



## EXPERT INTERVIEW

# Shawn Stevenson

Nutritionist



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**Shawn:** I'm Shawn Stevenson. I'm a professional nutritionist specializing in biochemistry and kinesiology. I've written a couple of books, *The Key to Quantum Health* and *The Fat Loss Code*. I have a Bachelor of Science degree and I founded my own company five years ago, Advanced Integrative Health Alliance. I've spent the majority of my time during the past 10 years in the field running experiments, working with clients, and finding out what works. My biggest modus operandi is finding out what works. Since then I've been speaking at events all over the country, events all over the world and I have a radio show that's been featured on television several times. It's just been a fun and incredible ride of spreading this message of true natural health and health sovereignty; this message of really stepping up and taking care of yourself in ways that are really possible for us.

**Larry:** How do you view the problem of sleep?

**Shawn:** Well for me, I understand that sleep in and of itself is an elevated anabolic state. People often have heard about anabolic and catabolic states. Catabolic is things that break down the body. Just being awake in general is very, very catabolic. We need that anabolic state to trigger the release of growth hormone and all the rejuvenating weapons to boost our immune system, skeletal system and muscular system. All these things get re-built when we're sleeping. Memory processing also occurs, where our short-term memories get converted into long-term memories. So if you're not sleeping properly you're literally getting dumber. It's something that's pretty important and for me personally. Here's one of the big reasons why sleep is so important. In my field, nutrition, I work with individuals who



are dealing with obesity. There's a wonderful study in the *Canadian Medical Association Journal* that showed sleep deprivation is directly related to an inability to lose weight. They put test subjects on the same exercise and diet programs. One group got less than six hours sleep per night. Another group got eight-plus hours sleep per night. The group that got less than six hours sleep per night consistently lost significantly less weight and less body fat than the group that got eight-plus hours sleep. This is a clear-cut example that when people are getting up early to go work out, really watching their diet, watching what they're eating, but they're not getting results it's because they're not sleeping. That's the time when the body actually heals itself from all the work that you're doing. So it can be counterproductive, in a way, to get up earlier and exercise if you're not getting the sleep to actually recover from it. I hope that makes sense for everybody. So, basically, sleep is an important time when your body rejuvenates itself from just the day-to-day things. There's also your mind, when I talked about memory processing. Getting sleep is important for your brain to actually process all the stuff – all the experiences – you've taken in during the day. Okay? So on every single level, sleep is very, very important.

And, for me, I look at it as a trinity. We've got exercise, nutrition, and sleep. It's that important to getting the results we want.

There's another fascinating study I looked at that shows just one night of being sleep-deprived can make you as insulin resistant as a Type 2 diabetic. What that means is you are aging faster and storing more body fat than you want.

Alright? So being insulin resistant is not a pretty thing and just one night of poor sleep quality can do that do us. This has been proven clinically. Some other things to consider regarding the consequences of poor sleep include things such as weight gain, obviously, but more specifically, fat gain. Skin issues are another big one because of the impact on the nervous system. Your skin is the outermost part of your nervous system. So if your nervous system is lit up, or it's not getting properly rejuvenated, your endocrine system and your nervous system are not lining up properly, you're going to accumulate skin issues. Obviously, fatigue is another issue. Then you've got things such as sleep apnea. We're going to get deeper into this, but sleep apnea is one thing where, if we address some lifestyle factors, we'll be able to reverse it. Then we have the snoring issue and also insomnia, which is a really, really big issue for a lot of people today.

So these are some of the consequences of poor sleep that are going to translate into having a much lower quality of life. We all know what it's like when we get a good night's sleep and wake up feeling refreshed and rejuvenated. We want to feel that way every day. If our sleep quality is poor, because it's not the quantity that's most important, it's the quality, then we've got some serious issues.

**Larry:** What symptoms should one look for?

**Shawn:** One of the smoking gun symptoms of poor sleep quality is fatigue. Waking up tired, waking up feeling groggy, not feeling rejuvenated and refreshed, that's a tell-tale sign. If somebody's dragging through the day, if they have to have that coffee, that caffeine to make it, then chances are they're not getting good sleep at night. We think all we

need to do is take a supplement to give us more energy or do this type of exercise or some other thing on the perimeter instead of getting to the core issue. That is really getting good, quality sleep. There are thousands of exercises you can do, there are thousands of foods you can try, but there's no alternative for sleep. That's the big issue. People keep trying to trump that.

So, if we're talking about people with insomnia, where they have an inability to sleep well at night, these individuals have been shown to have a much higher mortality rate. They also have a much higher incidence of depression, anxiety, and all manner of diseases. So if somebody is dealing with a chronic issue of any type, I would really say, "Let's look at your sleep." It's something that people just don't give a lot of attention. But your sleep is a big indicator of whether your body is healing properly and protecting you from illnesses. If somebody is snoring, chances are there's an issue with the respiratory system, the way oxygen is flowing through their body. If someone's suffering from sleep apnea, they're going to be pulled out of their REM sleep and their rejuvenating sleep. Again, it's not just the quantity of sleep, it's the quality of sleep. So, being able to get into those different areas, those different REM areas of sleep, is very, very important. I like to point to several studies showing that, yes indeed, drinking alcohol can help you sleep. It can help you get to sleep, to induce sleep. However, the REM sleep is radically affected. You're not going to get to those deeper levels of sleep and actually get that rejuvenation. It's why people tend to wake up feeling crappy after a night of drinking, you know, with a hangover. "Hangover" has become a big thing in our society with the movie trilogy but it's a serious thing, taking

substances that influence your nervous system, your endocrine system like that. Then I also talked about memory processing. Your brain is not going to get into those REM sleep areas where the memory processing actually happens. You're going to have a tendency to not remember, just like in the movie. They woke up and didn't remember what was going on because they took substances that stopped that process from happening. I hope that makes sense for everyone. So these are just some of the really general symptoms, the fatigue, the snoring, obviously insomnia is a red flag here, and sleep apnea.

**Larry:** What aggravates the problem?

**Shawn:** One of the big things that aggravates the problem of not getting high-quality sleep that I've seen in my clinic is excess weight. There are different types of fat we have to be looking at here. We've got subcutaneous fat and we've got visceral fat. The visceral fat is the stuff that's deep down, really maneuvering itself and wrapping itself around your organs. It's putting a greater stress on every organ in your body. If somebody's carrying a lot of visceral fat around their abdominal section, for example, that fat is impacting their liver, kidneys, intestines and pancreas. All of these organs are essentially getting squeezed all day long, there's not enough room. This is going to be one of those big-time issues that aggravates the process of sleeping because there's a tremendous amount of stress on the body. So getting that excess weight off is going to help you to sleep better. And sleeping better is going to help you get that weight off. So it's either a vicious circle or a virtuous circle, whichever one you're going to get proactively into. Sleep apnea oftentimes is related to being overweight or



obese. So a good solution for you to reverse that issue is getting some of that weight off.

Another thing that aggravates the problem of not getting high quality sleep is your diet and nutrition. Certain foods create inflammation in the body and others trigger a histamine reaction. If people have issues with snoring, or allergies that can radically affect their sleep quality. Those are things that need to be avoided. We're going to talk about that in a little bit, about what some of those foods are, but your diet is definitely a big player in your quality of sleep. Also, I might be the only expert who talks about this, but doing the wrong kind of exercise, doing low-quality exercise, can really aggravate your sleep issues. We actually can get into that, too, as we go along here. So you want to make sure you have the right exercise protocol. You want to make sure your body is not carrying around a lot of excess weight and excess fat. You have to make sure your nutrition is dialed in as well to avoid aggravating the problem.

**Larry:** How would you treat the problem?

**Shawn:** One of the first things I like to do with my clients is help them understand that for the past 100 years humans have had an increasing ability to create daytime environments in their homes, even when it's nighttime. It's been very successful with helping clients improve their sleep quality. Prior to the last 100 years, you didn't have lights. You didn't have computers. You weren't on your laptop at two in the morning, doing the laptop lap dance as we like to say. You just weren't creating an environment where there was a lot of light. Here's the issue. Your body doesn't care whether it's sunlight or some other type of spectral light, all of it is



going to be hitting your optical nerves, these photo receptors in your eyes. It's going to travel to the optical sensors in your brain and trigger the secretion of daytime hormones, namely cortisol. So I like to direct my clients to create an environment where the bedroom is a sleep sanctuary. Make the room dark. Use blackout curtains, for example, and get it really good and dark. Researchers say it should be dark enough so you can't even see your hand in front of your face. An eye mask is great. We talked about the photoreceptors, but your skin actually has receptors that pick up light. So, if there's light hitting your body, it's going to be influencing your endocrine system and your nervous system. It's going to be telling your body, "Hey, there's light; it could daytime." So getting it dark in your room is really, really powerful. That impacted me a great deal when I started doing that. So that's one of the first things I like to direct my clients to do.

One of the other things I pretty frequently put my clients onto is grounding technology, also called "earthing" technology. I particularly do it with women, because the studies show it impacts them even more. One particular study sought to find out whether getting the human body in contact with the earth's surface, connecting mattresses to the earth itself, would impact pain reduction, stress, insomnia and other issues. The study is available on the website PubMed.gov ([www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed)). Anyone can go look it up. It was so fascinating. What they found was every single person in the study had radically improved sleep quality, reduced pain, and normalized cortisol levels. Cortisol should be high in the morning and then low in the evening. Today a lot of people are tired and wired. Basically they're tired but then their cortisol

shoots up at night and they can't sleep. They have issues going to sleep at night because their cortisol, which is a daytime hormone, is so high. So connecting the mattress to the earth starts normalizing that cortisol cycle, the circadian rhythms. This was all from, I think, it six or eight weeks of sleeping with these grounded mattresses. We have grounding sheets, and I even have a grounding mat under my desk. The science is very sound. If you want to look into more, you can check out the book *Earthing* by Clint Ober and Dr. Sinatra. It's a wonderful read. You'll get all the information you need to know about it. It's been used in several different athletic spheres as well. So like the Twitter France, they would use these grounding recovery bags. This is really sound science. People at a high level will tell you they are using these things. So if someone's had a really big issue with cortisol or adrenal, I oftentimes recommend they get some earthing sheets and use those in a blacked out room. I also would employ several other things. Just one quick caveat for everyone is to be conscious of where you're using the grounding technology. You need to aware of whether you're in a city or you're out in the country or you're somewhere where there's a lot less pollution or electromagnetic noise. If you're connected to the earth in those areas, it's going to get connected to you. So look into it. What we're sharing is these ideas, things that have been proven to work for some people. It might be the best thing ever for you or it might not work for you at all. Just go ahead and look into it. Definitely pick up the *Earthing* book, or research it, and see what you think.

**Larry:** What dietary recommendations would you make?

**Shawn:** As far as supplements go, there's one that's really high up on my list for people who are dealing with chronic sleep issues. There's a study by James Penland at the Human Nutrition Research Center that showed that a high magnesium diet has been found to be associated with deeper, less interrupted sleep. On the other side of the coin, a magnesium deficiency was found to be a central symptom of people with chronic insomnia. So, this is like a huge "ah-ha!" for people with sleep issues, It should be, the antenna should be going up here on this one. Magnesium can really, really help in this department. So, the question is, "Why is this?" Well, magnesium is responsible for more than 300 biochemical processes. It has a lot of responsibilities in the body. What's it's really known for is like an overarching kind of stress distance mineral. It's like a buffer. It helps your body deal with all the stresses to which it's exposed. The issue as well is that today we're exposed to a tremendous amount of stress, a very abnormal amount of stress that can break your body down very quickly. That zaps the magnesium out of your system. Your body uses magnesium very, very quickly. This is likely the number one mineral deficiency in our country, or in the world. Period. Right now. You want to have an intelligent strategy for getting more magnesium in your diet. Understand magnesium deficiency is a central symptom of chronic insomnia. That definitely is something to focus upon.

So, first and foremost, let's go to the foods first before we even look at the supplements and the medications. And here's why: food has a long history of resonance with the human body. When we get into the supplements and the drugs, these are fractioned items. So they're not going to have all the different phytochemical and phytonutrients



that have come with them historically when humans have consumed them. So maybe they'll help one issue but create another one.

The number one category food to pursue is dark leafy vegetables. Those are very large sources of magnesium. Juicy vegetables are going to be awesome to us here: the kales, the collards, spinach. Antioxidants are basically the color spectrum and those colors that are featured in those green vegetables are tied up with magnesium, oftentimes as well as the chlorophyll. It's just a really, really wonderful thing to look at. So, this is something that, every day, having it in your strategy to get in plenty of green leafy vegetables, either through your diet or through juicing. It's going to be a really helpful, effective way to go about this. Another big source of magnesium is chocolate, funny enough. Everybody knows about raw chocolate and all the benefits, but it's also likely the largest source of magnesium available. Now, it's to be respected. All of these things need to be respected. You're not going to go crazy on chocolate, but it's something that can be very, very helpful as far as getting your magnesium levels up. It can get you some of those feel-good chemicals that everybody likes. Use these foods intelligently and respect them.

Then we get into the super dense sources. The super dense sources of magnesium are going to be found in super foods such as spirulina, chlorella, and E3 AFA Blue Green Algae. These are all wonderful sources of magnesium. In particular, I like spirulina and these different types of algae. The spirulina is 65 to 71 percent protein and a very, very dense source of nutrition overall. So ideally, if somebody's really looking to do this at a high level, they're going to be



getting these high, super dense sources of nutrition in their diet. You're not just getting the magnesium, you're getting all those other benefits as well. So, it's a big-time win-win. So, spirulina, green leafy vegetables, and chocolate are three good sources of magnesium.

Now let's look at magnesium supplements. I've really liked magnesium. I've seen some good results with my clients. But the issue there, again, is that it's a fractioned thing. I see people tending to create a dependency when they're not using the whole foods. That's what you want to avoid. Plus, if you're really looking to get your magnesium levels up, you can't take that much because magnesium pulls moisture to your bowels. So it will have you sprinting to the bathroom because you've got diarrhea. So you've got to be careful with the internal stuff. What we really like is the topical magnesium, Magnesium Infusion in particular. It's not just any brand. Other ones just flake up and your body's not really absorbing all of it. The Magnesium Infusion product is amazing. It's a super critical extract. It's from amazing sources and upwards of 99 to 100 percent of it gets absorbed. So you're actually getting your money's worth. And when you put it on topically, it literally interacts with your endocrine system. If people don't understand that, with a lot of hormone replacement therapy, the progesterone creams, testosterone creams, you rub it on your skin and it interacts with endocrine system that way. So putting it onto your skin gets it into your body and magnesium is one of those things that very effectively gets through your skin. So, that's what I would do as far as magnesium supplements. I would use a topical treatment. It's much, much safer.



Personally, I'm not a big fan of supplements, if you haven't noticed that already. But I'm going to throw out a couple more that people can look into. I'm not going to get too involved today personally, but if they sound good to you, then go ahead and give them a try. Another one is chamomile. A lot of people know about chamomile tea. You can get this in a lot of supplement forms or just by using the traditional teas. What I'm throwing out here are things that have been used for a long time, I mean thousands of years of documented history. So these are not new things. There are some things you want to avoid, which I'm going to talk about in a second. Chamomile tea has been shown to have a relaxing, calming effect on the muscles and nervous system, which is pretty awesome. So it might be worth considering having chamomile tea before bed. Another option here would be kava kava. Kava kava actually is the national drink of Fiji. It is well known there that it has sedative properties. It's commonly used to treat sleeplessness and fatigue. So, it has a long, rich history. It's actually the national drink of a country, so it's pretty awesome. But, again, these things need to be used with respect. Third, another thing to look into is Valerian root. This is moderately strong, so you can look into trying Valerian root if you have some really strong sleep issues. You just want to get a jump start to help things unlock, but not get dependent on it. Valerian root is a moderate sedative. This one typically is indicated for individuals who have a difficult time falling asleep. It's been shown to promote uninterrupted sleep as well. But, again, we want to get into the mindset of treating symptoms. We want to look at the lifestyle factors that are really causing the whole overarching issue with our sleep in the first place. These are



the things we were talking about earlier: the light exposure during nighttime hours and then biochemistry. Our body wants to be asleep, it wants to be in darkness.

Another thing I brought up was the exercise. I would implore you to have an exercise curfew because that's a strong promoter of stress hormones getting produced in your body that can interrupt your sleep. I don't even know why we have 24-hour gyms, that's insane. If you're up exercising at midnight, we need to talk. That's not going to be conducive with your getting high-quality sleep. So, I would have an exercise curfew, preferably 7 p.m. if you're trying to get to bed around 10 p.m., 11 at the latest. That will give your body a few hours to settle down. A good exercise to do if you have sleep issues is long duration cardio. Just running on the treadmill for 30 to 45 minutes is very cortisol friendly. That's going to churn your body to produce a lot of cortisol, a lot of stress hormones. And since you're continuously going, your body's not getting a chance to disperse that. So if you're doing the split exercise, where you're doing burst training, where you're going fast and then stopping, your body's shifting gears and it immediately starts to disperse and break down these hormones. Lifting weights gives your body a break and can get back in balance in between sets. If you're just drudging along and doing this long duration cardio, that's going to be producing even more cortisol. If you've got a cortisol issue, which a lot of people with sleep problems do, then that kind of exercise is probably going to be something that you want to avoid. If you've got a concern of, "Well, I don't want to get fat, or I don't want to lose this fat I have," then we really need to get into the fundamentals of fat loss. We need to get into understanding that that type of cardio is

extremely ineffective for fat loss. It's something I talk about in my courses. That's another thing, a supplement with vitamin E, which would be "vitamin exercise." Let's call that one "T." So, this is the training. I would recommend focusing on strength work, lifting heavy things, and doing more interval-type training and some splits. I also would recommend taking your vitamin "T" earlier in the day. Those would be my overarching recommendations there.

Finally, let's talk about what foods to avoid. When someone's dealing with sleep apnea, and snoring in particular, I would say pull the dairy products off the table for a while. Let's see how that affects your sleep quality. I think it's because dairy is a food that encourages the production of more mucus cells. It's sort of like a histamine reaction, like your body is getting exposed to something and needs to create protection against it. So for people who are having trouble with breathing, with snoring, with allergies, let's pull the dairy off the table and see how that impacts your sleep. If you've got weight issues, we were talking earlier about getting some of that weight off to cure sleep apnea. If that's the issue, then you want to avoid those high glycemic index carbohydrate foods. In particular, the highest glycemic index thing out there that we eat the most of is going to be bread. That's a very inflammatory food. A lot of people are not aware of gluten sensitivity, gluten problems. So go ahead and cut the cord and just test it, run with it for 30 days. Cut out the grains and the dairy and just see how that affects, not just your sleep, but your overall body composition. See how it affects the way you look and feel and how you're functioning on a day-to-day level. Your performance is probably going to go way up.

**Larry:** What lifestyle recommendations would you make?

**Shawn:** As far as lifestyle is concerned, one of the overarching things when I'm addressing my clients is getting in touch with how the human body really functions as far as our circadian rhythms. And having a time when we're playing, when we're up, when we're kicking back in our job and we're hanging out with our family and our friends. I'm saying there's a time when we've got to shut it down. Of course, there are special occasions when it's like "Yeah, let's stay up all night and party." Generally though, if that's a consistent behavior, being up all night, you're going to have some very serious problems. There are so many connections here; I'm just going to talk about one. Recent research at the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine looked at nighttime exposure to light. This particular study looked at kids before the age of two and the development of myopia, nearsightedness, later in life. The study had about 500 kids between the ages of two and 16 years old. What they found was, of the kids sleeping with a light on in their room before the age of two, 55 percent ended up developing myopia. They also found that the kids who had a nightlight before the age of two developed myopia 34 percent of the time. The kids who slept in complete darkness developed nearsightedness only 10 percent of the time. So we're talking about a spectrum of 55 percent to 10 percent. This is not a matter of "sleeping in darkness is going to give you better sleep." This is a matter of protecting your health, your vision. There are other studies similar to this one, linking sleeping with the lights on to cancer and depression. This is a big thing. One thing I would recommend people do is have a curfew for turning off electronic devices. Especially if they need to get their



endocrine system and nervous system back online again and get quality sleep. So, maybe it might be 9 o'clock for you if you're trying to get to bed by 11. Just having a couple of hours where we don't have this light beaming in and triggering the body to produce more cortisol. So be a little more strategic about it. It's not written in stone, but sometimes it needs to be, at least temporarily. People probably have noticed that you get really great sleep if you're camping or sleeping out in the countryside somewhere. Your sleep quality is so much better because you're not exposed to a constant stream of light. So that's one of the big lifestyle factors, just having an understanding of the cut-off time for exposure to this blue light spectrum coming out of our devices.

So to add a little more about that blue light. If you've ever driven through your neighborhood at night and seen blue light coming out of a neighbor's window, it kind of makes you think, "Are they getting abducted by aliens or something?" It's their TV, or their computer screen. They have a blue light. Oftentimes you can't see it when you're in it. That blue light suppresses the production of melatonin and encourages the production of cortisol. So just being aware of this could really help you out. That brings me back to one important point. When I was talking about supplements I didn't mention melatonin because that's a hormone. Some of my colleagues agree that that can potentially downgrade your body's production of melatonin. So that's something to really look at down the line. You want to look at things that have been done for a really long time, like I talked about earlier.



Another important lifestyle factor we can talk about is, and this is going to be a funny one for people, but it's true, is having more sex. That can really help with your sleep quality. It's a powerful inducer of sleep, and here's why. According to many researchers, during sex your body produces a surge of oxytocin, serotonin and prolactin, which all have powerful sleep-inducing effects. You don't need a partner to do this, but that would be much more fun. What's been found is your body actually produces four times more prolactin when having intercourse with your significant other versus masturbation. So sex is awesome on so many levels, but just look at it from the perspective of "I'm just trying to get my sleep together." Communicate this to your partner; there are some beneficial sleep-inducing effects here. And having a healthy sexual relationship is all part of creating a healthy, happy, sovereign, amazing human being. So that's something to look into as well.

And finally, as far as the lifestyle factors are concerned, one of the most powerful things we can do to improve our sleep and sleep cycles, is getting more sunlight during the day. I just mentioned melatonin and cortisol. Getting sunlight actually helps your body get your melatonin and cortisol cycles all lined up, which is part of your sleep/wake cycle. So melatonin is not the sleep hormone as some people might say; it's the "put you in the mood for good sleep" hormone. It doesn't actually put you to sleep. Melatonin is powerfully affected by light exposure. So having too much exposure at nighttime, like being exposed to computer screens and those things we've been talking about, would depress your body's production of melatonin. So you want to get that sunlight during the day, get that

light exposure during the day, and it helps put your body into the proper cycles. Your body knows, "Okay, I'm exposed to sunlight, it is daytime." So, it's kind of like setting an alarm clock for the melatonin secretion to be stronger, to be proper. I hope that makes sense. So, making sure we're getting more sunlight during the day and less at night, because we're totally backwards in this. During the day, most of us are indoors. We're in our offices, we're in our houses. The only time we see the sun is if we're walking to the car, or walking to get some food and then walking back to our car. We have to be proactive about getting some sunlight. Then at nighttime, we keep all of the lights on. Oftentimes people are going out at night because they've been cooped up in their office all day. So, just be strategic about this and understand it is going to have an impact on your long-term health. If you want to improve your sleep quality, you need to get more sunlight during the day. It's part of this overarching formula to help you get the best sleep of your life.