food that I would've rather eaten instead when I was a kid. Instead of, again, being kind of invited into the process, just giving a little bit of input, suddenly we feel like we are participant in this. We're a co-creator of family dinners. And so asking your kids, if you've got multiple kids, for example, let them have their night selection. What do you want on the menu? And also what I found too is kids like options. Even if those options are your options, but just like, would you like this or this tonight? Again, it's

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that democracy? They're placing their vote and they're going to deal with who they put into office as far as their food. That is so good. I love it so much.

LAILA ALI: I agree with that a hundred percent.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Awesome. All right. Now you said that you get your kids involved in this process. What about in the process of cooking itself? Is this a place where you're inviting your kids to participate in that as well?

LAILA ALI: I would like to do that more than I do now, although I do invite them in. I'm somebody who like, I'm kind of like, this is my kitchen, this is my domain. I don't really like that much help. That's just how I am in general, because that's my vibe spot, you know what I mean? Even on Thanksgiving, when I have a house full, everyone's like, can I help? Can I help? No, no, no. 'Cause I don't want you messing my food up. I might let you chop something, but I have got to make chop at the right size because the bite matters, even the chopping matters. But with the kids, like for example, Sydney, we just baked some chocolate chip cookies, some gluten-free chocolate chip cookies yesterday, and she was helping me do that.

LAILA ALI: It's very intentional when I do it. It's definitely not a regular thing because I kind of, like I said, that's just what I enjoy doing. But Sydney loves to help cooking. My son, I kind of have got to drag him in a little bit more, but I've been telling him now that he's 15, I'm like, look, I'm about to start making you get in the kitchen even. 'Cause I usually will ask, Hey, do you want to help? And he'll say no. So now I'm like, what I don't want is, I don't want him growing up, moving out the house not knowing how to prepare a meal for himself, because it's very empowering to know how to make your own food. It's like, you have got to at least know the basics. Sydney, she's already on it. She'll be like, Hey mom, she's not waiting.

LAILA ALI: And she's more like me. She's in the kitchen, she's already cooking, she's putting her food together. And of course I watch over her, but she's very responsible, you know what I mean? Yeah, have, having help is always good, they do come to the garden with me and harvest sometimes. I'm like, Hey, let's go get some tomatoes, let's go get some onions, let's go get some lettuce. And they'll help me harvest food that way. But yeah, I think that in my perfect world, there would be one night where the kids cook dinner, just one night where they do it start to finish. But what I have to work on is my patience before that happens, patience to sit back and watch and not hover and tell them what they're doing wrong. [laughter]

SHAWN STEVENSON: That part. Thank you for sharing this because this is, again, this is keeping it real. We have to know thyself, understand our personalities. Your kitchen is your vibe, that is your domain. And one of the things that I highlighted in the Eat Smarter Family Cookbook is, create the kitchen vibe that you like. For me, I'm the early morning guy. I'm the breakfast guy,

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I'm the making coffee guy for my wife. And when I do that, I'm having the Alexa connect to my phone. I'm trying to say a whisper so I'm not turning on people's Alexa and I'm playing my Jams, whatever it is I want to hear, whatever I'm into for that day. And I got the music blasting, and you guys are going to jump into the vibe or not. I don't care if you want this good food or you want this coffee, this is what's happening. And it's because it makes me feel good. And also I could see it infecting in a positive way my family members, just really kind of setting the tone for the day.

SHAWN STEVENSON: And with that being said, Anne is more, she's on the dinner side and she likes to, a lot of times, she don't want nobody in there. And when I'm making stuff, people are coming in and out, it's a lot more movement. But she's, sometimes she'll put on one of these shows, she knows I don't want to watch, like Love Is Blind or something she's watching right now. Real Housewives or something, Potomac's coming back. I don't, what does that even mean? It's just creating the vibe that you like. And also, like you said, it's intentional for our personality type is to set aside some time when we can have a little bit more patience and allow our kids and invite them in and do some things together. And the most important thing that you said in that note was like, okay, especially when our kids are getting older, making sure that they have this valuable skill set to be able to feed themselves. Like a couple basic things can take them a long way, because that's one of the things that's on the endangered species list right now is, and this is some of the data that we share, less and less kids know how to prepare meals for themselves. And so what are they going to do? They're going to eat more ultra processed foods.

LAILA ALI: Absolutely.

SHAWN STEVENSON: And so it's just understanding your personality type and creating a culture that works for you.

LAILA ALI: Yep. And let me just add to that, the energy that we put into the food has a lot to do with how we're feeling, the vibe in the kitchen. I definitely like to keep the kitchen positive, I like to be feeling good, I like to be happy, and that's the other thing about eating out and all of that. You don't know what that person's energy was that they had when they were creating your meal, you know what I'm saying? It all just really comes together, there's just so many benefits to cooking your own food at home.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Ooh, this ties right back to what, food is Love. It's a translation, it's an energy exchange. And this isn't just like a metaphysical, this is real solid science that we know today. And, but our ancestors knew this. There is this energy exchange, everything is energy and our vibration truly does affect the vibration of that food, it is a real thing. And so being more intentional in that, and we feel it, we all feel it. I know that you felt it... I've of course felt it having

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food prepared by people that love us. It doesn't even compare to anything else out there in the world. Just keeping that in our back pocket as well. I want to ask you about this because you mentioned having some varieties of picky eaters. And you mentioned the democracy helping with that, allowing them to select. But is there anything else that you've done? Because that's something a lot of parents struggle with is getting their kids to eat certain things.

LAILA ALI: Well, I would say that over the years, I have snuck in the veggies which I mentioned, and as they're older now, even with adults you could sneak in more veggies, even with your yourself, it doesn't have to be a sneak, it's just to elevate your meal. But I have just tried because a lot of times I go, they won't eat that. And then we say, we go to someone's house or we happen to be at a restaurant, they order something, I'm like, oh, you eat that? They'll try things. I have to try myself, push past my comfort zone because sometimes we get so stuck in saying, I don't want any pushback. I'm just going to make X, Y, Z. And we don't try new things ourselves.

LAILA ALI: I think that for me, I have learned that having a meal plan is very helpful, having foods that my kids have chosen that I know they like, but also having a night where I try something totally new that I've never made before. Keeping in mind I'm not going to put anything in there that I know that they absolutely, I'm not going to be like, Hey, my son absolutely does not like liver, I'm going to try to make him eat liver, you know what I mean? But I'm talking about it can be a different preparation using different vegetables, trying a different sauce, trying a different, maybe instead of rice, we're going to do quinoa, or instead of regular potatoes, we're going to do sweet potatoes or add some in, doing a stir fry. That's a great way to try new things.

LAILA ALI: And when you're stir frying, so a lot of times, I'll make something that they've seen before. Okay, if I'm going to give them some rice, they might get some brown rice. But in the stir fry, I'm not just going to do Chicken and Broccoli, you know what I mean. I might throw some green beans in there, I might throw some celery in there, I might throw some other vegetables that they, bok choy, something that they don't normally have. That's all, you just have got to try new things. And putting sauce and putting the right season on it will really take it a long way. And you already know, I know how to do that.

SHAWN STEVENSON: That part and your spices by the way stay on rotation in our cabinets, we love them. And by the way, we're going to put a link for Laila's spices for everybody in the notes along with this interview. And it's lailaali.com/model, by the way, and you get an exclusive discount. Other people don't get this discount that Laila knows, it's exclusively for us. Definitely check that out. And finally, before I let you go, I want to ask you about the culture that you've created during mealtimes itself, getting the family together and actually connecting. Can you talk a little bit about your family's culture?

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LAILA ALI: Absolutely. Well, we're all so busy, kids on their phones a lot of the times, we are on our phones, we're handling business, we're running all through the house, with so many different things to do, so many different things taking our attention. I like mealtime to be one time during the day that we're absolutely going to sit together and check in. And usually, I'm going to ask how your day was, what happened today? And so many different things come up. And it's like, I really get to learn who my kids are, what human beings they're turning into. What some of the struggles are? What are some of the things that are making them happy, who their new friends are, any challenges that they're facing, any hard classes that they're struggling with. This is when I can really give them the feedback.

LAILA ALI: Because you think about how many hours a day your kids are gone and away from you, and they're still learning. They're learning from other people, they're learning from the environment, they're learning at school, having interactions. And I like to have the opportunity to kind of pick their brains, share with them how my day was and really connect as a family. And that doesn't always mean, we don't have phones at the table, that's one thing we don't, but sometimes you're going to appreciate this, we'll have the TV on in the background because we like to watch Martin Lawrence and we will literally do that a lot of time.

SHAWN STEVENSON: [laughter] that's Martin.

LAILA ALI: Yes, we literally, because it's such a regular thing, everyone's not sitting there just like not paying attention to each other watching Martin. We have seen these episodes over and over again, so sometimes we'll just turn it on and we'll be talking, having our moment, and all of a sudden one of these characters will come on, whoop, whoop, whoop, whoop, whoop, and we'll be like... Everyone will just start laughing and that's a great moment to have together too, just something that's silly that we can all laugh at, and just, it doesn't have to be a formal situation. We all want to be together doing the same thing, focused on the same thing at the same time interacting.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Amazing. Marty Mar, love the kids! Amazing. I love this. Again, this is identifying what is special and unifying for our unique family, our unique tribe. And, I love that so much. And you just shared literally what this is really all about, which is for us being able to get real face time with our kids, to keep our fingers on the pulse of what's going on in their lives because we spend so much time apart. And that dinner table, whether it's dinner or lunch or whatever the meal is, but that dinner table is a unifier. It's an opportunity for us to see, to feel seen, and to truly connect. And also, real talk, with all the crazy stuff going on in the world, we get an opportunity to get feedback while a little monster might be getting created. Instead of dealing with a big monster later on. And so that's so powerful, Laila. Can you let people know where they can get your cookbook? And of course, I shout out your spices. Can you share why your spices are so special?

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LAILA ALI: My Laila Ali Spice Blends are made to mix and match. I actually have three new flavors coming out that you have not had yet. I'm going to send you some because you're going to absolutely love them, yes. And they're organic. They're non-GMO. There's no chemicals and no fillers and they are blends. They're meant to make cooking easier. So instead of maybe pulling out eight different containers, you only pull out the one and you can mix and match them. And, they're just a way to elevate the flavors in your meals. I have salt free flavors. They're all low salt. So you're sprinkling on nutrition, because a lot of spices that a lot of the commercial brands have chemicals, fillers, they're non-organic. So they have pesticides and herbicides. You think about sprinkling on a little bit of poison every day, that's not going to add up.

LAILA ALI: That's why I created my spice blends, because I love to cook amazing, delicious meals. And that's why I won Chopped. They kept talking about the flavor in the food, the seasoning in the food. That's really my culinary trademark is I can make anything taste really good. If you take and put it on some really great ingredients, you're going to have a great meal in front of you. My cookbook, Food for Life, same reason you did your book, really to give people tools and information they need and inspiration, excellent recipes that they can incorporate into their life. It's so much more than just a cookbook, just like your book, which I love, by the way. I am using one of the recipes out of it tonight to cook here in my home.

LAILA ALI: And, I think that the more we can share inspiration, tools, tips and products with others, and just keep keep that information out there, the better it's going to get. Because, Shawn, heart disease, diabetes, obesity, those are the leading killers in our in our world. And these are things that a lot of times we can control. That's why I started Laila Ali Lifestyle. That's why I came out with my spice blends, my cookbook and why I'm so passionate about encouraging others to take control of their own health.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yeah, thank you so much, Laila. And listen, anytime I get to talk to you, it's an honor, straight up. You're one of my favorite people. And even when we just pop into Atlanta, we try to connect with you because you are the real deal. You're really about that life and I respect you so much and I appreciate you. And like you said, even with your seasoning blends, you just make you make it easy for us. The soul food seasoning salt, for example, just like some ground beef or ground bison or ground turkey, just add that. You don't have to worry about all these other things. And, again, I appreciate you so much. Thank you so much for contributing to this important summit for family, for wellness. And I hope you have a great rest of your day.

LAILA ALI: Thank you so much for inviting me. And you already know that you all are some of my favorite people. I love your family. You're welcome to my home and my table anytime.

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SHAWN STEVENSON: Awesome. We love you. And everybody, thank you so much for hanging out with us in this 2023 Family Health and Fitness Summit interview. You've got more to come, so make sure to stay tuned.