

# Disrupt Yourself Podcast

## EPISODE 202: SHAWN STEVENSON

Welcome to the Disrupt Yourself podcast, where we discuss strategies and advice for how to climb S the curve of Learning™ in your professional and personal life, disrupting who you are now to slingshot into who you want to be.

I'm your host, Whitney Johnson. And today our guest is Shawn Stevenson, host of the number one nutrition and fitness podcast in the United States, The Model Health Show, with millions of listeners. He's the author of *Sleep Smarter* and now most recently *Eat Smarter*, which as of this recording was one of the top 10 selling books on Amazon.

Food is the building block of your brain. Intuitively, we know it's true, but do we eat like we know it's true? To scale an S curve, we need to be strong. Food can make a strong, but often it makes us weak, which means that if we'll disrupt how we eat, if we'll eat smarter, food can be our secret weapon on the S curve climb. And that's what we're talking about today.

Shawn Stevenson, thanks for joining us.

**Shawn Stevenson:** It's totally my pleasure.

**Whitney Johnson:** And congratulations! Your book is the number one new release of all books in the United States, and it sounds like they're are sold out on Amazon. Thousands and thousands of people are trying to buy your book and cannot. Is that correct?

**Shawn Stevenson:** That is correct. That's the heartwarming and heartbreaking truth all at once. But that's the, that's the dichotomy of life, you know, and even in this time in human history, you know, there's so much going on, so much in flux, but when this is coming out, the books are back in stock on Amazon. But it, just for me, being the number one new release, we were in the top 10, along with Barack Obama's book, Matthew McConaughey's book and our book! And this is a book about health. It's not about fanfare. It's not about politics. And it's just showing that this is an important message and people are resonating with this. And we want to, if we can, have access to things that empower us and that can actually help to get our citizens healthier. You know, at the end of the day, that's really the big mission behind it, making science and learning about how our bodies work. Palatable, fun and

transformative. So that was a big mission behind it. And apparently it's really, it's really making a big impact. So I'm just grateful.

**Whitney Johnson:** Oh, that's so thrilling. And, you know, when you're talking one of the lines in your book that comes to mind and it seems very apropos right now, is that food is your secret weapon. And I think that we're all realizing that we need a secret weapon or two in our arsenal in order to be able to function effectively.

**Shawn Stevenson:** Oh, that's so true. That's so true.. I often make the, the analogy of it being like a superhero utility belt. You know, and just like Batman doesn't have just one little thing. If he did, he'd kind of suck, he wouldn't be Batman. You know, he'd be, I don't know, Batguy or something. I don't know. But having more things in our utility belt, because there's so many different things that we're going to be faced with in our lives. It's the nature of being alive. You're going to have problems. You're going to have random stuff happen. I like sharing this whenever I can with folk, especially for folks in audience that are business minded, success minded in how these systems really encourage things to be the same, but just slightly different. You know, they think they've got the market figured out. But just look at the results, you know, so essentially they'll say, "That people are smart enough to know this stuff." You know, "Just tell people what to do, tell people what to eat. Keto is hot right now. You should write a book on keto. This diet hot right now." It falls into these frameworks that are selling rather than giving people real solutions, which not to say keto can't be a solution, but every one of these diet framework's leaves out the most important thing, which is you are unique. There is nobody like you in the history of humanity. Your metabolism is a unique metabolic fingerprint. Nobody's ever existed like you and nobody ever will. And we have to have the tools to be able to adjust. If we do take on a keto diet, if we do take on a vegetarian diet, if we do take on you name it, how do I adjust this to fit me in my unique metabolism? That's always in flux. It's always changing, and that's the mission behind Eat Smart, is to give us those tools so we know what's best for us.

**Whitney Johnson:** All right. So let's dive in and we need to dive in by starting with you, the author of the book. If people are saying to themselves, "OK, I've never met Shawn Stevenson, who is he?" Why did you write Eat Smarter? What do we need to know about you that allows us to say, "OK, this guy cares about this subject passionately and deeply, and he's also very qualified to talk about it."

**Shawn Stevenson:** Great question. I was definitely disenchanted with science and, I did well in school, and when I went to college, I went to this expensive private university initially and I went with the assumption that I should be a doctor. Let me, let me go ahead and get a degree and practice medicine. And I base that decision off of television. You know, seeing The Cosby Show, because I didn't have anybody in my life that ever graduated from college before. I didn't know anybody, at all. Like, I had no reference point to what that looked like. And so I was just doing what I thought, looked successful on television. But the thing was, I hated science. I hated it because it didn't really connect with me. You know, there was no connective tissue, ironically. And so I shifted my core study to something else, but fate kind of had other plans, you know, if you can look through that lens. And when I was 20 years old, I struggle with a devastating health issue. When I was coming from high school into college, I mean, man, everything looked amazing, you know, as far as the athletic side. You know, I ran a four or five forty yard dash when I was 15. That's like NFL... If anybody follows NFL combine stuff. So I was excelling. I had all of these different colleges that were just like... I had my, my pick, really. But my body shortly thereafter started to really fall apart. I broke my hip at track practice, just running, doing a time trial. But nobody stopped to ask how a kid can break his hip from running. And what it was, you know, I didn't find this out until I was 20, I had this very advanced degenerative bone condition, degenerative spinal condition. And then we get these disease labels or diagnoses that are incurable. Once you get this label, you're stuck with it. And so mine was degenerative disc disease. And so, when I was 20, all of a sudden, I was living in chronic, constant pain all the time.

My physician again, he said that the condition is incurable. And this is the craziest thing. I don't know if this was like a Back to the Future thing, like when you jump back and you bump into your old self. But I think that messes up the timeline or something like that. I don't know. But I asked him this question I had no grounds to ask him. I asked, "Does this have anything to do with what I'm eating? Should I change my diet?" And he literally, he cocked his head to the side and he looked at me like I was from another planet. He said, "This has nothing to do with what you're eating. I'm sorry, son, this is something that just happens. We haven't seen somebody who's 20 years old, who's this young, have advanced arthritis of their spine before like this." Essentially told me I had the spine of an 80

year old when I was 20 and he said, "I'm sorry, we're going to get you something to help you manage the pain, but this is something you're going to have to live with." And he sent me on my way.

And to make a long story short, it was a very, very dark and struggling time in my life from the age of 20 to 22. Fortunately, I did get a second, third opinion, which I always recommend people to do when they get a bad diagnosis. But all the physicians told me the same thing. And each one of them prescribed me a new medication and told me to go on bed rest. And the crazy thing is I could walk. I could still walk. Why they keep telling me not to not to walk? And so, not only where my bones, you know, my, my, my bones and my spine atrophy, but everything else was. I wasn't using my body. And so I gained a lot of weight over these two years as well. You know, I just, I tried to do as little as I could because they told me to. I didn't want to hurt. Here's where everything kind of changed. And I love the S curve example that you talk about, but, um, there was a shift that took place. There's a reflex in it. It's called instinctive elaboration.

The human mind is driven by questions. Every time you pose your mind a question, it is obsessed with trying to find the answer. It's operating unconsciously all the time, you know. So, even just you getting out of bed, you're posing yourself questions about what do you need to do for that process to happen, what you need to do? Why are you getting up? You know, there's always questions looming. And so, I had been habitually asking, "Why me?" Every single day, constantly throughout the day and also asking, "Why won't somebody help me?" And my brain is just continuously scanning my internal and external environment to give me an answer to why my life sucked. Give me an answer as to why nobody's helping me. And all of those things gave me more negative feedback. But I finally asked this question and everybody, I encourage everybody to ask this. I asked, "How can I feel better? How can I get healthy?" It was like a momentum shift instantly took place because I started to look through the lens of what I could do proactively versus what was being disseminated to me, that there was nothing I could do.

What I did, I invoked the power of this instinctive elaboration. And there were solutions there all along that I simply couldn't see until that moment. I had people in my life who had access to solutions. I had people in my life who, who had access to information that could get me to where I needed to be. And so, over the course of about the next six weeks, I made changes to my nutrition, my movement practices. I finally was able to sleep. Sleeping was my biggest struggle for those two years. And if you're not sleeping, you're not healing. About six weeks after that moment of decision, I lost 18 of the 40 pounds I gained. The pain I've been experiencing for two years was gone. But I was terrified because I've been living with it so long, I was scared I was going to come back at any moment. And it wasn't until nine months later I got a scan done and the degeneration had reversed. You know, it's completely gone.

You could see the light shining through my disc and my two herniated discs had retracted. But during that nine month period, I started helping other people, because people started coming up to me at my college campus. I didn't look like a person who lost weight, I looked like somebody who was radiantly healthy. And so my professors became some of my first clients, fellow students, faculty at the school. You know, I shifted gears all the way back from the beginning of the story to studying biology, nutritional science, shifting all my coursework back over to that. But now it was like so palpable and visceral and connected. And eventually I opened my practice as a clinical nutritionist and, of course, a strength conditioning coach as well. That was a low hanging fruit. I've worked with thousands of people in a one-on-one context and many, many thousands more live events, that kind of thing. Millions more through The Model Health Show and through all the courses and the books. My first book, *Sleep Smarter*, became an international bestseller. I can look over here at my bookshelf and I see all the different translations. It's 20 different countries, from a guy from Ferguson, Missouri, who, again, I was, I had to chalk it up that I wouldn't get it, I wouldn't get anywhere. And I was just going to be relented to living in that struggle, in that pain, in that environment. And I didn't have any other way. And it just simply wasn't true. In my new book, *Eat Smarter*, as you mentioned, became instant USA Today national bestseller, Top Ten Books sold in the entire United States. And this really began from that moment of decision in my own struggle, trying to figure this stuff out and also doing the work to help other people, to serve, to help to solve problems for others. And ultimately, that's what really makes life worth living.

**Whitney Johnson:** You know, it's so interesting hearing you, I mean it's such a powerful story and that question that you asked of, "How can I feel better?" And in my head, though, I've got that open loop. So, you know, those questions that you're asking is when you first ask the doctor when you were diagnosed and asked him or her, "Does this have anything to do with what I'm eating?" And they said... They dismissed it. Do you remember when your

brain came back to that question of, "Does this have anything to do with what I'm eating?" When did that all tie back in for you?

**Shawn Stevenson:** I see myself as a very analytical, kind of logical human being. And I was looking at like, "OK, so I'm having this compression of my spine, the discs are herniated. Maybe if I lose some of this weight, it'll take some of the pressure off." And so the first thing that I did, and this is true story, I did Slim Fast first. That was the first thing I did the next day when I got up, I was like I went got some Slim Fast shakes because of the commercials, you know, shake for breakfast, one for lunch and one for dinner, you know, and it was just it was so disgusting. It was terrible. I was constantly hungry. I kept asking different questions. And you just mentioned it again. Media uses this all the time, like it's called an open loop. This is why you have to come back and find out what happened on that next episode. So, this is the power of questions. And so I asked, "OK, so what do I bones made of what is my... What are my discs made of?"

And that took me down a different path, because on the surface, when you think about bones, most folks thinks, think about calcium because of marketing. But when I asked a question, certain things came up, certain books landed in my hand. Friends that I had who were in the field of health and wellness and medicine, they started to like emerge like they might have just been my friend that I like, I don't know, go out to eat with. But now it's just like now going to Wild Oats with them or Whole Foods, whereas I didn't even know that that existed before. And there was like 20 other things to build bone and to have bone density, many of them more important than calcium. But I never even thought of them before. You know, even omega 3 fatty acids we know are important for our cognitive function, which hopefully we'll talk about today. It's needed for bone formation, omega 3s. Are you kidding me? That was so far removed from anything I was getting my fast food, my drive-thru window diet. These tissues are made from food. And I'm not giving my body the raw materials that it needs to build my disc. Your body works on a hierarchy and so that hydration is needed for your brain and your blood first. Your spine is going to be second tier. It's like, it'll get to that if it can. So, sometimes you have to bring in an overabundance or a truly adequate amount of something to see the result that you're looking for. That's really when the when food mattered or the nutrition does matter really came back on for me. It was by asking the question, "What are these tissues made of?" And it's all made from food.

**Whitney Johnson:** How can I feel better? That is the opening question. And that just led you to question after question after question.

Continuing that note, in your book, that is so well researched, you talk about a study that was conducted with 200 prison inmates. And here's what you said, "The findings were that having a bad diet is a better predictor of future violence than past violent behavior. You can predict bad behavior by what a person eats." That just hit me right between the eyes, not just for prison inmates, but just thinking about, you know, boardrooms where things run amok and meetings where things go awry and conversations that go off the rails and relationships that struggle. I'd love to have you just tell us more about that.

**Shawn Stevenson:** Yeah, thank you. This is such a wonderful question. If folks really get this, it is an absolute game changer. So I just gave a little bit of a preface as to why food matters and like, everything is kind of made from food, but I'm going to take it a step further now. So, our brains, our neurons, these incredible network... Theoretical physicist, Michio Kaku, said, "The human brain is the most powerful entity in the known universe." The cool thing is we all have one. It's incredibly remarkable; however, this little sidebar is that we don't really have a good owner's manual for how it all operates. And our neurons, you know, the dendrites, the axon terminals, all the stuff that connects our brains together, that allows them, to our brain cells to communicate. Every one of those things is made from food. Every single cell, every piece of the communication is made from food. Food truly enables us to have thoughts, feelings and emotions. It's made from food. Our heart is made from food. The blood running through our veins is made from food, our eyes, even the tiny bones in people's ears as they're picking up this information that's sending the electrical signals to their brain. It's all made from food. And so, I wanted this to be the heart of *Eat Smarter* because in our culture. Unfortunately, when we think about diet and nutrition, it's largely related to weight and it is an incredible disservice.

Look how it served us. We are, right now, we have over 200 million people in our country today who are overweight or obese. We know food impacts our metabolism, but it's not enough. The meaning of food has to be different, has

to be deeper. How much food impacts our ability to make memories, how it impacts our ability to, to have focus, to have empathy and patience and even our proclivity towards violence. And right now, we've never seen so much infighting and just this polarized culture where there's a lot less listening and a lot more everybody feeling that they're right and they're the ultimate right and an inability to perspective taking, put yourself in someone else's shoes. And factually, this has to do with our overall health. And so the study that you mentioned, this was conducted by researchers at Oxford University and they wanted to find out how food or nutrition could affect the behavior of the inmates. It's unfortunate the circumstances, but what's fortunate for science sake in this equation is that it's a ward study. It's a ward study, meaning that everything is tracked and monitored. The people are going off, leaving the jail and eating something different. You know exactly what they're getting. What they did was they gave a set of the inmates increased nutrition in the form of vitamins, minerals, omega 3 fatty acid supplements.

And then they gave another group of inmates placebos and they tracked over a multi-month study. And then they compiled all the data and they found that simply by increasing the nutrition that the inmates were receiving, they had a 40 percent reduction in behavioral offenses, number one, which is remarkable, but what was most remarkable for me and what really stood out was that there was a 37 percent reduction in violent offenses for folks receiving increased nutrition. And the question is, "why?" Really, how could that be possible? Basically, their brains are actually able to work better. The executive part of our brain, the prefrontal cortex, needs nourishment. And it's your ability to have social control, to distinguish between ideas and distinguishing between right and wrong. You're able to now understand more of the ramifications of a decision instead of just hitting send on that email, going off on your boss or client or whatever. So, that filter, it gets inhibited when we're deficient in nutrients. So, here's the thing as well, I can't just have a study like that that's that shocking without taking it deeper. There was another group of scientists and this was published in the journal *Aggressive Behavior*, which, by the way, there's journals for every freaking thing you can imagine.

This is like the top peer-reviewed journal in that domain. And the scientists want to find out, like, they were so shocked by the study. They were like, "This can't be possible."

So, they repeated it in another set of prison inmates and found almost the exact same results. This is real. When we're deficient in the key nutrients that our bodies need to thrive, we become more aggressive, more agitated, more prone to violence. And again, 200 million Americans are overweight or obese. Forty-two percent of our citizens are clinically obese. We're on our way to 50 percent within the next couple of years. One of the most remarkable things in the data shows that blood sugar dysregulation is one of the primary drivers. This was even seen in married couples. The Ohio State University found that dysregulation to the blood sugar led to couples be more aggressive towards each other, less ability to perspective-take and to have patience, and also a less likelihood of them resolving conflict issues. One hundred and thirty-five million Americans are diabetic or pre-diabetic, right now. It's almost half of our population at least. On top of that, 60 percent of our citizens have some degree, many of them advanced degrees of heart disease and hardening of the arteries. We are incredibly detached from the things that make us healthy and that enable us to be able to, again, have empathy, to perspective-take, to have patience. Now, not to say that you can't if you're not well, we absolutely can. It's just harder. What I want to do is to ensure that we can get our citizens healthier, to create a bridge so we can have healthier conversation. It just makes it easier when you feel well. When your brain is really firing to his full capacity, when your body is nourished, it makes it easier to have important conversations and to be able to put yourself in someone else's shoes, to have patience, to have empathy, and also to have new ideas and the data exists.

**Whitney Johnson:** I love that. And it's so revealing to think, you know, if you may have gotten in an argument with someone, it may be because you didn't eat well. And then also just thinking about the increase in ADD and ADHD and depression, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera, you know, that it's almost like the obesity is an outward manifestation of what's going on internally, inside of people's minds. And from your research and your study, your experience, that so much of that is there are probably other contributing factors, but much of this can be traced back to what we eat.

**Shawn Stevenson:** That's absolutely a fact.

**Whitney Johnson:** Ok.

All right, so we've talked about bad behavior, let's now talk about how we can predict good behavior by what we eat. And so, what I'd like to do is just have you run through a couple of thoughts here on so what should we do when we first wake up so that we're on good behavior throughout the day?

**Shawn Stevenson:** Such a good question. We're just going to look at this through the lens of the human brain, because it's really a trickle-down effect. Your brain actually controls a lot about what's happening with your metabolism. And this isn't talked about in all these different diet frameworks. Some of them might accidentally help your brain to work better, thus helping your metabolism to function. But there's glands in your brain like the hypothalamus that is like a master controller of your rate of calorie burn. The connection between your, your hypothalamus and this kind of gut brain axis can literally tell your intestines to stop absorbing so many calories or tell your intestines to absorb more calories. And so these are called epi caloric controllers from the perspective solely of our behavior is number one, the brain is mostly made of water. Today, we're really, really going to get this. Your brain is about upwards of 80 percent water. It's the most water dominant organ next to your lungs. And being that it's a water based organ, and your neurons, the neurotransmitters, all the communication is happening in a water medium. And so one of the studies that I shared in *Eat Smarter*, found that a simply a two percent drop in your baseline hydration level leads to significant decreases in reaction time, in spatial awareness, in things, in things like mental math, grammar, map recognition, like just being able to manage yourself within your own environment. All of these capacities start to decline.

And basically we, we start to become a dumber version of ourselves. We have this spectrum of potential in our performance and water is at the top rung. We don't usually think about water in terms of nutrition, but it's one of the macronutrients. People know about the fats, proteins, carbohydrates, but water is the master macronutrient. And so, every day for the past, I don't know, maybe 17 years, 16 years, first thing I do when I wake up in the morning understanding that while we're sleeping, there's still a lot of action happening, a lot of metabolic waste products, the glymphatic system in your brain cleaning house is 10 times more active while you're sleeping. But all of this metabolic waste, we have to flush it out. Many of them can get reabsorbed, you know, even fat. Your body fat can get released by a fat cell, but it can get reabsorbed somewhere else. So, water is there to help to literally flush the stuff out in the morning. So, I get up and I take what I call my inner bath, every morning. And many folks take an external bath or shower, but the inside is truly more important. It determines what your outside looks like. You get that benefit of literally flushing out metabolic waste, which is important, but also another little cool side effect, which is really a direct effect, is something called water-induced thermogenesis.

You're like, "What the heck is that?" They had test subjects to consume 17 ounces of water, about 17 ounces of water, just within a couple of minutes. And they found that drinking water in that instance led to a dramatic increase in their metabolic rate. They burned an additional 25 to 50 calories simply by drinking water. And the question is, "Why?" Like on a surface, we might think, "Well, maybe the body is, maybe it's cold water it's trying to warm..." It doesn't matter the temperature of the water. Water makes everything work better. There's a U-shaped curve of benefits. I'll put it like that. Most folks can do way better in increasing their water intake and getting it to optimal range. But in our culture, we tend to think that some is good, more is better, but if you drink too much water, you're going to be flushing out minerals. You're going to be creating an imbalance of your cell's hydration and your extracellular fluid. We don't want to overdo it, we just want to make sure that we get the right amount. And so, starting our day with 20, you know, maybe even a little bit less, but 20 to 30 ounces of water can get you in a nice chunk of your optimal hydration needs to get the day going. Plus, you get water induced thermogenesis and you're flushing out metabolic waste.

**Whitney Johnson:** You realize you're making me so thirsty as we're talking.

**Shawn Stevenson:** Mission accomplished.

**Whitney Johnson:** Exactly. I'm sure everybody's grabbing their, their thermos right now. So, first thing, you do an inner bath, inner water bath. What time then do you recommend that people start eating and why?

**Shawn Stevenson:** This question gets into your metabolic individuality, we all have a unique metabolic fingerprint that's unlike anybody else again in the history of humanity, that will ever exist in the future. And the most important take away from that statement is that you right now, yourself as you are right now, your metabolism is not even the

same as is going to be next week. It's constantly changing and in flux. So I cannot give a definitive when to eat breakfast because everybody needs to do this for themselves. But there are some principles, some guiding principles that can be very helpful, because in our culture, we often don't realize that many of the things that we do in our lives and the way that we operate, these are things that have just been made up, especially when it comes to our eating schedule. Throughout evolution, there was no three square meals. That's a new invention. Breakfast is the most important meal of the day! That's marketing. Somebody just made that up. So, number one culturally, it's a new invention. Not to say we can't have it. If you love breakfast, so be it. We can make it work. Absolutely. But one of the studies that I shared found that essentially our way of eating today is colliding. It collides with the human genome in a negative way because we're constantly eating throughout the day. And one of the studies found that basically folks eat on average about 15 hour window throughout the day, almost from the time we get up to time to go to bed or just within a few minutes of that for a lot of people. Now, that's not that is bad. Well, what could be the potential side effect? And that is eating food requires a tremendous amount of energy to process the food. It is the number one use of energy by the human body is turning foodstuff into you stuff. You're going to turn an egg into human cells, you're going to turn a bagel into human cells.

All right? It is a, an incredible process, but it requires a lot of energy. With an increase in that, that fasting window, the time you're not eating... And this includes your sleep, by the way. So, you know, if you're getting seven or eight hours of sleep and then maybe you stop eating, you finish your dinner at eight p.m., you have a couple of hours and you go to bed, wake up the next day. Maybe you have your first meal, a first bit of food at 8 a.m. or maybe 9:00 a.m. That's a 12 or 13 hour fast. The baseline is it's found that 12 hours is the kind of minimum effective dose you see increase production of human growth hormone, which increases your, your energy significantly, your ability to heal and also improves cognitive performance. Increase in autophagy, which is cellular cleansing, basically, and especially autophagy happening in your brain, cleaning house and making your brain spick and span and work better, direct increases in insulin sensitivity, having a fasting window, your body really kicks into gear to sort out the functioning of your of your blood sugar, the functioning of your liver and your pancreas and all the organs involved, all from just being a little bit more intentional about our eating windows. Last point to take 10 seconds... It still is dependent on you. You do not have to do that. You can stack conditions in your favor. So, many other ways that we talk about in the book. But I want to make sure people know about this because the data on this is pretty remarkable.

**Whitney Johnson:** So intermittent fasting, you highly recommend it, which I have actually been doing probably for the last year. And it has really made a difference in my cognitive functioning and my calorie reduction. So that's good. So you've got your water bath, you've fasted for at least 12 hours, but potentially longer. What foods would you recommend people be eating or consuming for their first meal?

**Shawn Stevenson:** This is one of the most important questions. So, we have smart, intermittent fasting. That's what we talk about in *Eat Smarter* because you've got to make sure that you're nourished. You've got to make sure that you have the nutrients that your body needs to do all the processes of autophagy and to optimize your insulin sensitivity and to go through the process of shuttling released fat, you know, triglycerides to the mitochondria and you burn, burning fat. All of that requires nutrients. And so it's what you do when you're eating that determines the success of the intermittent fasting window. It makes it all easy, so it just all feels good. So, I just want to start with that and also breaking the fast, this matters a lot because in our culture, I know myself personally, I grew up my favorite breakfast and most days what I ate, I start my day with some cereal, you know, a bowl of cereal. And this might have been, oh my goodness, Fruity Pebbles to Lucky Charms...

**Whitney Johnson:** The healthy stuff.

**Shawn Stevenson:** ...Fruit Loops. Oh, yeah, right. These are fortified with vitamins and minerals for healthy kids. It is unbelievable. But then what we do is like I'm an adult now. I'm going to eat adult cereal. So, I eat my, you know, Quaker Oatmeal Squares or, you know, my, my two scoops of raisins, you know, my raisin. It's like the same amount of sugar. It's just packaged up differently and marketed towards adults. This term that the breakfast is the most important meal of the day, I think it holds weight in one dimension, which is it kind of sets the tone for which metabolism is going to do. This study blew my mind, like, "Why don't people know this?" And this was conducted by researchers at St. Louis University and this is published in the *International Journal of Obesity*. They wanted to find out what happens with fat loss when you eat a breakfast that's either a high carbohydrate breakfast or a breakfast that's high in protein. That is the one metric and being that the meals are the same exact amount of calories. What

might happen to our metabolism? To say I'm starting my day with cereal, that might sound far-fetched for some people. What else do we do? Bagels, waffles, you know, french toast, the list goes on... Muffins. You know, a lot of us are consuming carbohydrates, oatmeal, and not to say oatmeal's bad. There's a spectrum here. What we have to realize what happens when it's first meal of the day, high carbohydrate breakfast versus high protein breakfast. Here's what they found after the eight week study. OK, so for the high carbohydrate breakfast, they had the folks to consume a bagel, OK? And then for the high protein breakfast, they had folks who consume eggs, but they were the same amount of calories, exact same amount of calories.

The study participants in the lower carb breakfast group, so the egg breakfast group showed a 61 percent greater reduction in body mass index, a 65 percent greater weight loss, a 34 percent greater reduction in their waist circumference and a 16 percent greater reduction in their body fat percentage.

These folks ate the same amount of calories now, but simply by changing the ratio of their macronutrient for the first meal of the day dramatically changed the outcome of their metabolism and their weight loss. All right, so now does this mean you can't have a bagel? Does this mean you can't have oatmeal? Not at all. But we want to be mindful of these things because, again, even as I share that, studies like this, it's remarkable and it's going to affect the majority of people in this way. But some people, it's not the same. You know, it doesn't affect them the same.

**Whitney Johnson:** All right, so we've developed a framework called the S curve of Learning™, and everybody who listens to the podcast knows it very, very well as a model for us to think about how we grow and develop. And there are three different phases of the curve. There's the launch point when you're doing something brand new and then there's a sweet spot. When you're in the groove in your high end, you, you know, it's time to do something new and you've got to make that jump. What I'd love to do is just briefly, when someone's trying to do something new, they're contemplating it and they're feeling anxious, what foods would you recommend to help people feel a little bit more like, "Anxiety goes down, I can take this on I can do this new thing." Are there any foods that can help with that?

**Shawn Stevenson:** Absolutely. One of the most powerful and important and key nutrients is a master regulator of our stress response. It actually helps to turn on the parasympathetic rest and digest nervous system and turn off the fight or flight sympathetic nervous system. A big driver of those two things is magnesium, all right, magnesium. And magnesium is one of the biggest nutrient, if not the.. It is the number one mineral deficiency, definitely, but just one of the biggest nutrient deficiencies, period. And here, in our culture, almost 60 percent of people are chronically deficient in magnesium. It's a buffer for stress. And we live in very stressful times, very stressful times. And so it's just getting zapped from our system so quickly. It's responsible for over seven, 650 biochemical processes. So, essentially that means 650 things your body can't do or can't do properly if you're deficient in magnesium. Simply increasing magnesium intake restores critical brain plasticity and improves cognitive function, and particularly helps us to stay focused under stress, which is kind of cool, kind of important. So magnesium, I'm a big proponent of food first to get our magnesium. Anything that's green is going to be a great source of magnesium. So green, leafy vegetables. Chocolate, funny enough, is a great source of magnesium. But you want to get the good stuff, not the Hershey's whatever. Not that stuff, but higher Cacao..

**Whitney Johnson:** The dark, dark chocolate without sugar. Yeah.

**Shawn Stevenson:** Yeah.

**Whitney Johnson:** Like 90 percent kind of thing.

**Shawn Stevenson:** That's right. We want 80 percent and up. So, those are a couple of good sources. Also nuts and seeds a great source of magnesium. But this is something you might want to look to supplement. But if you can get whole, like food-based, magnesium supplements, kind of salt-based and or getting topical magnesium, also. I could talk a little bit about that... Rubbing it into your skin, too, can be helpful. So, magnesium is super important. You want to get plenty of good food source.

I've got a list for all this stuff in the book, by the way. That will be a big one, especially when you're getting started and dealing with stress and overwhelm.

**Whitney Johnson:** You persuaded me to do this 30 day challenge, and one of the challenges for me in doing a 30 day challenge is that I like sugar, processed sugar, to the point that my family calls me the Cookie Monster. And I will tell you a fun little story. So, audio engineer, Whitney Jobe. He, when he first had me listen to your podcast, he's like, "Whitney..." (We both have the same name.) He's like, "Whitney, you need to listen to this episode." And I started to listen to, like, a minute of it and I could tell where it's going. It was like, "You need to stop eating sugar." I'm like, "Whitney, I can't listen to it. I can't give up sugar. I can't give up my pretty." But I'm going to give up for 30 days. So, here's the question for anybody else who's listening to this and saying, "I want to do the 30 day challenge. I've got these cravings." Any recommendations for people when you're first starting to help offset those cravings so that you can move through the challenge and be successful?

**Shawn Stevenson:** This is great. And like literally a pictured Cookie Monster, when you mention that. He definitely, he definitely had a little bit of an addiction.

OK, so this is the big one. This is the big one right here.

The management of our hunger, the management of our cravings is largely determined by our nutrient profile that we have in our bodies already. So, what I mean is chronic nutrient deficiency leads to chronic cravings. Chronic nutrient deficiency leads to chronic overeating. Often times we are drawn towards different food sources, very quick sources of carbohydrates, for example, when we're nutrient deficient. And so many of us, again, are nutrient deficient and also stress, you know, stress can really create disfunction and dysregulation with your blood sugar, even if you're on some personalized, perfect low carb diet, your blood sugar can be deranged because of stress. And it's also that management of stress is zapping and using up so many of the nutrients you have in your body. As humans evolved, we never had access to this kind of sugar ever. This is super new to us. You know, if you happen upon a beehive on accident, like you hit the, you hit the jackpot, you got the golden ticket, you know. But now today, the sheer amount, like, on average folks are consuming the average person here in America, somewhere in the ballpark, between 90 pounds of sugar, maybe upwards of 100 plus pounds of sugar a year. And that's added sugars. It's, it's crazy. And we, as we evolve, we have something called post ingestive feedback. When you eat a food, your body is, in a way, taking notes on what it got from the food, all right? It's recording the data. So, just say, you know, through our evolution, maybe you happened upon like I said, you happened upon a beehive. You ate some honey, your body's like, "OK, I got some copper, I got some glucose, I got some manganese. I got some..." It's taking notes. And so now it knows when I'm deficient in this thing, I'm going to create a flavor association to go seek this flavor. We're hardwired to be able to match up and have this post ingestive feedback.

But today, food manufacturers have manipulated our flavor sensations and our ability to create those connections. Plus, also, if you eat a food, like cookies, you do get certain nutrients from it, but you might also get a hormonal response, neurotransmitter response that creates something that your body is desiring and looking for as well. And it's taking notes. "OK, she went through this thing. She had this thing. She felt like this. Let me write that down." That's how these connections take place. And this, what we call these cravings and addictions. Your body is just doing what it's designed to do. It's trying to protect you. It's trying to make sure you're somehow in a state of balance, strangely.

So, how do we address this? We've got to make sure that we address our hunger and cravings by making sure that we are fulfilling our body's nutrient needs. DHA and EPA, omega 3 fatty acids is directly tied to things around our metabolism, cognitive function and also management of hunger and cravings, and it's because DHA and EPA get an express pass way into the brain to nourish your brain cells as some of the very few nutrients that can do this because they are structural fats that help with brain plasticity and also transduction. That means your brain cells can talk to each other. If you're deficient in these things, your brain just can't really get a good message across. So getting, making sure you're getting plenty of omega 3 DHA and EPA. That's specific, not the plant form ALA. That's cool. It has its benefits, but DHA and EPA specifically for the management of hunger and cravings. The number one way to help to suffice and bring down the drive towards eating processed foods, sugary sweet things. Not to say you can't have them, but just so you can be in control and like choose rather than it choose you. Make sure that we're increasing our body's bank account of nourishment.

You want to make sure your, your cells feel rich so that you're not chasing after a bunch of rich foods.

**Whitney Johnson:** In addition to people buying your book, which I highly recommend for anyone who wants to be smarter and wants food to be their secret weapon, you've got a bunch of downloads on your website. Can you just tell people where they can go to get some of the additional recipes, et cetera, that you're recommending?

**Shawn Stevenson:** Sure, of course. My website, my kind of home online is [themodelhealthshow.com](http://themodelhealthshow.com). So, that's the name of my show, The Model Health Show. [themodelhealthshow.com](http://themodelhealthshow.com). And just once people are like tapped in, I'm constantly sending new studies, new foods, new recipes, new ideas, because, again, a big part of the movement towards change is immersion and exposure. You know, having continuous reminders of how powerful we are, our health is the greatest gift that we have. People are interested in it even if they don't realize it. But once you make that connection of like, "I can make learning about my body as fun as seeing what, you know, Cardi B doing on Instagram." Like that's a, that's a huge task.

But being able to get people tapped into that, to that love, and to that affection and admiration and passion for learning and learning about themselves, that's what it's really all about.

**Whitney Johnson:** Shawn Stevenson, thank you for being with us.

**Shawn Stevenson:** It's my pleasure. Thank you so much for having me.

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I loved reading Sean's book. I loved talking to him and to think I almost didn't. Sometimes you need people to push you onto a new curve. Thank you to Whitney Jobe, our audio engineer, for giving me that push. Here's some of what I'm thinking about as we wrap up:

First, what we eat impacts our behavior, our bad behavior and our good behavior. In preparing for this interview, I thought about something that happened while we were on vacation. We had been traveling all day navigating COVID testing. I was tired. I was hungry. My husband started to hand me chocolate, thinking that would make me feel better. Ordinarily it would, but this time I snapped at him. I just want healthy food. When you rob yourself of nutrients, your body wants to rob a bank. Bad behavior. It makes me wonder how often do scuffles happen simply because we haven't eaten well.

Which goes to the second thing I'm thinking about. We are doing the 30 day challenge. As of this recording, we are fifteen days in. I feel better, I'm sleeping better, plus eating's more fun because the Cookie Monster isn't hoarding all my calories?

Third, I'm thinking about the power of questions. We talked about this in Episode 124 with Hal Gregersen that questions are the answer. For Shawn, it started with, "What do I need to do to feel better?" It makes me wonder what those questions are for you. "Maybe it's what could I eat to climb my current S curve fast? What could I eat to get along with coworkers better? What could I eat to be more productive in the next hour?"

Fourth and final observation is, actually a list of things that I want to remember and do. Number one, everything in our body is made up of food right down to the neurons. Number two, water is the master macronutrients, so take a bath when you wake up. Drink water. Number three, intermittent fasting at least twelve hours a day. Number four, eat protein for your first meal of the day. And number five, when you're on a new S curve, eat magnesium. It helps buffer stress. Green leafy vegetables like spinach, dark chocolate without sugar, almonds, edamame and peanut butter. In climbing the S curve, food is your secret weapon.

If you want to be an agent of disruption, though, first become its subject.

Thank you to Shawn Stephenson for being our guest. Thank you to our team, Emily Cottrell, Whitney Jobe, Steve Ludwig, Dan Ruty, Melissa Ruty, and Nancy Wilson.

I'm Whitney Johnson.

And this is Disrupt Yourself.