

Rachel: Hello everyone, today we're here with Shawn Stevenson. Shawn Stevenson is a best-selling author and creator of The Model Health Show, featured as the number one nutrition and fitness podcast on iTunes. A graduate of the University of Missouri-St. Louis, with a background in biology and kinesiology, Shawn went on to be the founder of Advanced Integrative Health Alliance, a successful company that provides wellness services for both individuals and organizations worldwide. Shawn is also a dynamic keynote speaker who has spoken for TEDx, universities, and numerous organizations with outstanding reviews. To learn more about Shawn, visit theshawnstevensonmodel.com.

And I originally came across Shawn a few years ago, actually, at a TEDx event in Las Vegas, and I just thought his presentation was spectacular and loved his wife, and everyone had such great things to say about him. And throughout the years, his name would just come up a lot, either through... I had a friend that was working with him, or mutual friends mentioning him, or Facebook - just all over. And I knew a little bit about his backstory, and it just always made me have so much respect for him.

The backstory, and Shawn I'll let you get into this more later if you want to, but basically he was diagnosed with a very rare disease back when he was in college, that he was told was incurable. And so while he was a young student in college, his doctors told him that he had the spine of an 80 year old, and he had a hard time even just walking from room to room. And so he decided he wasn't going to take that as an answer, he wasn't going to take "incurable" as an answer, so he just started doing a ton of research about health and nutrition, and was eventually able to get rid of all the pain and just have a crazy healthy body. So not only has he made huge changes for himself, but what I really love is that he gives awesome advice for other people, and it's very accessible. So whenever I listen to his podcast, it's very rarely, like, hard and fast rules, "you need to do this, you need to do this." It's practical stuff that people can actually commit to. So I'm pumped for this episode, I'm looking forward to getting you guys some tips about how to maximize your energy, feel focused, and just feel like the best version of yourself. So Shawn, thanks so much for being here!

Shawn: Rachel, thank you so much for having me on, this is awesome! And it makes me sound so awesome, thank you so much!

Rachel: It's true, I wrote that in, like, three seconds.

Shawn: Well it's so interesting because when I hear my story, especially coming from another person, it's just like... Wow, that was my life. It's really hard to believe I came from that place where yeah, it was really difficult, I spent a lot of time laying on my floor in my bachelor apartment while I was in college, just like hoping that somebody would come and save me and help me to get my health back. And it's just been a really wild, interesting, and really rewarding journey since then, the process of getting well. And

then from there, being able to serve other people and helping them to do the same thing, so it's so amazing to be able to even stand here with my spine being great, and being able to talk to you today, so thank you.

Rachel: Thank you! And rolling right along with that, how I always open this podcast is just, the intention behind the show is just to show people that if they have a choice, that they can choose a better life. And so can you just take a moment to share some of the things you're most proud of in your life? You just shared one, if you have any others that come to mind, I'd love to just take a second and brag.

Shawn: All right, I'll do that, okay. Well I'm very, very proud of being a father. I have three kids, and check this out everybody! My oldest- my daughter is 18, freshman in college, and my baby boy is three. So I've got this wide range of humans who I am responsible for in one way or another, and I am very, very proud to be a dad, and to really be able to, more than anything, just kind of show them what's possible because I didn't really have that framework or that example growing up. So it really makes me feel good to know that, and to know that my kids really do understand and admire the work that I'm doing. It really means the world to me.

Another thing I'm proud of is being a husband. It's so important to me, and being a good husband. When I met my wife, it was simultaneously when I think I was trying to get my stuff together instead of being a "player" so meeting her, it really, I guess it co-created me being a devoted, honorable man and through her, I've also co-created my mission because her... People who listen to my show know this, that my mother-in-law was actually a big spark for me really learning about nutrition. And then I don't think that's an accident at all, so I'm really proud of that.

I'm proud that my book, my latest book "[Sleep Smarter](#)", is the number one bestseller for five months strong right now and we are not coming down anytime soon. This conversation about sleep, we're making it sexy, and people are understanding the leverage point that they can get with improving their sleep quality through this book. I literally wrote the book on sleep, which is just amazing to say that. And I'm proud of my show. It's my baby, it's the thing that I invest most of my time and energy into. I love doing it, absolutely love doing the show. So my show, as you mentioned, "The Model Health Show" has been featured as the number one health show in the world before, and also number one in nutrition and fitness several times.

And I'm so happy to be a part of this community of people who are really changing the health conversation out there. This podcast world is extremely powerful at changing what society's doing. You know, it's so interesting because just being out at random places I'm bumping into fans of the show, fans of other shows, and it's real. It's really, really changing the game out there, so everybody listening who's into podcasts, keep it

up, and people who are doing their podcasts, keep it up, because we're really making a big difference.

Rachel: Really, it's amazing! I've been blown away at podcasts. I just launched mine, like, two months ago, and there's been 60,000 downloads already, I've been shocked!

Shawn: It's incredible, it's this interesting format where you can use... It was Tony Robbins, I believe, that said this, or maybe it was Jim Rohn - your NET time, no extra time. You know, you can do this when you're driving, you can get educated, you can listen to something that is fulfilling to your soul, or you can listen to something that's fulfilling to your mission to learn more about marketing or health or whatever it is, while you're exercising, walking, doing the dishes, like you can still live your life and still learn at the same time.

And human beings, we're really meant to learn that way, not just with one sense, sitting down and watching the teacher. We're meant to use our bodies, to be active and auditory is a very, very powerful way of learning because how we used to learn was really through stories, the passing down of stories and communication. So it's just kind of getting connected back to that, it's very primal and it's extremely powerful. And also, by the way, I don't know if you know this yet, Rachel, but they're building the new cars right now, for a while now, they're actually putting podcast apps into automobiles. So it's only going to get bigger.

Rachel: Oh, that's awesome. I had no idea.

Shawn: Yeah.

Rachel: Very cool. Okay, so where you are now, you just gave some super outstanding brags, you have so many great things going on. And in the beginning, you talked a bit about when you had your degenerative disc disease, and we don't have to keep going back to this, but... First of all, if you want to explain more about it for context, awesome.

Shawn: Sure, sure.

Rachel: But I'd also love to know, like where you are now. You just gave these great brags, and I know that you were in this place where you were laying on the floor praying for help, and I'd just love to know a little bit more about the mindset, or the choices that you made to help shape you from getting from where you were to where you are now. Like what are the things that you'd tell yourself, or told yourself?

Shawn: Yeah, okay. Well, just to give people a little brief snapshot at it, so I was diagnosed with Degenerative Bone Disease/Spinal Disease, so my bones and discs were deteriorating. And I actually got a little glimpse at this when I was 16. This is before the diagnosis, because I was doing a timed trial. I was a track athlete, and I was doing a timed trial running a 200 meter sprint, and about 150 meters in, I broke my hip.

My iliac crest, like the tip of my hip just broke off, and I didn't know at the time I just kept going to practice for a couple of days, but it just got ridiculous, I'm limping around.

So I went and got a scan done, and there was my bone just kind of hanging off in space, I'm like, "oh, that's interesting." And then they put me through the normal track of recovery, physical therapy, some exercises, ultrasound, and they gave me like a little jacuzzi tub that I could bring home, and that was it. I'm 16, so like, my hormones were like wild stallion, like Italian stallion, whatever, it's just crazy so I had everything in my favor, everything was rocking out. So I was able to recover quickly with that assistance of just being young.

Fast forward when I'm 20 years old, is when I started to have a really difficult time walking, and I got my scan done, an MRI done then, and my physician told me that I had this degenerative bone disease, and that I had the spine of an 80 year old when I was 20. And he said, "there's nothing you can do about this." And I still to this day, Rachel, I have no idea if it was like, I went back to the future or something, like hopped in the DeLorean and went back and told myself to say this, because I had no idea at the time about why this matters, but I asked the doctor, "Does this have anything to do with what I'm eating? Should I change the way I'm exercising?" I asked him these things, I had no clue that that stuff even mattered. And he looked at me like I was from the future or from another planet, he's like, "This has nothing to do with what you're eating, son. This is something that just happens. It's something that you're going to have to manage, we're going to get you a prescription, we're going to get you a back brace, and you're just going to have to live with this. I'm sorry."

To just see me, like you could just see the deflation happen. I can still feel it, like I just felt so confused and so sad, I can't believe I'm getting diagnosed with something like this. And so fast forward the story, I see four more physicians to get multiple opinions, they all say the same thing.

Two and a half years later, 30+ pounds heavier, far more pain because obviously I was told I can't get well, so I'm taking medication just to sleep at night, and here's what changed, here's the kind of mindset shift that you asked about. It was two and a half years later, I'm sitting on my bed about to take my Tylenol PM plus my prescription medications to knock me out, which is... I can't believe I'm even saying that. And it just came to me in that moment, I was thinking about my life, and like how did I get to this point, and obviously I was depressed at the time. So I'm facing this depression, and I remembered in that moment, for whatever reason, my grandmother.

I thought about my grandmother, and I remember her always bragging about me and talking about how special I am, and how much potential I have, and all these amazing things that I'm going to do in my life, and I'm just like, "This is not matching up, grandma," in my head, and because of that I started to think about all the things that she

instilled in me. That determination, that focus, that strength that I had that I had just forgotten about, and right then in that moment, I made the decision to get well.

And this might sound kind of cliché, but people don't usually do this, Rachel. When people make a decision most of the time, it's not really a decision, it's more like wishful thinking, like, "I want to do this, I really want to lose some weight. It would be nice if I get into a relationship." I made a decision that I'm going to be well. Come what may, nothing is going to stop me. So I really had this very firm resolve, and it's not like the clouds parted and like a genie came out or anything like that, but I was able to sleep at night without medication for the first time. And I woke up and I put a plan together. And we can talk a little bit about, of course, what I did to get well and reverse the condition.

By the way, when I went to get a scan done six months later, my spine had regenerated, and my two ruptured discs had retracted on their own and the results spoke for themselves. So we can talk about some of the stuff I did, but the mindset shift really was tuning back in to my worthiness and my deserving to be happy, and the potential I have, and finally and ultimately making the decision that I was going to do this. So, there you go.

Rachel: That's amazing, and you didn't have, at that point, any examples of somebody who had gotten through it, did you?

Shawn: No. Absolutely not! It was totally, I was just done. And I think that's a valuable place to be sometimes, too, when you kind of hit rock bottom and it's like, you can't go any lower. And I was just fed up, I was sick and tired of being sick and tired, and that was it for me. I guess it was more so like how it's the carrot and the stick, like the pain was so bad, I was just finished.

Rachel: Wow, wow. And yeah, I'd love to dig into some of the things that you did on your plan.

Shawn: Yeah. Okay, so the first thing - I say this is the first thing, it's not the most important thing, but this is the easiest thing for people in our society to kind of... and as you know, I'm really about like, practical tangible things that you can take away and do now. So the first thing was, the opposite of what my physicians were telling me. They were telling me bed rest, wear this back brace, be careful, don't do anything. Here's the thing, Rachel, is that the human body requires movement in order to heal. It's like your body really works on "If you don't use it, you lose it." This is where the whole concept of even when your muscles atrophy and bones atrophy, bone degeneration will take place if you're not using your bones, all right? So, it's just like so obvious that I needed to move, but I wasn't doing it because of fear. So I started to move my body, and this is incredibly important for everybody just to be active every single day at least get like, 20 minutes of conscious exercise in.

So, I started off because I couldn't move my leg very well, on a stationary bike. A week later, I got onto the treadmill, a week after that I started jogging a little bit, a week later I added in some weight lifting. Six weeks later I had lost 30 pounds, results not typical but I lost 30 pounds because it just really wasn't supposed to be on my frame, and it felt like I literally... the pain was gone. It was as if nothing had ever happened, and the biggest component, though... Yes, the exercise was kind of the driving force, the initial thing, but the real change happened when I changed my nutrition.

And just to give everybody the biggest takeaway with this, it's that your body will not heal unless you give it the raw materials it needs to do so. So I began to ask questions like, "Okay, what is my spine actually made of, right?" If my spine is degenerating, what do I need to give my body for it to do the job? Because your body has this infinite intelligence, it knows what to do, you've just got to get out of the way. Even if, like for example right now, if you get a cut on your leg or on your hand, just if you get a cut on the back of your hand for example, your body knows what to do to fix that. What we do as humans, though, is we can... like, I can put some beer on it, I can just keep on opening it, playing with it, and putting like some mustard on there, some crazy stuff, and prevent it from healing, right? That's what we usually do, so you need to get out of the way and let your body do the job, but give it the raw materials.

So with the spine, I'll just share with everybody two quick things. Your discs in your back are non-vascular, right, and I want to share this because I know a lot of people have back troubles, so the discs are non-vascular. That means that nutrition doesn't get there directly, all right, nutrition, hydration. It's like the last place to get fed, which is crazy that our bodies operate like that, but our bodies work on a hierarchy. It's more important for your body to build blood than to regenerate your spine tissue or your discs. And your bones require some calcium, but your blood requires calcium in order to clot, so your body's just like, "I'm going to clot the blood first, we'll get to the bones later." So with that said, number one - what's really creating that soft cushyness of the discs? Because it's sort of like little cushions, little shock absorbers - is water. I was drinking like one glass of water a day, maybe. Most of the time it was soda, Sunny D, Kool-Aid, Capri Suns with my growing butt, that kind of stuff. And so I was dramatically, chronically dehydrated, but I had no idea, because I'm just living like most Americans right then.

And so I started to do something called super hydration. I would super hydrate my body every day. So for me, I was drinking one liter of water first thing in the morning upon rising, and then another liter or two throughout the day. And lo and behold, my body took that water and it started to drive that... it's a process of... it's something called remote diffusion, where the water can actually eventually push its way into your spine, into your discs. And so I had all the stuff my body needed to do that, and so that's one thing.

The other thing, really quickly would be the nutrition itself. So what is my collagen made out of? The ligaments and tendons, and I'm just going to share this with everybody. Sulfur barium amino acids are very important. And so I was upgrading the quality of the food that I was eating, and getting more sulfur barium aminos, mainly that's going to be found in non-starchy vegetables, raw non-starchy vegetables. So, vitamin C and sulfur, those two things do something called transmutate to become tissues.

So I was upping my vitamin C, and I hope everybody's staying with me on this, I don't want to get too complicated, and upping my amount of sulfur barium aminos, and I can share some of those great foods to get those in, too. But those things were really helping to regenerate my spine rapidly, and my doctor when he saw the scan was just like, "whatever you're doing, keep doing it." He didn't have any logical explanation for it, but since then I've helped literally tens of thousands of people around the world to transform their health because of me going through my own particular struggle. So I would honestly go back and do the same thing again.

Rachel: Wow, so how did you find out the different parts of your body, what they were made of? A, how did you find that out, and then how did you find out what foods were good for those things?

Shawn: Well you know how it works, when the student is ready, the teacher will appear?

Rachel: Yes.

Shawn: I came across these different books, one book in particular that really kind of opened my eyes was called "[Acid and Alkaline](#)." And it was so interesting, and by the way, when I'm talking about this, because a lot of people are like, "I know about that stuff." Well, we actually have a culture now, especially if you're into health, that gets too extreme, okay? The unconscious health culture are extreme on the other end, very, very acidic. And then we try and go like, "everything needs to be alkaline, acid is bad." It's really about the yin and yang, it's a balance. But I was so chronically acid, I was in a state of acidosis. I read this book and it had this particular couple of lines, it basically said that when your body is deficient in the minerals that actually regenerate your spinal tissue, in particular calcium, it's going to first rob your hip and then your spine. It's going to take the calcium from your hip and then your spine.

Rachel: Wow.

Shawn: I broke my hip and then I had the spinal degeneration. It's like "What?!" It literally detailed what had happened with me. So I really tuned it when it said that. And so what calcium really is, it's an alkaline mineral, and that's really the key here, it's a mineral. It's a mineral balance that we are looking for in our bodies. And so once I understood that, and just kind of from that, I went and looked at, "okay, so what are the other minerals required? What are the minerals that make up the different tendons and

tissues and the co-factors?" I got really nerded out with it all, And so one of the interesting things was, there was a food called... people have heard about this, but maybe not as a food - aloe vera, right? Aloe vera is like, this big dinosaur tail looking plant, and when you fillet out a piece of that, it actually kind of looks like the spongy disc in your back. And so it has a tremendous amount of these sulfur barium amino acids, and also antioxidants, vitamin C is there, vitamin A, all these things that my body was chronically deficient in, was able to deliver that back to my system.

Now when people hear calcium, they might think, "well, I just need to drink more milk." Not so. I think you know this too already, that dairy products actually, when they're homogenized and pasteurized, the calcium is no longer in the same form, it's not as bio-available. And actually here's what the research shows, and anybody can go check this out themselves, it's that individuals who drink milk in particular have radically higher incidents of having osteoporosis, okay, and also degeneration of their bones, okay. Their bone density is less than the people who don't drink milk, so it's kind of right there in black and white.

So where do you get your calcium? Again, green leafy vegetables. Wonderful source of calcium, and it's bio-available. So I was just eating, like, a crazy amount of that stuff, and as a matter of fact, at first I started juicing, because I was really not attracted to broccoli at the time, or celery, so I would juice the stuff and just kind of change my palate and then eventually I started eating all the good stuff, so I hope all that made sense.

Rachel: Yeah, it absolutely made sense, and so I know there are so many different things that people can do to have better health, and I don't know if this is asking too much, so let me know if it is. But if you had to distill it to like... well, not distill it, but if you could pick the top three things that people could do to maximize their health?

Shawn: Oh.

Rachel: Would you be able to do that?

Shawn: Top three. That's tough but yes, I can definitely do that. Number one would be the very basis of nutrition, the number one nutrient is actually water. It's so important. And we look past this because in our culture, Rachel, like, we're jaded, because we have water all over the place like, literally... We're so wealthy with water, we've just got fountains going all the time, and people are like peeing in the water. Whereas other people, like, there's places in the world where water is, like, people are killing over water, so water is the most critical nutrient because, people have heard this before, up to 70, upwards of 80% of your water, depending on where you are in your life, 80% of your body is water.

Okay, so we're talking about your brain tissue, water's responsible for transmitting all the neurotransmitters throughout your body, so like, all of your cellular communication. Your mitochondria being able to make energy is happening in a water solution, so oftentimes when people don't have energy, they're dehydrated. It's so simple but one of the issues is that our hunger and thirst signals are so similar and this is going on in the hypothalamus of our brain that signals all this stuff. So oftentimes when we're really thirsty, we get the hunger pang, and so people eat, and what does that do? Make you more dehydrated, make you feel more like crap. But water is so critical, like I can literally rattle off a hundred different things that it's responsible for and it still wouldn't even be close.

So that's number one, get yourself super hydrated with the right kind of water, and I did a master class on this recently, I think it was episode 73 of my show, because, like I can go crazy nerded out with this stuff, with the water. But get yourself some high quality water and get hydrated. That would be number one.

Number two, real simple, but maybe not so much, is to eat real food. That's number two, eat real food, and when I say that, what is real food? I like to give the example if an indigenous person, somebody from a hunter-gatherer tribe came into your kitchen, and you took them through your cabinets and your refrigerator, would they be able to recognize where that food came from that you showed them? Okay, that's the real key to understanding if it's a real food or not. So when you take them and you show them the fruits and they're like, "Yeah, we've got fruits," and you show them the vegetables, they're like, "Yeah, we've got vegetables." Then you show them the nuts and seeds, they're like, "Yes, we know, we have nuts and seeds." You show them the meats that you have, and they're like "Yes, we hunt animals."

Then you show them the Ding Dongs. Then you show them the Honey Nut Cheerios, then you show them the potato chips. The connection is lost at that point. They can no longer recognize where that came from, because that's not real, okay? And now here's the stuff that people don't really realize, what about when you show them the bread, right? You can't recognize where that came from anymore, it doesn't look like amber waves of grain, or anything like that anymore, it's this loaf of something that gets mold and nasty pretty quickly. But it's one of the things in our society.

So, I went to a university and learned this stuff, not the stuff that I'm teaching, but I learned the wrong stuff. So we were taught to tell our clients to eat 7 to 11 servings of grains a day, and grains, literally, when we're talking about grains, we're talking about the number one category of foods that are going to spike your insulin, all right? And so, here's what I want people to understand about that. Insulin is your body's number one fat storing hormone, all right? So if insulin's getting activated all the time, you're going to be storing fat. It's just the way it works. Unless you're going to beat yourself down doing crazy insane amounts of cardio, which the human body's just not designed to do. How

about we just kind of move away from that bottom part of the pyramid, and focus on the other food groups and high quality food. So, I'm going to get off my soapbox on that.

So eating real food would be number two, and then number three, oh by the way, really quickly - if it's from a drive-through, it's probably not real food. If it has a mascot, it's probably not real food.

If it comes with a toy, it's probably not real food, all right? So, number three would be, this is like, so Captain Obvious, but people, just we don't know about this, really intimately, is vitamin S - sleep, getting your sleep on. Sleep is known as the anabolic state, okay? So this is when your body is actually changing from all the stuff you do during the day. If you're working out, your body doesn't change while you're working out, you're actually getting in worse shape when you work out. You're in worse shape than when you came in the gym. If I was to take you in to get a blood panel done, you would have inflammatory bio-markers, hormones would be kind of out of whack, it would look like you possibly have a disease, or some kind of a condition. But that's not true, you just had a tough workout. Your body changes from that workout while you're asleep.

This is when you release all the growth hormone, all the repairing hormones, all the stuff that makes you actually come back better and stronger. Sleep is like the secret sauce here, and so that would be the key. That would be number three, is to optimize your sleep, and by the way, Rachel, never at one point in my book do I say that you need to get blank hours of sleep. What you really need to do is optimize the sleep you are getting to get more of the deep sleep stages of sleep. So that's stages 3 and 4. Okay, stages 1 and 2 is the REM sleep, which stands for Rapid Eye Movement, that's when you're dreaming and all that kind of stuff. That's all good, you will get some benefit there, but we need to get into stages 3 and 4, and that's what I talk about. What are the strategies and tactics that you can do in your life to get you into stages 3 and 4 more often, so you can sleep actually a little bit less and enjoy your life with high energy while you're awake.

Rachel: Interesting. Can you go over just a couple, or maybe just one or two of the things to keep you in stage 3 and 4?

Shawn: Absolutely, all right. Here's a practical thing, and it goes together with something that we talked about earlier, the movement. There was a study done at Appalachian State University, and they took exercisers, and they had those exercisers, three different groups they put them in. Group 1 exercised at 7:00 a.m., Group 2 exercised at 1:00 p.m., okay so we've got 7:00 a.m., 1:00 p.m., and Group 3 exercised at 7:00 p.m. at night. What they discovered is that Group A, or the group who worked out in the morning at 7:00 a.m., spent up to 75 percent more time in the deep stages of sleep. Okay.

So it's just like right there, it's like, whoa, really? That's incredible, that's so interesting to know that. How can I leverage this in my life? This does not mean that you've gotta be one of the people that get up in the morning and go hit the gym. If you are one of those people, that's awesome! You're actually probably, you're able to get up and go to the gym because you're getting better sleep than most people. And some people who are doing that, they might not feel all the way the best, there's some other things you could be doing, but 9 times out of 10 they feel better than other people.

So you don't got to get up and hit the gym, what you do need to do is get up and do some form of activity. So this could be as simple as like doing some yoga at home, doing some rebounding, doing some bodyweight exercises, maybe some tabata, where you exercise for just four minutes, 30 seconds on, 30 seconds off. There are so many different things, go for a power walk, that's what I like to do, and like, throw on an audio book or podcast in the mornings, and then I'll train in the afternoon. But you do want to leverage this, understanding what the data shows. If you work out in the morning, it's going to help you to sleep better at night.

Rachel: Can I ask two quick questions about that?

Shawn: Sure.

Rachel: Awesome, thank you. So first, when you say wake up and do something, is there like a time? I know you mentioned at least 20 minutes a day of exercise. How long would you recommend that people do things in the morning - 20 minutes, or...?

Shawn: I think 20 minutes is the sweet spot, so okay, I don't like to say "I think." Here's what the research shows. Actually if you're going to get the most benefit, it would be... let's just use walking for example. Getting out and doing a brisk walk, the sweet spot is 35 minutes, 5 times a week, all right? But that's walking, that's a very low impact, low intensity type of thing. If you want to do something a little bit higher intensity, it could be as little as 4 minutes.

What we're really going for here is... let me make this as simple as possible. We have a natural hormone rhythm, especially guys don't really get this, sometimes, I know I didn't. Because, like whatever with the hormones, I don't have cycles. Guys even have cycles and a lot of women are like, "yes, they do." But we all have these hormonal rhythms that are in line with nature, and in the morning, right around 6 o'clock, everybody even if they say they're a night person, our natural hormones' rhythm is to have the highest point of cortisol right there in those morning hours, and that's evolutionarily derived, that's an evolutionary advantage for human beings because it was safer to get up in the morning and do our activities, all right? So, cortisol is going to be up in the morning, and it's going to be down in the evening.

Now here's the big secret, it's that cortisol is the antithesis of melatonin, it's the polar opposite. So when cortisol is up, melatonin is down. When melatonin is up, cortisol is down. So if you're up exercising at night, like you're trying to post on Instagram, you're at the gym at midnight like, "Yeah, I'm getting it in," you're actually depressing your melatonin so much, you're going to throw your whole hormonal patterns off. So what we want to do is exercise in the morning, encourage that high cortisol spike, and then it's going to set pattern, it's going to basically set up the clock so that the cortisol is lower in the evening and melatonin is higher, and I hope that makes sense. I think that really made sense for everybody.

Rachel: Yeah, I think that makes sense, for sure. And the other question that I was going to ask, you touched on it a little bit, and this isn't applicable to everybody, but it applies to me, and I'm sure other people, is we have a treadmill in my house, I don't know if that part applies. But I would wake up every morning and I would go on the treadmill for 20 minutes, and what I was finding was that I was just exhausting myself so much that it was like the rest of the morning I didn't feel better, like I felt worn down.

Shawn: Yeah.

Rachel: And you said that it could be because of some other things.

Shawn: Yes.

Rachel: What would that be?

Shawn: Okay, so number one here, Rachel, this is what I do every day, thousands of patients, is look at where is the real issue here? Because chances are it's not the exercise. The first place to look at, is the person actually getting high quality sleep in the first place? Because a lot of people are getting up and doing exercise, but their sleep quality sucks in the first place, and if your energy's down, chances are, it's first and foremost something to do with sleep quality. So, do you know when you were getting to sleep, how many hours you were getting, not that hours are that important, and were you waking up feeling refreshed?

Rachel: You know, I used to wake up refreshed all the time, I stopped, but now that you mention that, my boyfriend, he has a hard time... he wakes up a lot throughout the night, and so he'll wake me up sometimes, and I'll basically scratch his head until he falls asleep.

Shawn: Like Garfield.

Rachel: He's so much like a dog, actually, like I tell him all the time, he was a dog in a past life, he's crazy, it's hilarious actually, but that definitely has something to do with it, I'm sure.

Shawn: Yeah. So that's the first thing to look at, it's not the exercise, it's the sleep quality. But with that said, I would first look at ways of optimizing the sleep, which is what we're talking about here now, and now since we're doing this, I'm going to help you, thus everybody else can get the benefit too, just by hearing some of the recommendations for you guys all, more so even for your boyfriend to make sure that he's staying in deep sleep. So here's another one - super powerful for a lot of people - black your room out. Have you guys done this yet?

Rachel: No, I was just telling him that we need to, so it'll be moved up, moved up the list.

Shawn: Here's why it works so well, and people have experienced this all the time when they travel, and they go to a nice hotel by the beach, get those blackout curtains, and you have that sleep, that deep dreamless sleep, and you wake up, it's like, "Oh! Wow, that was amazing!" We can replicate that at our home, it's not that it's because you're out on the beach, it's because the human body.... So, here's the deal. You can wear an eye mask, but that's only going to be partially effective because your skin has photo-receptors.

So basically what that means is that your skin can sense light, right? So if there's any kind of light source coming through your windows from a street lamp or your porch light or whatever, what's going on outside. We're going to talk about external light first, but even the internal light to, so if you've got like a glaring bright light on your alarm clock, you need to get an alarm clock with a shutoff, with a dimmer shutoff.

Because you don't want any light source in your room if you want to get optimal sleep, because what that does is, any of those light sources hitting your skin will trigger to activate, basically talk to your liver, to your brain, to your kidneys, and say, "Hey, there's some light here, it might be daytime, it might be just like an overcast day." Your body's been evolved to be... it's only been like 100 plus years, just barely 100 years, Rachel, that we've had light like this. For all of human evolution before that, it was like night time, that's it. You might have some campfire light, but that's all you got.

Now, we can come home and light up our house like Las Vegas, like the strip and basically replicate, create a new daytime. So, black your room out, and you're probably going to find your sleep quality's going to increase immediately. That was the number one thing for me personally when I was running all these sleep experiments to find out what's going to optimize my sleep. That was my biggest takeaway that I always do to this day is blacking the room out. So that would be number one.

Number two is going to be hard for people who work on the internet. Do you even want to hear this?

Rachel: I think I do it. Is it stop going online after, what, 6:00 or 8:00?

Shawn: No, no. That doesn't matter as much, it's more so just giving yourself a curfew for when you actually go to bed. So, I like to give a recommendation of about 90 minutes before you plan on going to sleep, all right? So it might be 8:00 for you, it might be 6:00 for somebody else. And here's why - Rensselaer Polytechnic produced a study showing that two hours of iPad use was enough to drastically depress melatonin secretion.

Rachel: Wow.

Shawn: Yeah. At night, at night, by the way, and there's more studies being looked into right now, and what it is, is there's this blue spectrum of light that is kicking out of our electronic devices that I love, like we're hooking up right now through my Mac, and you've probably got the same thing, and it's just amazing that we can do this stuff. However, we don't understand the impact it's having on our health, because that blue spectrum of light is very, very similar to sunlight, and so here's a couple of hacks for everybody, because I like hacks, because even last night I was up late working, fixing a problem that you and I were talking about.

And so what you can do is there's an app you can get on many of your devices called [F.Lux, it's F-dot-Lux](#), and what it does is at a certain time, in alignment with the sun and moon cycle in your area, will actually pull out the blue spectrum of light from your screen. So you can still work, your computer will look a little bit different, but it just pulls that light out so it will help you to not get as much of a decrease in your melatonin. That's one option.

Option number two is you can get some of these, like, funky glasses. I don't know if you've heard of this yet, but they're like, orange tinted glasses, and you can just go online, there's like even hardware glasses, you can get some for 5 bucks, you can be fancy and get some for like, \$200 that are really cool looking. But I like to call them "Mr. and Mrs. Smith" glasses, because in that movie, right, when they had that scene and they were fighting together against the bad guys, or whatever, they were wearing some of these glasses. So that will just, basically, everything you're looking at, so even the lights in your house, it kind of pulls that spectrum of light out. I've found, Rachel, seriously, within me putting those glasses on, like 20, 30 minutes, I start falling asleep.

Rachel: Wow.

Shawn: And I'm not that guy that just falls asleep, it's just created this pattern, and I know that it just increases my melatonin secretion, and my sleep quality's been improved because of that.

Rachel: That's so interesting because I have [F.Lux](#) and I love it, and also I wear the [Gunnar glasses](#), but I wear them all day because I find that I don't get headaches when

I'm on the computer anymore when I wear the gunners. But are Gunnars the same as the ones that you're talking about, with the orange tint?

Shawn: I'm not familiar with the [Gunnars](#), do they have the orange tint?

Rachel: They have, like, yeah. Yeah, yellow-orange.

Shawn: Yeah, that's fine, that's all good.

Rachel: That's interesting, I don't feel like I get tired, but I guess for you that would explain the pattern, like when they start coming on that means bedtime soon.

Shawn: Yeah, exactly, and that's another one of the secrets right there, is that humans are creatures of habit, all right? And ever since we were babies, all the way... we're just adult babies, we're just big hairy babies, if you're a guy, or if you're a girl and you don't... never mind.

We're all just kind of grown up babies, right? We have the same basic programming, and it's really about rituals. Our brain is always looking for rituals and patterns, so that it can free itself up to do other things because we're very evolved phenomena really. So the last chapter of the book I kind of bring it all together and give people okay, so like, you've learned all these different strategies, here's how to put them together in a sequence for yourself, or you can pull these ones that work best for you, here's a good sequence.

So, yeah, you just said it, a pattern, so for us, my three year old, who I mentioned earlier. He's been sleeping through the night, 10-12 hours since he was six weeks old, right? And a lot of people that have kids are like, "What? No way, that's crazy, that's impossible." No, the kid actually wants to sleep too, it's just - sorry about the siren if you can hear that, I don't know.

Rachel: I just did after you said that, I hadn't heard it before.

Shawn: I'm in a good part of town here in St. Louis, but that's real world. But yeah, so what we do is play a particular music every single night, right before bed. And, wow, it's getting louder, sorry about that.

Rachel: No, no worries.

Shawn: Okay, and even to this day, we put this music on and he's asleep within two minutes of us leaving the bedroom.

Rachel: Wow.

Shawn: They just drove right by my window. So what we would do is number one, read a story, give hugs, and then turn the music on, and then he's in bed, he's asleep.

There's no, like, "No, I don't want to go to sleep," none of that stuff, it's just he has a certain pattern, his ritual, and he enjoys it. And we enjoy it also because we get to sleep through the night as well.

So yeah, it's really looking for those patterns and creating these rituals for yourself because they don't just happen. Help me say this, they don't just have to just happen, you can create your own rituals yourself. So maybe it's you turn the computer off, then you go and light some candles, take a hot shower or whatever it is, or maybe you go and read a book and talk to your mom or your lover, your boyfriend/girlfriend, whatever it is, do this kind of consistent thing. And what's that going to do is start to ritualize your body and your brain to get you ready for sleep. So the more that you can do that and create a ritual, the easier it's going to be for you to fall asleep and stay asleep.

Rachel: Awesome. Oh my gosh, I have all these questions written down, and I'm trying to maximize which ones are best because I want to be conscious of time and you're just like a human encyclopedia. This is so awesome! Okay, the next thing I would love to touch on is, I know a lot of people listening to this podcast, and just in life, they're just either entrepreneurs or just like stressed out that they're in high stress kind of positions, and if I were to ask some of the things they could do to minimize their stress, I'm sure that a lot of things you've mentioned already, like staying hydrated and getting enough sleep and eating real food is really important. Is there anything else that comes to mind for minimizing stress, or just being able to cope with it better?

Shawn: Wow. Absolutely. With me, I like to look at, okay so what is stress really? And human beings, we're experiencing... So what the research is showing actually is that the vast majority of physician visits are now for stress related illnesses, okay? Because stress is a very real thing, and it's not that it's just one blanket thing like, what I want people to pay attention to is what is your overall stress load? Okay, so what are the different components of stress, all right? Because all the time when we hear that, we're just like, "I'm not really stressed, like my job doesn't stress me out." That's just a part of it, so just picture like, a human head, right? We'll picture a human head, a drawing, not an actual head, because I don't want people to be freaked out, but a drawing of a human head with the top cut off, and then like, we can pour stuff into it.

So we're going to just say like that's going to be your overall stress load going into your brain. Here's the different ingredients - work stress, which a lot of people can relate to, relationship stress, physical stress - okay, so that could be from poor nutrition, that literally can damage your body and stress your internal organs, exercise stress - exercise is known as a hormetic stressor, to a large degree. That means that it's a good stress that you can benefit from, if it's in the right dose. However you can overload that, even if you're doing exercise that's a hormetic stressor, it's on top of already high stress load - it can be problematic. So we got that, we got relationship stress, we got spiritual stress, all right, so like if you're feeling disconnected, you're feeling like purposeless.

You feel like you don't really know what you're doing in life, you're not happy - that's a tremendous stress that we're adding to the mix. Emotional stress, mental stress, okay? Constantly thinking and worrying about things. You see how this can all come together and be a lot.

Rachel: Yeah.

Shawn: And just one trigger, one event can be the thing that knocks it all down, but it was always there that we had all these different pieces, so it's not just one thing. So with all that said, we want to mind our overall stress load, and do the things... It's critical, and now that I've said all that, that you have daily practice of managing this stress, okay? Because we live in the most stressful time ever simply because we've got so much going on around us. Oh, another one I didn't mention - environmental stress, all right? So we, we're like swimming in radio waves and wi-fi now, we don't know what it's going to do to us? I think we're going to start having, like, X-Men babies soon, which is crazy, because we just don't know what any of this is really doing to us, but all that stuff matters.

So here's what I recommend to do. It is a must, if you're going to be a high performing individual in our world today, you absolutely must have a meditation practice. And for me, it's not about drinking the Kool-Aid, I actually call it brain training, all right? And this is a practice every single day, and I recommend a minimum of just 10 minutes a day where we focus on shifting over out of our sympathetic nervous system, which you've probably heard of this before, the fight-or-flight system, where we're producing all of these stress hormones, namely cortisol, right? We can actually shift our body over ourselves, we don't need a drug to do this, to the parasympathetic nervous system, which is known as the rest-and-digest system, and you can do that by changing your breathing, okay? Most of us are chest breathers, right?

So just sitting and focusing on moving your navel in and out. Okay, so you move your navel out with a deep belly breath when you're breathing in, and you breathe out, pull that navel all the way in as far as you can take it, get all the air out of your body. So what I would do is, like, a count of breathe in for 8 seconds, hold for 5, breathe out for 8 seconds, hold for 5. And just keep on doing that, and it'll run the course. Maybe you can count how many times you do it, maybe you can just set a timer, something that's gentle timer because you're probably going to be feeling really good and kind of zoned in, not zoned out. So you don't want something that's going to be like, "Hey! Get out of meditation!" Maybe like, some little soft music will come on or something.

But it's essential that you do that to shift your body consciously over to your parasympathetic nervous system, that's where your body can process all of that stress, kind of displace the metabolic byproducts, okay, the metabolic waste products that are produced from all this stress that's really physically tearing you down. So, I hope that

that's a good valuable takeaway for everybody, I think again, it's essential if you're going to be a high performing individual to have some kind of similar practice to this, it doesn't have to be this exactly. There are guided meditations you can do, but it's essential that you do this in our world today to help modulate that stress.

Rachel: That's a great, great tip. Awesome. So, I'd love to also know, you have so much stuff going on, you're such a high impact person, you're helping so many people. Are there any other action steps that you take on a daily basis? Or just one, and and if not because we've run over our time, no worries. Is there anything else that you do that you feel like helps make your life just better, like a higher quality of life?

Shawn: Oh man. You know what? I'll share what I did today that really helped to set the tone for the day, and even when we began our conversation. In the morning, during the meditation practice, I take some time to just ... and people have heard this before, but are you doing it? I just take some time and just go through some of the things I'm grateful for, maybe three things that I'm grateful for that day, or maybe in my life, and it just shifts your focus. And your focus really determines how you feel. Whatever you focus on is going to change your feelings. And when I say that, this isn't some airy-fairy stuff for me. Your feelings are a result of your hormones, okay? So you can literally change what your hormones are doing when you think about things you're grateful for. How powerful is that?

And we can do that at any time, and I did that today when I was... and I'll even share. I was grateful for my wife and her being such a guiding light for me, I was grateful for... and these are things that we started the show with what I'm most proud of. I was grateful for my kids, my daughter being such a beautiful person, and my son, my middle son who's 14, just grateful for him doing well in school, and I'm grateful for my little baby always making me laugh, and I think... What else did I say I was grateful for? Oh, I was grateful for my book, I was just really happy about it this morning, because I just booked to do another talk for US Bank, actually, so I'm just, like, man this is so amazing that this is even my life, because I had no interest in writing even a note, let alone a book. So, those were the things I was grateful for, and I do that every single day to kind of set the tone for my day.

Rachel: That's awesome, and yeah, you're giving just so much amazing information, I'm so grateful, and oh, another question just to indulge me. For those of us... for people listening, we're recording this on Halloween, and so I'm so curious, Shawn, what are you giving out to kids tonight?

Shawn: Oh man, it's so funny, the nicknames I have for Halloween in my head, Diabetes Holiday. I was talking with one of my friends recently when we went out of town for an event. You know, when I was a kid, Halloween was, like, the funnest holiday? Because you're kind of like an adult like you get to go and dress up and go out

there and adventure and go to all these different people's houses, so it's kind of like this feel-good thing, but at the same time at the end of the day, it's really a dangerous thing. Because we're literally just like giving kids, like, crack right now. So what I do is, funny... last year I was giving away some little organic kind of candies, little snack things, and one of the kids that came up to the door, when he was walking away, he was like, "He's giving away healthy stuff!"

I'm kind of like giving him Power Bars or something, not Power Bars but similar things like that. But I was just like this isn't working, these kids are going to throw that away. So, I'm just not going to participate. I'm just going to hang out with my family, maybe watch a movie or something like that, and just kind of enjoy our time together and wish the best for everybody else.

Rachel: I really love that answer, because you're not compromising what you want to do. It's great, that's awesome. All right, this has been so freaking spectacular, I have taken notes, I've learned so much, I know other people are going to love it, and last question is just where can people go to learn more about you?

Shawn: Awesome! Okay, so all of this and so much more is at my show, The Model Health Show. You can go and look me up on iTunes, Stitcher, all those good places, and also my home online, which is theshawnstevensonmodel.com. So it's S-H-A-W-N, Stevenson S-T-E-V-E-N-S-O-N model.com, and that's where, that's my home online, so that's where you can find all of.. the podcasts are there, but also my powerhouse articles that I over-deliver, make it epic and fun to read and learn about a lot of this stuff and consume it in that fashion as well. We got transcripts to the show there as well for those who just kind of want to scan through and miss out on all the funny moments, those juicy things you get through audio, and then we've got some videos there and some other programs and different things, and also my book is there.

And you can check out my book on Amazon, and I'm so honored and happy to say it's still a number one best-seller because it's good. It works, and the results speak for themselves. It's called "[Sleep Smarter: 21 Proven Tips to Sleep Your Way to a Better Body, Better Health, Bigger Success](#)". Out of those 21 things, if you just get one down, it can radically change your life. So those are the different places people can connect with me, and I appreciate it so much, you having me on, Rachel, you're amazing, thank you.

Rachel: Thank you.

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