

Sawbones 258: Colic and Gripe Water

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Intro (Clint McElroy): Sawbones is a show about medical history, and nothing the hosts say should be taken as medical advice or opinion. It's for fun. Can't you just have fun for an hour and not try to diagnose your mystery boil? We think you've earned it. Just sit back, relax, and enjoy a moment of distraction from that weird growth. You're worth it.

[theme music plays]

Justin: Hello, everybody, and welcome back to Sawbones, as if we've never left. My name is Justin Tyler McElroy.

Sydnee: You completely...

Justin: Hello, and welcome to Sawbones: a marital tour of misguided medicine. I was trying to streamline for 2019! There's nothin' wrong with that. [pauses] Okay, I forgot. This is a Sawbones.

Sydnee: [laughs quietly]

Justin: My name is Justin McElroy, and—

Sydnee: And I'm Sydnee McElroy, and I apologize that my husband ruined our opening there.

Justin: We had—

Sydnee: You just ruined—!

Justin: Listen—

Sydnee: We have this nice, catchy little, "[indistinctly] Hello and welcome to Sawbones, a marital tour [dissolves into mumbling]." You just ruined it.

Justin: We had a break for the holidays, and we are ready to get—but, like, we had a great Christmas episode. We had a great week off, and we're ready to get

back to doin' what we have always done on Sawbones, which... is. [pauses]
Bringing you the latest—

Sydnee: [laughs]

Justin: —instant pot recipes—

Sydnee: No. What?

Justin: —sort of our tips and tricks and hacks...

Sydnee: No, you're—you're confusing this with your other podcast about instant pot—Instapot recipes.

Justin: Ah, okay.

Sydnee: Is that what it's called, Instapot?

Justin: This is the show—this is the one where—it's "Instapot."

Sydnee: Instapot? Okay.

Justin: This is the show where we talk about the island off the coast of Nova Scotia—

Sydnee: [loudly] Oh, I cannot—

Justin: —called Oak Island, where—

Sydnee: —[loudly] hear anything else.

Justin: —in 1795, Daniel McGinnis and two of his friends—

Sydnee: Please stop. Please stop.

Justin: The Curse of Oak Island Recap Podcast.

Sydnee: I cannot hear anything else about Oak Island, ever again.

Justin: Do you wanna do a Curse of Oak Island recap podcast with me, Sydnee? It's *only* six seasons long.

Sydnee: No. No. No. They don't find anything. Spoilers! They don't find anything.

Justin: Uhh, this week they found... a stone!

Sydnee: Okay.

Justin: And then someone showed up with an, uh... astrology map that is gonna break this thing—

Sydnee: Okay.

Justin: —wide open.

Sydnee: Moving on, I will say, we just got a little, uh, update. Your dad, who is watching Charlie, just asked me if she can have ice cream. [pauses] It is—

Justin: It is...

Sydnee: —11:47 AM, folks.

Justin: Folks. Folks. I said we're too close to lunch, Sydnee. Is that an acceptable—

Sydnee: That was the right—that was the right answer.

Justin: —I'm gonna say—can she have a popsicle?

Sydnee: She can have a popsicle. She's been sick. I've been sick. She can have a popsicle. That's why I sound like this.

But that's not what we're gonna talk about. Uh, Justin, I wanted to talk about something that is—it's an old thing that's still used today. I love those things. I love when we find these remedies or diagnoses—

Justin: Remedies! Medicine! This is the medicine one. Okay. Yes.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Justin: When you started talking about the ice cream thing, I thought, "Is this the one where we share funny parenting stories from our life?" But no.

Sydnee: We don't do that. Who do you—who do you do that with? Whose pod—

Justin: That's our YouTube—that's our YouTube—that's our YouTube ser—

Sydnee: Oh, okay.

Justin: That's our YouTube series "Meet the McElroys," where we just have zany adventures. Have y'all seen these?

Sydnee: Do you have another wife that you do this with?

Justin: Charlie watches these videos that's just families doing things. And—

Sydnee: Okay, Justin—

Justin: —it makes me feel like, "Do you like *that* family on YouTube better than ours? Because all they seem to do is, like, open huge toys and go to water parks." That's, like, all these families do.

Sydnee: That's 'cause they're making a bunch of money off of YouTube videos.

Justin: That YouTube money, though.

Sydnee: Alright, I wanna—

Justin: I'm gonna stop interrupting you. I'm sorry.

Sydnee: I wanna do our podcast—

Justin: I'm sorry!

Sydnee: —'cause I have a lot of stuff to get to, and we're gonna run long—

Justin: I haven't talked to you for—

Sydnee: —and you're gonna be mad at me that we ran long, and—

Justin: I haven't talked to you for two weeks, since we recorded the last episode of Sawbones! I'm really enjoying it!

Sydnee: I wanna talk about Gripe Water.

Justin: Oh, I got a few—I got some right now!

Sydnee: Oh no. Just—just—

Justin: Hey, what really grinds my gears—[wheezes]

Sydnee: Yeah. Just run through those in your head and don't say them—

Justin: \$3 for an Aquafina? Are you kiddin' me?

Sydnee: Don't say them out loud. So, uh, thank you—

Justin: That's a water gripe. It's a water gripe.

Sydnee: —to Ann, Elicia, Michael, Amanda, and Vanessa for suggesting colic and Gripe Water and things around it. We're gonna talk a little bit about colic.

I've said before—I actually said this on our book tour, that I had avoided doing a whole episode on colic because it's one of the darker things that we can talk about, but we've talked about a lot of dark stuff on the show before, so I just wanted to find a way so that it was not just nonstop... sadness, for 30 minutes?

Justin: To make it fun! The way—make it funny!

Sydnee: No, not make it fun, but like, have more interesting and information than just, like, "Wow, that was super depressing. Thanks, great way to start the Year, Sawbones." So—

Justin: We should maybe do, like, maybe kind of like a little bit of a... like, a warning. A content warning, in that case.

Sydnee: Yeah. I don't belabor the point, but certainly...

Justin: I think you and me especially—

Sydnee: Yeah.

Justin: —we, like, frequently... if you find, like... infant death challenging—[loudly] who doesn't? Okay, but like—

Sydnee: Well, I would say—I don't know that that's, like—

Justin: —specifically challenging.

Sydnee: Specific, yeah. I mean, if we're gonna get into—and this is not gonna surprise you. Colic has a lot to do with babies crying, and if we start getting into the history of stuff people have done to make babies stop crying... you can follow that line of logic.

If that's something you'd rather not hear—the first half of the show, I'm gonna talk about some of the history of colic. The second half, we're just gonna talk about Gripe Water, though, so.

Justin: Okay. Perfect.

Sydnee: I think that'll be... easier. If you're interested. And a lot of people might be, 'cause Gripe Water is still sold in stores today. Justin, do you know what colic is?

Justin: Uhh... I mean, okay. You have told me in the past couple days, so I'm gonna pretend like you haven't, and I'll tell you what I would have said, is like, they're crying a lot.

Sydnee: That's true. That's, I mean—

Justin: Because of gas.

Sydnee: Okay, because of gas. And that is one of the, I think, misconceptions about colic, is that when we use the word "colic" we have any idea what we're really talking about. Like, that as—

Justin: You used me to illustrate misconceptions. I should be used to it at this point, but it is... just humiliating.

Sydnee: That's the whole show.

Justin: "Here's what a lot of dunces think."

Sydnee: No! It's not dunces! A lot of people, like a lot of—I mean, I would say physicians, probably.

Justin: Oh, crap. Here she goes, folks!

Sydnee: I'm just saying, I think a lot of people assume—

Justin: Go hard! Get 'em!

Sydnee: —when you say "colic"—first of all, the word "colic" is derived from the same Greek root as colon, so it... like, you get it. It sounds like it's related to your stomach. Something's going on in the baby's stomach, and so the baby's crying a lot.

Uh, a lot of people are familiar with colic, 'cause they maybe have experienced it as parents or caregivers or, I don't know, they just heard babies crying. And you've heard about it on, like, media. You talk about colicky babies, and "My baby has colic," and nobody really knows what that means, other than that the baby's crying a lot, and that's really how we define it. It's just excessive crying.

When we use the word "colic," we're not actually talking about anything to do with the GI tract or any other part of the body. It just means the baby's crying a lot, and it's important to remember, when you start trying to define excessive crying, how much a baby is expected to cry.

[pauses]

Justin: A lot?

Sydnee: Yes! Baby's can cry a lot, especially in the very early months. In, like, the first three months of life—

Justin: Oh my God.

Sydnee: —a lot of crying could be completely normal for your baby, and that's really important to remember. There was a study that just tried to see, like, how much, on average, do babies cry?

And up to the age of six weeks, the average infant cries up to 133 minutes a day. Not necessarily consecutive 133 minutes, of course. But that doesn't sound like a lot, but if—I think other parents may be able to sympathize. If your baby is crying, even for two minutes, it feels like an eternity.

Justin: Yeah. So imagine 60 of those, back to back to back to back to back.

Sydnee: Yes. But we're talking 133 minutes a day.

Justin: Not even back to back, that's the worst part, yeah, right. So... ugh.

Sydnee: That's a lot for the average baby! The high end of normal crying is 250 minutes a day.

Justin: That's like... [quietly] two Lord of the...

Sydnee: That's a lot of crying! And, I mean, this is normal crying. This is like, your baby just might cry this much, and that doesn't mean anything's wrong or you're doing anything wrong. Just might be what the baby's gonna do.

The generally accepted definition of colic, when we say "colic"—you know, usually for, like, a disease, if we're talking about a disease process, I can tell you like, "Okay. What this is is this cell is doing this, or this message is getting misinterpreted this way," or whatever. You know, I can—or "This invader is coming in your body." I can tell you what it means.

Colic, the definition is just based on how much a baby cries. If a baby is crying for more than three hours a day, more than three days a week, in an infant under three months who is otherwise healthy, they have colic.

Justin: That sounds to be like it may not be a thing, then.

Sydnee: Well—and there are other criteria that you can use. There's actually—there's one specifically for if you think it has a GI cause that you can use. So, I mean, part of the debate about colic is that we don't really know what it means.

It's just a word we've used to describe babies who cry a lot, and there are parents who will report that they have colicky babies, but if you actually—like, they've done studies to see, like, do they actually meet this definition? And they don't.

So even though—like, the way we colloquially use the word "colic" and the way that you would define colic, none of it is used the same.

Justin: It's worth noting, also, that we're not talking about... we don't *understand* colic. It's that we, like, literally—

Sydnee: It might not be a thing.

Justin: —the term is, like, flexible enough to maybe not be very useful, medically.

Sydnee: Exactly. It's too broad. It's describing a lot of stuff that might actually be different things.

Justin: Okay.

Sydnee: It was—the term "colic" is not, at least in my med school curriculum, was never taught. Like, we don't learn colic as a medical entity. I'd say the closest—and I've seen this as, like, these two things can be used interchangeably, is the period of purple crying.

Justin: Yes!

Sydnee: Yes, which I—

Justin: We had to watch a DVD about the period of purple crying before we left the, uh, NICU with Charlie, and it was very much just like, "Hey, listen. Babies cry, y'all!"

Sydnee: Yeah.

Justin: "Babies cry and we don't know why, and the purple is, like, an acronym, for something? Like, it's like—please... un... herbal—I don't know.

Sydnee: I don't remember what it—

Justin: It's—

Sydnee: But the point is that, exactly like you're saying, babies in the beginning will cry a lot, and it's incredibly distressing. I can't underline that enough. So I don't want—when I say colic isn't a thing, I am in no way suggesting that babies don't cry, or it's not that bad, or you should get over it, or that parents shouldn't be distressed by it. Oh my goodness, I've been there.

But... we probably shouldn't just label every baby who cries a lot "colic" and move on with our lives, because what it's led to, as we're gonna get into, is some really unhelpful solutions for this entity known as colic.

The perception of the crying is probably the more dangerous part of colic, in all honesty. It's in—

Justin: What do you mean, perception of the crying?

Sydnee: How stressful it is to parents and to caregivers, and what behaviors that can lead to. There have been a lot of studies that have shown that, you know, we—there are a lot of caregivers who are driven to dangerous and abusive behaviors because of how overwhelming the crying can be.

Justin: It's hard, y'all. It's like, I mean, as a parent, you don't really understand this, like—it's weird if you hear a baby cry and it's like—and I think this is more common before you have kids—it's like, ugh, what's happening...

Like, we're biologically, I think, wired to really, really—like, trust me. However bothered you are by it, the parent is, like, 20 times bothered by it. It's really hard to, like—especially if you've ever, like, done any sort of cry it out, or Ferberize, whatever. It is extremely tough.

Sydnee: Yeah. Hearing, I would say, your own child cry is especially... it's horrible, because you wanna do something. You wanna make it stop. You want your baby to be okay. You wanna fix whatever—if there is a problem that you can fix, you wanna fix it. And it's a really horrible feeling.

Yeah, I would urge—I've always tried to be this way, but as a parent I think I'm even more so. If you hear a baby crying on an airplane or in a restaurant or somewhere, like, please... don't act annoyed. Don't be irritated. Trust me, the

parent and the *baby* are having a rougher time than you are in that moment. Have some sympathy. Be kind. You were a baby, too, once.

Justin: If I hear a stranger with a crying baby, something I'll do that parents really seem to appreciate, is I'll go over there and I'll say, like, "I hear a baby's crying. Do you want me to take them for a while, and just kind of walk around with 'em and care for them?"

Sydnee: I would not do that.

Justin: "As my own?"

Sydnee: I would never do that.

Justin: And the parents really appreciate it!

Sydnee: Ye—no. I would say they wouldn't. I would say they wouldn't.

Justin: They seem to appreciate it.

Sydnee: And—

Justin: They always call police officers to tell 'em how helpful I've been, and maybe give me some sort of medal? I don't know.

Sydnee: When we get into the reasons for crying, or for colic, and what might be causing it, there are a lot of different theories, and you can see where some of these things would play in. Like, some of the thought is that in some cases colic might be a behavioral thing. Maybe it just has something to do with, like, parental stress or psycho-social factors like how much support somebody has.

If you have other people helping you take care of a baby, the crying probably isn't going to affect you quite as much in terms of, you know, how stressful you find it. Whereas if you are the sole caregiver 24/7, it might wear on you a little more, especially if your baby is on the higher end of the normal crying.

So all of this can play into it. They've tried to look for, like, biological causes. Does it have something to do with serotonin production? Is it some sort of early form of migraine that we're not recognizing?

Justin: Huh.

Sydnee: They've tried to link it to, like, environmental factors like tobacco exposure or smoking. None of this is really proven 100%, like—"Well, we found some correlation here and there, but we can't prove causation."

A lot of people do believe it's GI related, like you said, Justin. A lot of people think it's gas, or just an upset tummy in some way. There's a lot of theories as to what exactly could be the cause. Is it lactose? Is it milk protein? Is it something to do with how you're feeding the baby, like, bottle versus breast versus burping versus positioning. What is it? Is it something to do with gut bacteria?

Nobody really knows if any of this is the case. Probably there are some babies with upset tummies, and then there are some babies who are just crying a lot, and then... you know. That's it. There are probably a lot of different reasons.

Justin: Yeah, but it's probably just, I don't know. Babies cry.

Sydnee: The problem is really old, as you can imagine. Babies have been crying since there've been babies, and it's very distressful, which is why the word dates back to ancient Greece.

There weren't really attempts to diagnose the problem for a long time. It was just, like, "Let's soothe the baby," and one of the earliest... uh, choices, for soothing a baby, was opium.

Justin: Nice.

Sydnee: So as we look through history, a lot of the "treatments," quote unquote, for colic, were really just ways to make your baby go to sleep, so that they would stop crying. Whether or not—whether or not you knew that's what you were doing. I'm not accusing everyone of intentionally doing this. I'm saying it would soothe the baby because it made them sleepy, and so it relieved the colic, was the perception.

So, like, in the Middle Ages, parents and wet nurses might put opium on their nipples in order to soothe the baby.

Justin: That might've just been for the wet nurses, though.

Sydnee: To put opium on their nipples?

Justin: Chill out a little bit, yeah. Relax.

Sydnee: Well, a lot of 'em were considered, like, mother's helpers.

Justin: Yeah. It's like, "Oh, I got a little bit on my finger. Oh, I got half a bottle on my hand. Oh, gosh, I gotta drink it all up."

Sydnee: [laughs quietly]

Justin: "Maybe I—maybe mama needs a nap."

Sydnee: Addiction to some of these substances, as we'll talk about, was actually a problem for adults, too.

Justin: Well, that makes my thing—

Sydnee: Like, soothing syrups and things.

Justin: Makes my thing less funny, thank you, Syd. [laughs]

Sydnee: Uh, Pliny had lots of ideas.

Justin: Of course.

Sydnee: Of course. Pliny the elder advised, other than opium, cumin and parsnips and almonds and honey and salt, and then there's this whole paragraph about all the different ways roasted lark—

Justin: Wait, for who? Wait, hold on, stop. Cumin and almonds and honey for *who*?

Sydnee: Well, babies with colic!

Justin: For the baby or the parents?

Sydnee: Babies!

Justin: Hey, Pliny?!

Sydnee: Although Pliny believed colic could persist into adulthood, so he believed that there were things—

Justin: That, I believe.

Sydnee: —so—yeah, so some of these he might have advised for adults, because he thought that were things that were colic that were in adults. He specifically mentioned that, that isn't it interesting that some things go away as kids, but other things persist, like colic? [laughs quietly]

Justin: I—I know I have access to a lot more medical information than Pliny did at his time, but I do have to believe that even he wouldn't have been like, "[clicks tongue] Uhhh, kid's cryin', huh? Maybe a handful of nuts! Enjoy these mixed nuts, child!"

Sydnee: "Enjoy these nuts, baby with no teeth."

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: Uh, he had lots of ways that colic could be cured by roasted lark. He said, you know, you can just eat it, you can burn it to ashes, feathers and all, and then pound it down and then take it in spoonfuls of water.

Some say that you should just take the heart of the bird and attach it to your thigh.

Justin: [laughs]

Sydnee: Or just... swallow the whole heart, fresh and warm.

Justin: [gruff voice] Yes.

Sydnee: Uh, [laughs quietly]

Justin: "[gruff voice] Now, child, are you appeased?! Child! Are you appeased? Will your crying stop? You've watched your mother eat a lark's heart fresh! I'll eat a fresh lark heart to stop you from crying!"

Sydnee: He spoke of two brothers. One was cured of colic by eating a lark and wearing its heart in a golden bracelet. The other performed a sacrifice in a chapel built of raw bricks in a furnace, and then, um... with the same lark—well, different lark. I'm assuming a different lark. And that cured it. In general, something roasted lark related he thought was a good idea.

I like Siddenham in the 1700's, he had maybe my favorite colic cure. Just hold a live puppy on your tummy.

Justin: Aww... okay, yeah, seconded!

Sydnee: I would be careful if it's a baby.

Justin: Yeah, don't put the—

Sydnee: Like, don't smush the baby with a puppy.

Justin: Don't smush the baby with a puppy.

Sydnee: Make sure the puppy is smaller than the baby. But I thought that was a lovely—that's better. Because throughout the years, the stuff people tried were really things that would just calm a baby down, because that was perceived as fixing the colic, but it was really probably just putting them to sleep.

So, like, alcohol, Valium, phenobarbital... there were medicines that were specifically aimed at the stomach that came along later, things like Dicyclomine and Donnatal and Scopolamine.

All of these things probably, at the end of the day—maybe some of them were helping some stomach issues, whatever. At the end of the day, they were probably all just putting babies to sleep.

But, the thing that has persisted... is Gripe Water.

[pauses]

Justin: What's that?

Sydnee: I'm gonna tell you what Gripe Water is. But first, let's go to the billing department.

Justin: Classic. Let's go.

[theme music plays]

Justin: One of the more challenging parts of transitioning from the halcyon days of your teenage years into adulthood is getting life insurance. Nobody wants to think about beefin' it—

Sydnee: [laughs quietly]

Justin: —and it's tough to get yourself in a head space where you can! But luckily for you, and for any other sane person that doesn't wanna... dwell, uh, there's PolicyGenius. It's a website that makes it easy for you to compare quotes, get advice, and get covered without extra fees or commissioned sales agents.

They make it easy! In minutes, you can get a quote from top insurers at a price you can afford. You can apply online, and the advisers at PolicyGenius, they're gonna handle everything. They're gonna ensure that you get the best rate.

Nobody wants to do this! Turn on Sarah McLachlan, light some votives, try to chill out a little bit and just head over to PolicyGenius. Tell yourself, "This is the time I'm gonna do it." You've been intimidated or frustrated by insurance in the past. Try starting your search at PolicyGenius.com. In minutes, you can compare quotes and apply, and you can do the whole thing on your phone, right now!

Not while you're driving, or else you might need that life insurance... a little sooner.

Sydnee: [reproachfully] Justin!

Justin: PolicyGe—what? Is it scandalous to suggest people should not be on their phones while they drive?

Sydnee: Well, no—

Justin: Dr. Smirl McElroy?

Sydnee: —I agree with that wholeheartedly.

Justin: Good, I'm glad we're on the same page and you feel so sorry for chastising me. PolicyGenius! The easy way to compare and buy life insurance.

You know what else we got cookin' this week, Syd?

Sydnee: Stitch Fix!

Justin: Stitch Fix! Is that shirt Stitch Fix?

Sydnee: [through laughter] Yes, it is!

Justin: Oh my gosh.

Sydnee: And the pants I'm wearing.

Justin: Talk about—

Sydnee: My wardrobe is almost entirely Stitch Fix these days—well, not entirely, but man, I love Stitch Fix.

Justin: Talk about how they threaded the needle with this shirt, because you've been on an amazing journey with this. I wanna talk about one Stitch Fix item, and it is the shirt you are currently wearing.

Sydnee: Well, but it's not my—

Justin: [simultaneously] Talk about your initial reaction to this shirt.

Sydnee: It's far from my favorite Stitch Fix item.

Justin: Talk about your initial reaction to this shirt, and then Stitch Fix kind of was like... okay, talk about your initial reaction to the shirt, first.

Sydnee: Well, first of all, can I tell everybody that Stitch Fix is an online personal styling service.

Justin: Great.

Sydnee: Where they will deliver you clothes, shoes, accessories, whatever you want, that will fit your style, and your body, and the kind of stuff you're looking

for. Your stylist really gets a good feel for, like, the stuff you like, and what you'll wear, and what you're looking for.

Justin: [simultaneously] They know you.

Sydnee: You give them tips and the boxes get better each time you get 'em.

Justin: They know you even better than you know yourself!

Sydnee: They do!

Justin: Perhaps.

Sydnee: They do. Okay, Justin is—I think you're poking fun.

Justin: I'm not poking fun!

Sydnee: At my t-shirt.

Justin: I think it's a tribute that Stitch Fix—Stitch Fix sends Sydnee a shirt. I'll tell it, you tell it wrong. Listen.

Sydnee: Okay.

Justin: [through laughter] Stitch Fix sends Sydnee a shirt, and it says, "Lazy Sunday Morning" on it.

Sydnee: [laughs]

Justin: Six out of seven days of the week, this shirt is unapplicable, and Sydnee's like, "Pfft. Nice try, guys! Swing and a miss. Not gonna keep this one."

And then eventually we were like, "Okay, well..."

Sydnee: It's really comfortable, is the problem.

Justin: It's really comfortable!

Sydnee: I'm not usually one for, like... is it a message tee? I don't know.

Justin: Folks, I'm here to tell you—

Sydnee: But it's so comfortable! And the first time I put it on I was like, "Well—"

Justin: "Well, maybe I'll just wear it to sleep, huh? Maybe I'll just wear it to sleep."

Folks, I'm here to tell you, it's 12:08 PM, Friday afternoon. That's two of the things wrong, and we're working on our podcast. It is neither lazy, nor Sunday, nor morning, and yet the shirt persists.

Sydnee: It's great, and Stitch Fix knew I would love it, and I didn't. And [through laughter] thank you, Stitch Fix!

Justin: "I'm gonna send this back."

"Ah-ah-ah, not so sure, fam. Think about it for a second, Sydnee. I know you better than you know yourself."

Thank you, Stitch Fix.

Sydnee: That's why—try 'em on. You never know what you might love. You pay for only what you keep and you return the rest. Shipping, exchanges, and returns are always free. The styling fee is only \$20, and it really—like, I am just, months on months of 5 out of 5, keeping every item, 'cause they really get me.

So, get started now at [Stitchfix.com/sawbones](https://www.stitchfix.com/sawbones), and you'll get an extra 25% off when you keep all the items in your box. That's [Stitchfix.com/sawbones](https://www.stitchfix.com/sawbones) to get started today. [Stitchfix.com/sawbones](https://www.stitchfix.com/sawbones).

Justin: Now, Sydnee, what is Gripe Water? 'Cause I legitimately have absolutely no clue.

Sydnee: Okay. So, when we get into the history of colic, like I said, a lot of people wanted to blame it on some sort of stomach thing that was going on with your baby that your baby couldn't communicate to you, so we need something that will fix the stomach thing.

Gripe Water is really aimed at that. If you believe colic has something to do with tummy troubles, Gripe Water would be, in your mind, a solution for it. It's

probably named for an old term for gastroenteritis, or, like, you know. You have some diarrhea.

Justin: The gripe, is what they call it?

Sydnee: The watery gripes.

Justin: [groans] Oh, God, no!

Sydnee: So it—the name "Gripe Water—"

Justin: [groans]

Sydnee: —specifically would indicate that it would be used for something—

Justin: How can it be?

Sydnee: —tummy related. It dates back to William Woodward, who was a doctor practicing in London in the mid-1800s. And this—I mean, like, this was a very normally educated doctor for the time. He had the appropriate education, and he was apprenticed under a pharmacist. He was very well respected. He came up with a lot of different kind of... cures, treatments, whatever you wanna—patent medicine type things.

And specifically, in the 1840s malaria was a big problem in London, and specifically a lot of people were looking for something to treat babies, infants, who were diagnosed with what was sometimes called malaria, but what was also commonly called fen fever.

Justin: [quietly] Fen fever?

Sydnee: Fen fever, F-E-N fever. And when you kind of look at this period of history, it's important to remember that, like, a lot of things were just named for stuff that was nearby. So, like, fen fever was probably malaria, but then sometimes you might've been applying the term "fen fever" to a baby who had a fever for a totally unrelated reason—you know what I mean?

Justin: It's just, like, what people called it.

Sydnee: But there were fens nearby. Do you know what a fen is?

Justin: No.

Sydnee: A fen is a low, marshy area of land.

Justin: Okay, then!

Sydnee: I had to read about fens. There used to be a lot, I guess, in the vicinity of London, but a lot of them have been drained for agricultural purposes.

Justin: And mosquitoes.

Sydnee: Yes, 'cause these were great breeding grounds for mosquitoes, so it made sense that, as we began to understand that mosquitoes carried malaria, that people were blaming this fever on the fen where the mosquitoes were... so.

Justin: Sure.

Sydnee: You know, I mean, it was all connected. But it is worth nothing that it—like, I love this. If you look back through history, there is a fever for, like, every geographical formation, for every time of day—there is—there are fen fevers, of course. Plain fevers, jungle fevers, mountain fevers, night fevers, day fevers, dinner fevers, supper fevers, sea fever, land fever, river fever... none of this really means anything other than, "This happens to be nearby, and I have a fever."
[laughs quietly]

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: That is the only thing they have in common. So, fen fever was probably more than just malaria, but mainly malaria.

Justin: Okay.

Sydnee: I just thought that was interesting.

Justin: It is interesting!

Sydnee: I didn't know about fens, I didn't know about any of this.

Justin: So what's Gripe Water?

Sydnee: Okay. [laughs] Well, you had to know this to know why Gripe Water became a thing!

Justin: Okay.

Sydnee: So, everybody was trying to treat fen fever in the 1840s in London, and some people were using quinine, which was good. That was actually probably helping, since it was malaria. But there was a group of doctors who came up with this other treatment that they thought was very helpful, and it involved dill oil and alcohol, and probably had some other stuff in it—

Justin: [snorts]

Sydnee: —but they started using that—

Justin: That's what the label said. [laughs]

Sydnee: [laughs] They started using that to treat fen fever, and William Woodard got wind of it, and decided, like, "Well, I'm gonna make something similar to that."

Because what he heard was that, "Well, it was definitely very soothing to the babies that they were giving it to, for this fen fever, malaria thing." And he thought, "You know what? This has wider applications. I think this could be used for more than just this fever. I think this could be used for anything that upsets your baby, especially anything tummy related."

So he started coming up with his own formulation of it, and in 1876, he registered "Gripe Water" as a trademark. So it was based on these docs out of Nottingham who came up with this dill oil, alcohol combination. He made his own that contained alcohol, sucrose, dill seed oil, and bicarbonate, and this was the first thing called Gripe Water.

Justin: Okay.

Sydnee: And, like I said, he named it that probably 'cause he was aiming it more at just, like, "If your baby's tummy is messed up for any reason, take this."

Justin: Okay.

Sydnee: Uh, the original packaging has the infant Hercules on it, which is painted by Sir Joshua Reynolds.

Justin: Sounds good.

Sydnee: And it is still used, I think, on, like, Woodward's Gripe Water, the original Woodward's Gripe Water.

It's a picture of infant Hercules strangling two snakes in his cradle.

Justin: [wheezes] Wow!

Sydnee: 'Cause Juno sent them to destroy him. And he strangled them in his— it's an—

Justin: That's some radical water!

Sydnee: It's kind of an adora—well, I don't know if adorable is the right word. It's a great picture. I would look it up, The Infant Hercules.

Justin: It's very good.

Sydnee: It's this baby that's just strangling these snakes. Anyway, it did well initially with him selling it both to consumers—"Hey, does your baby cry? Try this!" As well as in bulk to doctors and hospitals

So this was being used as, like, a—you'd go to the hospital and your baby was crying, and they'd give you Gripe Water. Like, this was not just being used at home like a folk remedy. Doctors were prescribing Gripe Water.

It did well, and then his son took over the business after he died, and it did even better at that point. His son was not in the medial world, but he turned out to be pretty good at marketing and sales, because he began kind of calling on this, like, patriotic use of Gripe Water.

Justin: Okay!

Sydnee: Like, "We are—the British Empire is growing, and it's claiming the world, and as we go and we spread across the globe, our babies are going to get sick,

and we're protecting the people of the globe. Gripe Water will protect the babies, all over the world."

And so, like, they had all these very patriotic ads with, like, battleships and cavalry carrying... I don't know. [through laughter] Gripe Water? To infants all over the British Empire, and the tag was "Granny told mother and mother told me," so it was like this, like—

Justin: Right.

Sydnee: —it's been passed down for—

Justin: Passed down, America's apple pie.

Sydnee: Well... no. 'Cause it's British.

Justin: Okay, you know. But you know.

Sydnee: [laughs] British is... tea.

Justin: Like, whatever British people like. Scones?

Sydnee: Tea, I think, is the thing most people would say, right?

Justin: Scones [rhyming with "cones"]? Scones [pronounced like "scahns"]. You're right.

Sydnee: Okay. Either way, it was carried all over the world. It was very popular in China, and it wasn't marketed in China, so a lot of this is probably just by word of mouth. Like, wives of British diplomats going places and being like, "You know what works for my kid? Here, let me show this Gripe Water."

So it was taken all over, and it was very popular. In 1926, it was taken over by Sanitas Trust Limited, and eventually this other company, Seton Scholl London International. And it was marketed, and doctors prescribed it, and it was this huge medicine.

If you look at its indications, they never put colic on it, which is really strange, 'cause that was the number one thing that people were using it for. It was

marketed for flatulence, minor tummy upset, and teething, which some colic probably is—well, no, 'cause it's under three months, so that'd be unusual.

Anyway, in 1992, the alcohol was taken out of the formula.

Justin: Boo!

Sydnee: That's 1992. That's not that long ago!

Justin: No. That's—that's wicked—I—yeah. That's wicked recent.

Sydnee: Yeah. So, in '92 everybody was like, "You know what? We probably shouldn't give alcohol to babies. That seems bad. Let's take the alcohol out of the Gripe Water."

And they also switched out the sucrose that was in it for something called Lycasin that wouldn't cause cavities.

Justin: Great.

Sydnee: Just, like, a different sweetener. And that was good, considering the alcohol part of it—so, a dose of Gripe Water, the initial formulation that was used up till [through laughter] 1992, in a four kilogram baby—that's, like, nine pounds? Something like that? No, eight pounds? Whatever.

Justin: It's 2.2, right?

Sydnee: Yes, nine pounds. Anyway, uh, would have the relative amount of alcohol as—I looked this up. It said "five tots of whiskey in an adult," so then I had to look up what a "tot" was. So, a tot is a small amount of whiskey, usually, like, 15 to 20 mLs.

Justin: Okay.

Sydnee: So, if I had a couple of shots of whiskey, this would be the same as the amount of alcohol this baby was getting. Like, the equivalent of me doing a couple shots.

Justin: It just gets your baby loose, it what you're sayin'.

Sydnee: [laughs quietly] Uh, so they took the alcohol out. It still had the sweetener in it, it still have the dill oil, still had the sodium bicarbonate.

Does it work?

Justin: Uhhh... I mean, they stop crying, I guess.

Sydnee: It doesn't work. [laughs quietly]

Justin: Ah, crumbs!

Sydnee: Anecdotally, people will tell you that it works, but studies have never shown that babies treated with Gripe Water are less colicky than babies who aren't.

In fact, there was one that showed there were more episodes of vomiting with Gripe Water, but it didn't—it also didn't take into account, like, if you're giving your baby Gripe Water, maybe they're already having vomiting? Maybe they're spitting up more already, you know? It didn't, like—it didn't control for that.

So I'm not gonna say it makes things worse, but I don't have any evidence that it makes anything better. If you break down the ingredients, the bicarbonate would help if acid were the problem. You know, like if you had excessive acid production, but nobody's suggesting that for colic. Nobody thinks that babies have very acidic stomachs, and so they need something to calm the acid down in their stomach. Like we would take a Pepcid or something. Nobody's suggesting that, so that doesn't make sense.

The alcohol isn't in there anymore, but they even did a study to see, does alcohol calm GI discomfort? Not crying, but GI discomfort.

Justin: Right?

Sydnee: And it doesn't.

Justin: Man! It's like this stuff isn't even good!

Sydnee: So the alcohol may have made babies sleepy, but it certainly didn't calm their stomachs down. The dill has been used for gas for some time. That's an old treatment for, like, if you're gassy, have some dill or some dill oil, but

there's—I mean, again, I'm talking more, like, anecdotal. That doesn't prove anything.

The sweet part is probably the only thing that has an actual effect, and this is interesting. Sweet stuff has been used as, like, a mild pain reliever for centuries.

Justin: Yeah, like... do you mean like how the... what is it? Pectin in, like, Luden's cough drops and stuff like that? The sugar from those, or, like, rock candy used to sooth a sore throat kind of thing?

Sydnee: Kind of like that. Yeah, that, and a really good example is, prior to—

Justin: That's probably more physical than chemical, right?

Sydnee: Yeah, yeah. But it is a taste thing. It's a taste mediated thing, because prior to circumcsions, for centuries, babies have been given, like, some sort of sweet thing. Like, either crushed dates or, like, a sweet red wine, like, on your finger, like, let the baby suck on it to soothe them before a circumcsion. I saw this done when I saw circumcsions performed as a med student.

Justin: Hm! Wow, really?

Sydnee: Yes. Not—it wasn't crushed dates or red wine, it was, like, a ho—it wasn't honey. It was, like, grape jelly that they had in packets in the hospital. I saw them dipping pacifiers in it and putting it in the baby's mouth before their circumcsion.

Justin: I have never heard that before.

Sydnee: Yes. I—well, I—I thought, "What is that? Just to give the baby a treat before they—why would they do that?" And this is an ancient thing, but the idea is that it has some sort of mild analgesic effect that is taste mediated.

Justin: That's wild.

Sydnee: So, when they've done studies with just, like, a sugar solution, it calms baby's down.

Justin: Hm!

Sydnee: So if anything in the Gripe Water actually makes your kid stop crying, it probably is just that it tastes sweet.

Justin: Huh. Go figure.

Sydnee: And that doesn't mean that it's working, it just means that probably the—if you see an effect, that's probably why you're seeing an effect.

The bigger problem today is that one, there are a ton of different formulations, other than Woodward's Gripe Water. They all contain different things. Some have fennel, some have ginger, some have lemon balm, there are some that have charcoal, some still do have sugar—most don't have alcohol anymore, so that's a good thing.

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: The FDA said in 1993 that it's not a medicine, so it's only sold in the US as, like, a supplement, so you'll find it over the counter in, like, the—it's usually with the homeopathic stuff for babies. Like, you'll find it in the homeopathic area.

Justin: [clicks tongue] Hmm.

Sydnee: Um, it probably is one of the less harmful cure-alls, but it is not... doing anything. I mean, there is no study that shows that it does... anything—

Justin: Right in the trash, folks.

Sydnee: —at all. The real harm is the misunderstanding of colic. If your baby is crying and you can't console them, and they seem to be in pain or something seems off, anything is off, please take them to a doctor. Get them checked out, make sure they're okay. Never assume that it's nothing. Always check. Get them checked out. But the answer might be, sometimes, that your baby's just gonna cry, and do your best to soothe them, comfort them, get help, get support, take breaks, lay your baby down sometimes.

Sometimes you just need to, like, put your baby in a safe place and sit down on the floor for a second and gather yourself, but the important thing is that it will go away. After three months, it usually subsides. It very rarely—it's usually shorter than that, but the long end is three months, and the important thing is that you're taking care of yourself and your baby to get you through that difficult

period of time, and don't rely on things like Gripe Water, which you're just really wasting your money on.

Justin: I—it's one of the... simultaneously most liberating things as a parent and most frustrating things as a parent, and I would not... there are very few areas in which I would, uh, you know, feel comfortable enough to give people advice, but in this one thing, it's shocking how many things the solution to is, like, I don't know. Babies... Hang in there. It will—it will... it will get better over time. It just is what it is.

Like, I think we are hardwired, especially these days, to look for a solution to every single thing. I think that a lot of times babies are just, like, this exercise in acceptance of just, like, this is—this is, in fact, the way it is. There is nothing that you need to or can do about it. It just is.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm. Just do your best to—of course, always get things checked out. I never wanna say, like, "Ah, ignore it. It's nothing." No.

Justin: Right, of course.

Sydnee: I mean, if you're worried, take your baby to the doctor! Make sure they're okay! But sometimes the answer is just, "It'll get easier." It'll get easier, I promise. Get the help, get the support you need. Get the help and support your baby needs, and don't waste your money on... dill sugar water.

Justin: Doesn't sound good. Except maybe on chips.

Sydnee: [laughs]

Justin: Uh, folks, that's gonna do it for us. Thank you so much for listening to our program. We hope you've enjoyed yourself.

Uhhh... we, uh, really appreciate you hanging in there with us all year, and we hope to have a great 2019 with you.

Um, we got a book out. It's called *The Sawbones Book*. It's kind of like this show, except it's a book, and you can find it at a lot of fine bookstores all over. It is now widely available, and there is an audio book version of it that you can get through Audible—

Sydnee: That we did!

Justin: —that we did! That we recorded, and it is boring, to do that, I would say. It's boring.

Sydnee: But the book is not boring.

Justin: The book's good! It's boring to read your own book into a microphone for many hours.

Sydnee: [laughs quietly]

Justin: And so I hope you like it, because it was boring to do. If you—you know what the problem is? It would be fun to do an audio book of somebody else's book, 'cause I haven't read that book. I didn't even write it! [wheeze-laughs] I'd just read their book!

I liked reading your parts out loud, but then my parts, it was boring to read out loud, and I wanted to change some of the jokes, but they don't let you. [laughs quietly]

Sydnee: I'd say that was the hardest part, is that if you're hyper-critical, that's—

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: That's hard.

Justin: "Why did I write *that*?!"

Sydnee: "Why did I *write* that?! I could've written that better!"

Justin: Anyway, it's a good—if you go to bit.ly/thesawbonesbook, then you can pick that book up, and we would really appreciate you doin' that. And, um... thanks to The Taxpayers for the use of their song "Medicines" as the intro and outro of our program.

Our whole family has a new website, by the way. It's called [themcelroyfamily](http://themcelroyfamily.com). If you go to mcelroy.family you can find it. There's lots of information about tours, we're doin' a show at Sketchfest in, like, two weeks? Less than two weeks? And if you click through—if you go over to mcelroy.family and look at Tours, you can find

a link to get tickets for that! And remote tickets for PodCon that we're gonna be at, and... so much more.

So, uh, that's gonna do it for us, folks. So, until next time, my name is Justin McElroy.

Sydnee: I'm Sydnee McElroy.

Justin: And, as always, don't drill a hole in your head!

[theme music plays]

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Speaker Four: Both of his eyes are squid's eyes.

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Speaker Seven: Farm raised snow leopard.

[deep pitch, unintelligible]

Speaker One: Download it today. That's The Beef and Dairy Network Podcast from Maximumfun.org. Also, maybe start at episode one, or weirdly, episode 36, which for some reason requires no knowledge of the rest of the show.