



Episode 589: Shawn Stevenson on 80/20 of Health,
His Non-Negotiables and What He Will
Compromise On

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Katie: Hello and welcome to "The Wellness Mama Podcast." I'm Katie from wellnessmama.com, and I'm here today with a dear personal friend who is always a joy to interview. I'm here with Shawn Stevenson, and he is the author of the bestselling-books "Eat Smarter" and "Sleep Smarter." He's also the creator of the wildly popular podcast "The Model Health Show," and he is also a graduate of the University of Missouri in St. Louis, and he studied business, biology, and nutritional science, and became the co-founder of Advanced Integrative

Health Alliance. He's been featured all over the major media outlets and also on many, many podcasts because of his wealth of knowledge and, like me, he gets to interview fascinating people for a living.

So, today, I was excited to hear from Shawn what parts he has integrated and kept as part of his routine from all of the many, many, many health tips he gets on a daily and weekly basis. And so, we talk about his 80/20 of health, his minimum effective dose, his non-negotiables, and what he will compromise on, and everything from how he decides what health information to follow. His results-driven personal 80/20 of health. The reason for the disconnect between our health, knowledge, and our outcomes in the U.S. Why so much of the stuff we're learning about health goes back to what our ancestors have known forever. His personal non-negotiables of sleep, exercise, and movement, though the specifics may surprise you. A lot of really fascinating research he goes into on sleep and movement, and it's not gonna be what you think, and so much more. I always love talking to Shawn. I always learn a lot. I know you will, too. He's one of my favorite guests. So, without any additional wait, let's join Shawn Stevenson. Shawn, welcome back.

Shawn: It is my pleasure to be here.

Katie: It is always so fun to chat with you. We've gotten to do this a couple times, on both sides. You have a really popular podcast that I enjoy listening to. And it's always such a joy to talk to you. And we're gonna get to get into some really fun, a little bit personal topics today. And I'm happy to talk about my side of those as well. But before we do, I have a note from your bio that you also love superhero movies, books, etc. And it's just something I've gotten into now with my kids. But I would love to hear just a little bit about what sparked that interest for you.

Shawn: Wow. So, I was one of those kids who went to the comic bookstore. You know, so, I would take my little brother and we would trek. We lived in the inner city, and we should not have been walking as far as we were walking, crossing, you know, four-lane major streets, and all the whole thing. But we would trek our way to the comic book store. And they would have these little bins, where they would have, like, 10-cent comics. You know, because a lot of the comics were very expensive. And so, we'd go there, scoop up some comic books. And in particular, actually spent, you know, a little bit more money, was a little bit more expensive comic, and I bought an X-Men comic, and it was "The Dark Phoenix Saga," and it changed my life. Like, I really fell in love with that genre when I read that comic.

And then, so, when they started to bring these things more to life with these big-budget films... And you know this. There's this big thing of, you know, the movies not being as good as the books, a lot of times. But they really measured up well. Obviously. You know, they're the biggest thing in the world right now. But of course, like, even going back, they had, like, "The Incredible Hulk" TV show, with Lou Ferrigno. And, you know, so I've always had this kind of thread, and just, I think it's part of us identifies with that, you know, to be superhuman, right, and to rise to the occasion.

But a big thing that's missed in these comic book stories, and why they resonate, is, every single time, you're facing a tremendous obstacle, and things look super bleak. Oftentimes, like, you're not going to win this thing, because the obstacle is so great, and you've gotta tap into more power, more creativity, more drive. You know, seek out wisdom, all the things, in order for you to, you know, rise to the occasion and be the hero at the end of the day. So, that's kind of my cohesive connection to these things.

Katie: I love that. And I feel like sometimes comic books get a bad rap. But I think of them, especially for kids in that realm of, how Naval Ravikant says, "read what you love until you love to read." And for a lot of kids, I feel like those are a great gateway into the imagination and the story of reading, and they're a good springboard.

And I also love that you mentioned the kind of becoming superhuman, and rising to the occasion, and overcoming the obstacle, because those are such great lessons for kids, and also something you've personally done in your life, it seems like, over and over, and continue to just do.

And that's actually something I'm really excited to delve into with you today. I know you've written extensively about sleep, you've written extensively about nutrition, and you've helped so many people in both of those realms. And, like me, you get to, as a job, hear from some of the most amazing experts in the world on a weekly basis. And I feel like sometimes we get so much information, it's impossible to do everything that there is to do that we know to do, and I hear that from my audience now too, of, like, how do you possibly do all of this? And I know my answer is I don't, at least not every day. But I am curious to hear your personal take on that. Maybe, let's start broad with what are your 80/20s? Of all the health knowledge that you have, what are the things that you feel like give you the biggest result for the effort given?

Shawn: I love this question so much. You know, and of course, we see this, and I know many people have felt this way. It's just like, "Oh, another thing I need to do?" Or, "Another thing I can't do, or that's bad for me?" You know, and I think it's really for our society at large to understand, like, the way that we're living our lives today is so abnormal. It's so different from the way that we evolved. And our biology simply has not caught up to our exposures right now. And so, you're going to keep finding out about things that are unknowingly harming us. Most of us, even right now in this moment, we are breathing in kind of processed air, you know, being "indoors." The way that we evolved, we didn't have an indoors or outdoors. We did have shelter of course, but we were cohesive with nature, you know. And as everything else in the animal kingdom is except us, and then our animals that we domesticate and bring indoors, it isn't an indoor-outdoor thing.

Even, if you think about beavers, for example, I don't know why beavers is jumping to top of mind but, you know, they build stuff, you know. And when a beaver builds a dam, we don't say, "Damn, that dam is, like, beaver stuff." It's still a part of nature, right? Humans, when we build stuff, it's still a part of nature. It might be very abnormal and strange and weird, the way that we do stuff. But we are part of nature, and the stuff that we build is also thus a part of nature, all right?

Now, the good or bad conversation, that's for another day. But let's just remembering, again, we're still trying to figure this stuff out, and to find some harmony with it. Because right now, what we're experiencing as a society is a lot of disharmony. And dysfunction, right? So if we look at... And I implore everybody to just tap into this part of their psyche. But I tend to be a very results-oriented person. I don't usually have a dog in the fight. I don't really care. I just care about the results, right? So, because I'm logical, and just, like, let's look at the outcomes.

Have the things we've been doing the past few decades, as a society, been working? Right? We have incredible innovation and technology, and even in medicine, in many ways, in our understanding of the human body. But yet, the way that we've been enacting or implementing things to treat these various things hasn't been working.

And if you look at the numbers, here in United States right now, we have over 200 million of our citizens are overweight or obese right now. We have over 130 million United States citizens have type 2 diabetes or prediabetes right now. About 60% of our citizens have some degree of heart disease, right now, at this very moment. On average, you know, just, again, any given year, right now, a lot of things people don't realize, like, Alzheimer's disease is creeping its way into the top five causes of death here in the United States.

And so, still managing heart disease, cancer, diabetes. But obesity plays such a big role in the vast majority of the top 10 causes of death. You know, so, obesity, and, you know, abnormal blood sugar. Blood sugar dysregulation. So, the way that we're living our lives is not working. But, on top of that, the way that we're treating these things is not working, because it just keeps getting worse. All the innovation, all the new drugs coming out in the market every year, these things are continuing to get worse. So we've gotta take a step back and say, "Hey, I know that we're smart. We're a smart species," right? "We're very creative, we're innovative, all the things, but have we been addressing these things the wrong way?"

And so, all of that to say, that's kind of the caveat before I share this, that we've gotta be at peace with us finding out, "Oh, wow. The sunscreen I've been using has carcinogens in it." It's probably this is not going to stop, because we've swung so far in one direction, where we have a system of healthcare, of lifestyle, that has negated the fact that all of these new things that we've been integrating into our lives are so toxic, right? And, you know, obviously, I'm sure you, of course, talk a lot about that, because of the work that you do in providing better-quality products, right?

So, with that said, we've got that part. But then we've got the, "Oh, my gosh. There's another thing I've gotta do." The things that we've gotta do that we find out about are things our ancestors have been doing forever. It's just that right now, a lot more time could be taken up with Netflix. Or a lot more time could be taken up with, fill in the blank. We've got so much stuff going on that we're not giving ourselves the biological inputs that our genes expect of us. All right.

So, what are my non-negotiables? What are those things? Well, again, just being very practical. What's the simple, easy on-ramp? Right? So, for me, it's focusing on getting high-quality sleep. Because our sleep is a major controller of so much about our hormone expression, our physical appearance. I just did a show last week, looking at how sleep affects our expression of beauty, right? But beauty in the sense of, like, what we typically monitor for, like fine lines and wrinkles, blemishes, all that stuff.

And so, just two nights of poor-quality sleep, I'm sorry, six nights of poor-quality sleep, in this particular study, led to an increase in fine lines and wrinkles, upwards of, like, 40%, just over the course of six days, all right, of short sleep. So, this is folks getting less than six hours of sleep per night. And, like, a 20% increase in blemishes, and redness, and all these things, basically accelerated the aging of our skin. And we have this moniker and culture, like "beauty sleep." But no, for real. Like, our sleep is regulating so much about our hormones, neurotransmitters, our gut health, all of these things are gonna show up on our face, and our face is the outermost portion of our nervous system, right. So, we've got that, you know, focusing on sleep for that.

Our metabolic health. Sleep is the primary controller. Period, end of story. You and I both just finished a workout, not together at this time, but we'll do that eventually. But we just finished a workout. But we both know that exercise is a much smaller component. People would be shocked to know how little we exercise, because we're focusing on getting good sleep, and our nutrition. All right. Our genes expect us to move, absolutely. But, again, it's become like more of a supplement. And we can get to this in a moment, but the bottom line is, sleep is the heavy mover. It's such a big weight, in controlling this. Even our results from exercise are coming primarily when we sleep.

All right. So, with that said, that's the non-negotiable for me. You said, you know, 80/20. There are gonna be circumstances, of course. Like, my wife just threw me this surprise birthday party, which I hate surprises. All right. I don't think many people like surprises, except surprises that they want, you know. Like, if life throws you a surprise, usually it's a problem. Right? You gotta try to figure it out. So, I was very uncomfortable with the whole thing, when I was walking up to this strange door, but it was a wonderful experience, you know. But

that night, didn't sleep very much. Well, I did. I got, like, six to seven hours of sleep, but, you know, it was much later than I normally would go to sleep. But, 98% of the time, I'm focusing on getting great sleep and having a consistent routine.

And for that, this leads into the next one, which would be, the lead-in sentence is, "A great night of sleep starts the moment you wake up in the morning." All right? A great night of sleep starts the moment you wake up in the morning. So, helping your circadian rhythms... And when I say circadian rhythms, this isn't some theoretical thing, right? Because, back in the day, like, when I was in my university, if I would hear a word like that, I would think it was very, like, like, a soft science, right? Circadian rhythm, huh? Rhythm. We have rhythms? Right? It just doesn't really sound real. But now, today, we know that, and there's great work coming out of the Salk Institute, for example, but our circadian clocks, within all of the cells in our bodies, not to mention our bacteria cells, these are essentially genes. These are functional genes, and proteins, that control every other gene and protein in our bodies. All right, so, when we say biological clock, we're talking about real, tangible things, that are controlling our health outcomes. All right.

So, knowing that our biological clocks are controlling so much about us, how do we help to keep these things in rhythm? Well, one of those things is, and a lot of neuroscientists have been coming out and talking about this. This was featured in my book, "Sleep Smarter," you know, back in 2016, and even the earlier incantation of it, like, 2015, 2014, I've been talking about this for quite some time. But getting exposure to sunlight, in the earlier part of the day, helps to sync up these circadian rhythms, your circadian clock. And this is because this is what we evolved doing. Our genes, our biological clocks, are using the primary cues in our environment to sync up these clocks with all of nature, because our clocks are linked up to the 24-hour solar day.

So, we're talking about our bodies are lined up with what's happening in the solar system, not just here in our little world, in our little crevice here, a little corner of the world, right? It's so much bigger than that. We're connected to all of it, but we can kind of hide out from it. And so, light is a primary cue, and when and how much we eat is another primary cue, noted again and again and again, in the most recent peer-reviewed data. So, "Innovations in Clinical Neuroscience" found that getting exposure to early morning sunlight helps to lower your cortisol in the evening.

All right? So, cortisol... There's an antithesis, or a kind of anti-sleep hormone, it would be cortisol. All right, when cortisol levels are too high in the evening, and, like, when I used to have folks get a hormone panel done, we can see if, you know, we can do long-term, kind of consistent through the day hormone reads. The cortisol would be too high in the evening, and it would be too low in the morning, causing them to have a hard time to get out of bed.

Sorry. We call them "tired and wired." And so, to help to reset that cortisol rhythm, getting up, getting sun exposure, was one of those things that was noted again and again to help in the peer-reviewed data, but also, I saw it practically, in people's lives that I was working with. And in addition to that, just, this is a side note, but this is not a non-negotiable for me, was having some caffeine in the early, like, literally within the first two hours of getting up in the morning, helps to kind of...it's a superficial punch, you know, to get that cortisol up. But it can help things to reset. You just don't wanna use that as a kind of a handicap, right, and just be so reliant upon it.

So, those are a couple of non-negotiables for me, focusing on getting a great night of sleep, getting up, getting some early morning sun exposure. And I'll share one more. And we can, of course, we could talk about a couple of others, but a lot of people are very much aware of this one that I'm gonna talk about, because it's tangible, right? We see it in our culture. Sleep is very weird. It's a very weird thing, so it still hasn't become

deeply ingrained in our culture as, like, this is really good for you. The people that know, know. Right? But exercise is one of those things where we see, you know, there's gyms everywhere, we see the commercials, you know, and it's been a part of our culture for decades, right? So, even going back to, like, the earlier franchise gyms, like, you know, Vic Tanny, and all these other places.

But now, they've got abundance of gym franchises, you know, the kind of commercial gyms, and also, so many people have their own personalized kind of box gym, or, you know, their own brand. So, we know how important it is. And we see the kind of before-and-afters. Oftentimes we see it on popular social media and stuff like that, is people doing people's training programs, right? And so, we have this visual cue to know that it's good for us. But what is left out of the equation is, again, how much sleep and nutrition are the real big movers with these transformations, and especially long-term transformations.

With that said, our genes expect us to move. So, every day, non-negotiable, I'm doing something physical. Now, the day after that birthday party, that surprise party, I'm not gonna go hit the gym and do my usual workout, where today, I was just bench pressing. I'm gonna pat myself on the back. It's been a while, but I...315. All right, 315 pounds. All right. This was a hammer press machine, by the way, so it was, all the weight was loaded. I was sitting. Anyway, so, I'm not gonna do that the day after my sleep is being so disrupted, but what I will do is, let me go for a 30-minute hike or a 30-minute walk, right, while getting some sunlight, so my body can start to get synced back up again. Right, so I'm going to do something physical, because my genes expect me to do that. And it's all these biological cues, so I recover faster, and I get back to my normal routine as soon as possible.

But do something physical every day. Whether it's, again, just going for a walk, is so nourishing. That's nutritious movement, as my friend Katy Bowman says, and, you know, of course, getting some strength training in a few times a week. You would be shocked at how little you need to do to see some serious, serious physical transformations. So, those are my non-negotiables.

Katie: I love that, and so many valuable things that you just said in there. I think, obviously, you've talked so much about sleep. I'll make sure I link to our podcasts about that, and all the other ones that you've done, for people to keep learning, because you get really specific and nuanced with this, but I 100% agree with you. If your sleep is not on point, it will make everything else, your nutrition more difficult, it will make your fitness much more difficult, it will mess up your hormones, to the degree that now, like, I use sleep as a guide as well. If I don't get good sleep, I'm not gonna go do a heavy workout. I'm not even gonna push myself hard that day. I'm gonna recover, I'm gonna hydrate, I'm gonna get sunlight, and do gentle movements.

And in fact, in my recovery from autoimmune disease, the vast majority of that time, I was only doing gentle movements, until my body was ready to handle more. But I love that you mentioned that we're probably doing less than people think, because we both finished... This is my hard workout of the week. It only lasted 35 minutes. I moved some really heavy weights, for short amounts of time, and did explosive stuff. And I think there's this misconception, especially for women, that it's, like, more is better. Lots of cardio. Like, go get on the Stairmaster for an hour. And I've seen panels, and that wrecks your hormones. Or it can. Some women can handle it, no problem. But I would love just a little bit more detail on what you do. I know you and your wife work out together as well, quite often. But what you do, what she does, that's kind of the minimum effective dose, because it seems to me that there's kind of this dichotomy between people, like, not training at all, and then vastly overtraining. And it's hard to kind of get that sweet spot.

Shawn: Absolutely. And by the way, just, on something you just mentioned, with our satiety hormones and stuff like that, from sleep deprivation, I just want to share a quick study, just because I just talked about this

the other day. This was a randomized crossover study. All right? I love studies like this, where they have both sets of participants doing both things, right? And so, this was healthy adult test subjects. This was published in the "Annals of Internal Medicine." And they found that just two days of restricted sleep, where they basically took a few hours of their sleep away, right? So, again, maybe it's ideal to get eight hours sleep, so they making them get less than six. And then, in two other days, they were allowed to get adequate sleep, to see what would happen with their hunger and satiety hormones.

After compiling the data, the participants were... Again, when they were sleep deprived, here's what happened. Their levels of leptin, our body's primary satiety hormone, dropped by 18%, right, in just two days. So, what's gonna happen? Gonna be hungrier. Match that with the body's, one of its primary hunger hormones, ghrelin, increased by 28%. So now, we're starting to create a little bit of a brew, a little bit of a gumbo, of having stronger cravings. Feelings of hunger, so, subjectively, increased by 24%. So they were feeling what was happening biochemically. And their appetite increased by 23%. Now, specifically, their appetite for calorie-dense, high-carbohydrate foods increased by upwards of 45%. All right. So, what are we gonna turn to when we're tired? Muffins look way better when we're sleep deprived, all right. So, the things that we already knew, now we have peer-reviewed evidence to support what is obvious if we pay attention to how we live our lives. So, I just wanted to share that, throw that in there real quick.

Now, with this exercise paradigm, it's just, again, if we simply look at the results in our lives, we can turn this whole thing on its head, and get ourselves aligned with what's actually effective. So often... I worked in a university gym for many years, when I was in college, and also after I graduated, I continued to work there as a strength conditioning coach. I would see the people that would come and do the cardio. I saw it. They never really got where they wanted to go. I mean, literally. You seem like...they're traveling so far, so many steps, so many strides, but yet they were going nowhere. All right. Now, this isn't gonna be true for everybody, as you mentioned. But if we look at what our genes expect of us, the human body is very, very good, especially with the exercise input, at adapting its caloric expenditure.

But that's the problem. We see things through the lens of calorie expenditure. And our entire system of nutrition, and really, even exercise, is still predicated on this. And as you know, Katie, in my book, "Eat Smarter," I broke down the calorie paradigm like nobody has before. I went back to the actual origin of when did calories become a part of science? And took people through that history, right? And also, I shared data on we would say things like, "Not all calories are created equal. The qualities of the calories matter." Right? So, those were ideas that we saw on the surface as probably true. That, you know, 100 calories of Cheetos is gonna affect you very differently than 100 calories of avocado, right?

But now I had peer-reviewed data to support that, and I just stacked it. Stack, stack, stack, stack. So, we have these epicaloric controllers, that are really controlling what calories do in our bodies. And so, but still, because the vast majority of our society has been indoctrinated into this calorie religion... Not to say, again, calories have their place, but your body is far more complex and intelligent than our micromanaging of calories that can be widely different from person to person. We're talking about expenditures of hundreds and hundreds of more calories, with two people doing the same thing, or the body retaining and holding on to hundreds and hundreds of more calories by people doing the same thing. All right? It just depends on person to person.

So, one of those great misconceptions are these cardiovascular-based machines, right? If you've got the monitors telling you how many calories you're burning, your biochemistry can be radically different than your best friend, again, right there next to you on the treadmill. All right? And so, your calorie expenditure, those things are so... I mean... I'm just gonna say it. They lie. These machines are lying to you. They're lying to you.

For most people, it's not going to be... It can be somewhat in the ballpark, but for most people, it can really, really throw off what you perceive, your perceived exertion, versus what this thing is telling you.

And so, let me give you a little bit of proof. If we look at, for example, we have this paradigm of, like, we think that we're, you know, when we're losing fat, I'm trying to give a visual cue, is sweating. Right? So, we see sweating as, like, you're really working hard. It's like your fat cells are having a good breakup cry, right? It's just coming out through your skin. And sweating is great. It's important. Our skin is a major detoxification organ. Yes. But the vast majority of weight that we lose is not through sweat. That's a tiny percent. We're talking about in less than 5% range. The majority of fat that we expel from our bodies is through breathing. We're breathing it out. You know, our lungs are an eliminatory organ as well.

And so, I also, I broke the... In "Eat Smarter," of course, I've take people through that biochemistry of, like, where does fat go when you lose it? How does that process happen? And, but this doesn't mean by breathing faster or harder, you're suddenly breathing out more fat. It's all of the physiological and biochemical steps that happen beforehand, that make that excretion possible. And that cannot be tampered up very much on a treadmill, because it's temporary. And let me say this one more time. It's not that we can't use a treadmill, or that it can't be beneficial. It's that our society is so hell-bent on using these cardiovascular devices to burn calories, right? And you are burning calories, yes.

However, what are you programming your metabolism to do? What kind of feedback, environmental feedback, are you giving your metabolism? Because through our evolution, if we are going these long bouts of exertion, right, this kind of, maybe our, you know, our biology is like, "This person is tracking, you know, an animal. They might not be very good at it because, like, I'm still going at this pace, and nothing is really changing." Or, maybe something is chasing you. "Something is chasing this person. We keep running. We're running and running and running. Will we ever get away? We've gotta switch gears, and allow this person to have a more sustainable fuel source."

And so, what the data shows, again and again, and so there are books like, "The One-Minute Workout," for example. Now, that's, again, it's kind of a marketing... And I know the author of the book, and he's a brilliant scientist, professor, all the things. But he was against, it was Dr. Martin Gibala, he was against putting a one-minute workout, because this is a marketing thing. But that's the thing. Humans, oftentimes, we won't even be interested in it if it doesn't sound super, you know, like, "buy now," here, you know, "lose fat overnight," this kind of thing. But he's breaking down in the book the efficiency seen with doing high-intensity interval training, for example. Really, more power-driven, more strength-driven movements, short, intense bouts, versus conventional cardio, done on, you know, a stationary bike, is one of his primary tools.

And it was shocking just how much doing short bouts of muscle-intensive movements outperformed long-duration cardio, that even him, again, it has its place. But if we're talking about efficiency for healthy metabolic, you know, your healthy metabolism, for fat loss, for retaining our muscle mass... Because what happens is, when we're doing that long-duration cardio, and your biology's like, "We've gotta save Shawn," or "We gotta save Katie. They've been running for 40 minutes, and eventually this tiger is going to track them down. Let's shift gears, because our muscle isn't gonna be needed if he can't keep running. So, fat is gonna be something that we could siphon from a little bit longer," right?

And so, this is a very catabolic form of exercise, that tends to just burn off, or kind of tear away our muscle mass. And this is, again, I'm gonna give everybody another result. If you just look at athletes who specialize in long-distance running, versus those who are doing short-duration, higher-intensive movements, right? The 100-meter sprinters versus the folks who are doing, you know, the mile run, or, you know, and/or the longer

aces, right? The marathon runners. So, if you wanna look like a marathon runner, do that. If you don't, because I know many of my friends, like, "I've dedicated getting in the best shape of my life this year. I signed up to run a marathon." And so they train, they do the thing, and they, hey, they accomplish something they never thought they could do. Wonderful. But that should just be for your psychology.

To get in shape, 9 out of 10 of them, it doesn't work. It doesn't work. They go backwards. They do the whole training. Again, they might lose weight, but then they gain it back and then some. And then, you know, eventually, they'll ask me, like, "Shawn, what do you think?" So, I just said so much there, but to consolidate all of it in one minute, cardiovascular-based exercise is great for cardiovascular health. It is not...and this is proven in the very best clinical data, it is not efficient for fat loss, okay. Weight loss, again, it's different from fat loss. And so, to protect our metabolic health, and to protect our muscle, if we simply shift a percentage of that focus to doing strength-based work, and/or higher-intensity, short-duration work, and decrease the percentage of this kind of long-duration cardiovascular, moderate intensity that we're doing...

And if you want, again, if you have the space for cardio, and you just really are attracted to it, great. But also, if you have time to fill... Because we can't strength train very long. It's hard. We can't do short-intensity interval training. It's too hard. If you have a gap in the time, and you want to do a little bit more, walk. That is the number one form of exercise that we're designed to do, as a human species. We're bipedal. We walk. It's what we do. It's our thing. And our genes expect us to do that. And there's really something very interesting that most people don't realize that happens when you're walking, versus when you're doing other forms of exercise.

Really, science overall is still trying to unpack why this is. But usually, when we're trying to burn fat, our bodies go through this kind of hierarchy of fuel use, all right? So, it's going to... It reminds me of my accounting class in college, all right. In college, we had LIFO, FIFO, right? Last in first out, first in first out. All right. So, it's kind of like what would be done at a store, right, what kind of stuff they're putting out on the shelves. So, last in first out means when our bodies are looking for fuel, to manage and do processes in our body, the last thing we put in, it's easy to access, right? So, if we just ate something, and those calories are available, caloric energy, again, we can use that label here, it's going to use that first. It's easier. Versus, breaking down stored muscle glycogen. Right, breaking down stored energy in your fat cells. That takes more work, and your body is all about efficiency. So it's gonna use last in first out. It's gonna use the last thing that came in, easily accessible calories.

So it's gonna go from there. Then it's gonna go to glucose, right? So, just, if there's glucose roaming free in your bloodstream. Then it's gonna go to stored glycogen. Your muscle glycogen, your liver glycogen. Then it's going to break down stored body fat. All right. So, it's kind of going through this hierarchy. And it takes a lot of work to try to get through... So, glucose, and I love this analogy from my friend, Dr. Sylvia Tara, a biochemist. And she says that that glucose from the food we just ate is like cash on hand, right. Then the glycogen from our muscles and liver, that's sort of like a checking account, right? It takes a little time to write a check, right? If you remember being in line, and, you know, the older person is writing their check out, whatever, you know. And then we become that older person writing checkout. But now, of course, it's different now, to where we don't, a lot of people aren't writing checks.

But then, to get to the stored body fat, that's like dipping into our savings account. It usually takes more work, right? We've gotta go...again, stuff has changed now, to transfer funds and that whole thing. But usually, you've gotta take an extra step or two to be able to access your savings account. And so, now, here's why I'm sharing all this. Through exercise, the same thing. If we're going to the gym, and we're getting on the treadmill, we're gonna burn through our glucose cache first, checking, then we're going to get to burning

some stored body fat, right? And they even have that. Like, it would be up at the gyms. Like, "Get to your fat-burning zone. Take some time to get there." Why? Why can't I just start burning fat. Walking. Not intense. Walking, leisurely walking, for whatever reason, bypasses that system, and uses stored body fat.

Now, it's not 100% of the case. But it's one of those interesting hacks. And I, just from my theory on it, is, if you're just leisurely walking, it's tapping more to kind of a sympathetic thing. It's getting your body out of this fight or flight intense state that it's in, that we're getting with basically any form of kind of exertion, right? And if you're leisurely walking, it's just like, Oh, I could... Let me just go ahead and tap in and use this source of fuel, and just keep that other stuff for anything intense." All right. So, little fun fact there. This is why walking can be so valuable. But that's the essential recipe, would be two to three times of lifting per week, one to two intense, you know, high-interval...I'm sorry, high-intensity interval training, and walk as much as you want. You know, it's a buffet on walking. You know, maybe, my barometer, my bar, is walking for 20 minutes a day, at least.

Katie: I love that. I think it's one of the most underestimated tips. You know, everyone wants to, like, jump on the treadmill and run, because it feels like they're doing more. But to your point, there's so much data showing walking is by far one of the best movements we can do as humans. And as a mom, I love to just go on a walk with one of my kids, a different kid each day. And I feel like, totally unrelated to just the fitness side, but that's a great parenting tip, is if you're both walking in the same direction, they're way more willing to talk to you about things than if you're, like, sitting face-to-face, and they feel the pressure. So those are some of our best conversations. But so many gems in what you just said. I think the idea of getting away from calories, and looking at nutrient density, like you explained so well in "Eat Smarter," is so important.

I think in the diet culture over the last few decades, we lost that understanding of nutrient density. And I've seen people go on this low-calorie-focused, high-protein, which, protein is great, but high-protein, low-calorie kind of focus, and then they're not getting enough nutrients. So they might still be maintaining muscle, but they're undernourished when it comes to micronutrients, and fat-soluble vitamins, and so many other things.

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And also your point about the high-intensity and the sprinting, and, those things contribute to muscle mass, which also means you're going to burn more at rest, i.e. even while you're sleeping, you're going to be able to burn more, which means not only are you going to be able to, but you're going to need to eat more.

That was an interesting thing for me when I started incorporating really heavy strength training and sprinting a couple times a week, is I started hitting plateaus, and I realized, for the first time in my life, it was because I wasn't eating enough. Which is another thing I think some women are learning right now is, if you under-eat, your body will plateau out of survival. And so, now I'm having to be conscious to eat enough food. But yeah, so many great things in what you just said. I'm curious if you have any supplements, obviously, with the caveat that supplementation is a very personalized, individualized thing. But I'm curious if there are any that you turn to often, or that seem to work really well for you.

Shawn: Another great question. When I started off in this field... I'm almost at my 20th year anniversary being in health and wellness. I started off definitely being... Because what tends to happen is, if you're aware of our pitfalls in conventional healthcare and medicine, wellness, we have a heavy reliance on treating symptoms, right? So, we're looking for...and this is the thing. When we're in pain, when we...and also when we're not educated about our bodies, we're looking for that thing to just help us, right. Give me the pill. And what can tend to happen is, when you become aware of the importance of nutrition, and that the food that you're eating, and the nutrition you're bringing in, is literally making your cells, making your hormones, making your neurons, it's all made from food, what can happen is this other pitfall of, like, trading in synthetic drugs for, "natural pills," and herbs, and all these things, and still having this kind of "pill for every ill" mentality.

Not to say that our supplements are not remarkably valuable. It's just that when we have this heavy reliance on trying to make supplement, things that should supplement an already healthy diet, the tip of the spear, that's when we can have some problems. And I definitely, I was that guy. So, I was buying all...I had a cabinet full of, you know, all these pills. And, you know, over the years, I've had less and less and less supplements that I use regularly. And you get to this place where you're really in tune with your body, and you start to just know, like, yeah, this is a good spot. Like, I feel like this is something, I've got a little bit of inflammation. Let

me go ahead and the, you know, turmeric, or whatever. You start to know what you need, and you just kind of get a feel for stuff.

But a couple of things that are so important and so deficient in our diet, one of the things is omega 3s. Period. Like, it's so important, and because it's responsible for so much, especially with our brain, it's a place that I would generally recommend everybody supplement. And one of the most glaring studies that I shared in "Eat Smarter" was these neuroscientists, they used fMRIs to look at the brain, and look at people's omega 3 intake, right? So, DHA and EPA. And they found that people who had the lowest intake of DHA and EPA had the highest rate of brain shrinkage, all right.

This is terrible. The actual physical construct of your brain shrinking. Not a volume thing, necessarily, like, from dehydration, which that can happen, by the way. But we're talking about the structural makeup of your brain. Because these omega 3s are used...they're structural fats, not just things that are used as energy, right? With, like, ALA can be used as an energy source. But these are used to make your brain cells, right, or to reinforce them. Because we're not just out here, haphazardly making brain cells, by the way. That's a very complex subject. And we know different now, in the last, really, the last decade, we've been more solid on this, because even when I was in school, you know, 20 years ago, we were really just kind of impressed upon this idea that you just lose brain cells when you hit about, you know, between 20 and 25, it's just downhill from there. We don't make new brain cells.

Well, we know that we definitely make new brain cells. We have neurogenesis in the hippocampus, for sure. And we've got some other data coming forward, with other areas of the brain as well. But, our brain cells, in general, we have to keep them alive, we have to keep them healthy. And these omega 3s are reinforcements, to help them to stay healthy, and to be regenerative. And so, they help with signal transduction. For example, like, our brain cells being able to send data back and forth, that it, kind of, a currency. That currency exchange that happens. The list goes on and on. So, with that said, food first though. Food first. The "Journal of Neurology" found, you know, they published a study that just one seafood meal per week, the test subjects who are consuming just one seafood meal per week, did in fact perform better on cognitive skills test versus people who consumed less than one seafood meal per week.

So, I recommend one to two a week, right? Particularly, again, seafood and/or other foods that have a rich source of DHA and/or EPA. So, it's gonna be fatty fish, like salmon and mackerel, sardines. But one of my friends who's a neuroscientist out of NYU, and I love it, because she's, again, she's looking at the brain to see the impact of some of these nutrients. She informed me, very early on, that fish eggs are far more rich in omega 3s than the fish itself. Right. So, caviar, salmon roe, which, for me, is outside my paradigm. I'm, what, caviar sounded so foreign to me, right? Coming from where I come from. And, but then, it's just like, wow, you know, looking at the data, it was remarkable.

And grass-fed beef. We could find some omega 3s. Egg yolks. There are many great sources. But, again, these are coming from animal-based omega 3s. It's different from the plant form, which, in my clinical practice, I would tell everybody coming in, like, oh, yeah, get your flaxseed oil and all these things. I was really missing the point. Because it's different. It's ALA. It's not the same. That plant version is not what's used to reinforce your brain cells. So, not to say that it can't be valuable, by the way. Chia seeds and hemp seeds and flax seeds, that stuff is great, in its place. In its proper perspective. But, and your body can convert some of that ALA into DHA and EPA, but that conversion process is gonna depend on your unique metabolic fingerprint, your unique microbial fingerprint. You could lose upwards of 90% in that conversion process, and barely get anything that your brain really needs, so it's just not efficient.

So, if you're doing a plant-based protocol, you're not gonna be left out here. Okay, Wellness Mama is gonna be inclusive. So, we've got food first, animal-based foods, then we've got krill oil. Most studies on omega 3s, by the way, the vast majority are done on fish oil. It's just, it is what it is. There's a lot of controversy around it. But if you look at the peer-reviewed data, it is clear, especially for your cognitive function, these omega 3s, in the form of fish oil, are important. But you gotta be careful of the quality, right?

Krill oil is a microscopic shrimp, right? But this word "shrimp" can throw people off, and they miss the word microscopic. Microscopic. You know, so people who are concerned about that, you're going to be gobbling up sentient beings just licking the air, you know what I mean? So, just keep that in mind. It's rich in astaxanthin as well. So, that tiny amount of krill is gonna be protected and more bioavailable, potentially. Lastly, if you wanna go full-on, make sure that it's plant-based as much as possible, but even still, some sentient stuff is gonna make its way through, get yourself an algae oil. So, algae oil, at minimum. But here's the rub. And I'm gonna tell you the truth. We don't have peer-reviewed data on the effectiveness on algae oil, stacking up against krill oil, which has, there is some peer-reviewed data on krill oil now, and fish oil. Not to say that it doesn't...we know that it's there. We know that the DHA and EPA is there. We just don't have clinical evidence as to its efficiency and efficacy as of yet. But don't wait on that. Get yourself some algae oil at minimum.

Katie: Awesome. And as it always does, our time flies by. I could talk to you all day, and hopefully, we'll get to have more conversations soon. But a couple quick wrap-up questions I'd love to ask, the first being if there is a book or number of books that have profoundly influenced your life, and if so, what they are and why?

Shawn: Cool. I'll just share one. There's many, and as you know, it could be different phases of your life. But one that has really put me in this place that I'm at right now, that's really special, it's actually is an audiobook, specifically. It's called, "The Life Visioning Process." It's from Michael Beckwith. And, you know, I listened to this audiobook, audio program when I was living in Ferguson, Missouri... Actually, Florissant, Missouri. It's like, a little bit better area. But I was working in this space, I was very passionate about service, I was helping so many people, but I didn't know how to put all these pieces together. And just that clarity that was gained from that, just by having introspection, by getting clear on my intentions, and what I wanted, and what I wanted to create.

So often, we're getting so much randomness in our life because we're not clear. And our brains are so powerful. You know, we have instinctive elaboration. It's just automatic, cognitive faculty, to answer any question that we pose our brain. The human mind is obsessed with answering questions, but if you're not asking the right questions, right, if you're asking disempowering questions, it's gonna keep sending you down roads that you might not necessarily wanna go on your way to your goal. So, but here's the thing, and I'm just gonna share this result with you.

This was so remarkable for me, because not only did I massively surpass the vision that I had for my life and for the impact that I had, but the author of "The Life Visioning Process" is one of my best friends now. And I had no idea... Like, millions of people are vying for his time, and I'm not exaggerating in the slightest.

And the way that we met was so weird. It was my first time I was speaking at an event in Europe, in Portugal. I'd never been to Europe. I'm from Ferguson, Missouri. I just felt like the most out-of-place human being in this spot. But we met...not only did we not meet here in the United States, where he's based as well. We ended up meeting at this kind of synchronous event in Portugal, and we met there, and, like, ever since, we've been in each other's lives. And, you know, again, this was a bonus to my time, you know, spending with him, that he ended up showing up in my life as well, as part of that visioning process.

Katie: That's an amazing story, and that's a new recommendation, so I will make sure to link to that in the show notes as well. Lastly, any parting advice? You've given so much great advice today, and I think your results-driven approach and your focus on simplicity is often better. Really resonates with me personally. But any other advice? Could be related to everything we've talked about, or entirely unrelated.

Shawn: Perfect. Yeah, I would just lean into that simple advice of just doing something active every day. Right, feed your body, feed your spirit. The best form of exercise is the form of exercise that you'll actually do. That's the very best. People, we could sit up here to throw all this science around and what you should do. But do the thing that you feel good about, that you're attracted to. Maybe it's playing ping pong. Maybe it's playing, you know, badminton. You know, we just ordered some shuttlecocks, the worst name for, you know, a sports device or tool.

But anyways, so, we've got that. You've got roller skating. Maybe you love to jog. Maybe it's cycling, maybe it's just going for a leisurely walk. Katie shared probably the most profound thing on this episode, which is that time with your kid. I wanna second and third that so much. Because, you know, when I go for a walk with my kids, and it's usually one or the other, but it's, most of the time, it's my youngest son. Man, we spend so much time together, and I know so much about him, and so much connection just from going on these walks. And, you know, it's something that's a regular part... Same thing with my wife. If I can get her to go for a walk with me, amidst her, you know, whatever she's doing, but just lining that up. Like, it's just such a bonding and healthful experience. So, that's what I would implore everybody to lean into a little bit more. It's just doing something, anything, active each day.

Katie: Perfect place to wrap up, Shawn. Always such a pleasure. Thank you so much for your time.

Shawn: It's my pleasure, Katie. Thank you. I appreciate you.

Katie: And thanks to all of you, as always, for listening and sharing your most valuable resources, your time, your energy, and your attention with us today. We're both so grateful that you did, and I hope that you will join me again on the next episode of "The Wellness Mama Podcast."

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