

Sawbones 196: Erectile Dysfunction

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Clint: 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 to Sawbones: a marital tour of misguided medicine. I'm your cohost, Justin McElroy.

Sydnee: And I'm Sydnee McElroy.

Justin: And Syd, it is so nice to be back in the saddle, as they say. If you will.

Sydnee: [laughs] The podcast saddle?

Justin: The podcast saddle.

Sydnee: Is that a thing?

Justin: Uh, it is. We had kind of a— it's been a wild month.

Sydnee: It has been. We've been all over.

Justin: Yeah. We went to Philadelphia to do a live show at Philly Pod Fest a couple weeks ago, then I was in San Diego Comic Con last weekend.

Sydnee: We were in Cincinnati before that, seeing Jimmy Buffet live.

Justin: That didn't affect Sawbones, but it was cool, and it did contribute to a wild July.

Sydnee: No, but the result is that we were gone so much and we were exhausted. Because actually, I work a day job too.

Justin: What?

Sydnee: I'm actually a real doctor. [laughs]

Justin: In real life.

Sydnee: And we missed last week. We missed an episode. We hate doing that.

Justin: We're sorry.

Sydnee: It was unavoidable and we're sorry, and I thought a good way to make up for that was to cover a topic this week that is probably one of the most requested that we get emails about.

And generally, when I get an email asking us to cover this it's something to the effect of, "I looked through your episodes and I can't believe you haven't yet talked about this." That's generally most of the emails I get are, "How have you not covered it yet?"

Justin: And... [makes drum roll sounds]

Sydnee: And that, of course, is erectile dysfunction.

Justin: Oh, yeah. Now, of course, heh heh, it goes without saying that I don't bring a lot of practical experience or knowledge to this one...

Sydnee: Okay.

Justin: The J-man is— except when he's not, the J-man has always... got his engines... you know what I'm saying.

Sydnee: Okay, well, let's just— Justin. [laughs] I think it's good, right—

Justin: If you're looking for some personal stories, you're just not gonna find as many as you might want to for an entire episode.

Sydnee: Well, Justin.

Justin: Yes.

Sydnee: First of all, no, you did not inspire this episode. But, that being said, I think it's important to, right off the bat, acknowledge that there is this connection between... this sorta social connection, not medical, that is

made between the medical problem, erectile dysfunction, and something that has to do with virility or impotence or the idea that somehow you're not able to— you're not up to performing in some way.

Justin: We hear impotence used as a shorthand or synonymously with erectile dysfunction, right?

Sydnee: Exactly, and I think it's good to remember that that connotation is not fair and it's untrue and it's not medically sound, and it has nothing to do with the medical problem that we're talking about.

Now, obviously we're going to be talking about a lot of ancient history when people didn't know that, so you're gonna hear a lot about old cures that are connected to some of these false ideas. But unfortunately, it is an idea that perpetuates somewhat today.

I mean, it's a reason that oftentimes people who are suffering from this won't seek medical attention. So, it should be— that idea should be banished.

Justin: Done.

Sydnee: And we will not do anything to further it.

Justin: Done.

Sydnee: Justin. On this podcast. [laughs]

Justin: Done. Fair. Okay, yes ma'am. Sorry.

Sydnee: Thank you to all the people who recommended this. Among the many recommendations are all of the following people. Thorin and Penny and Abigail and Sheldon and Daniel and Ayla and David and Devon and Arlee and Matthew and Chimera. Thank you all so much.

So, let's go all the way back. Obviously, erectile dysfunction is a problem that I'm certain has been plaguing people with penises since there have been people with penises.

Justin: [simultaneously] People with penises.

Sydnee: In ancient Egypt, they had a really unique cure for this. You could take some baby crocodile hearts, which I guess involves first getting baby crocodiles and removing the hearts. That seems like quite a feat.

Justin: Yeah. Cause you've gotta get them away from the parents. That's the number one thing.

Sydnee: [laughs]

Justin: You don't wanna have to fight the parents first, because they are not gonna like the reason that you need the hearts. You can't reason with them.

Sydnee: No, I don't think explaining that you're gonna grind them up and rub them on your penis will go very far.

Justin: "Oh no, Mrs. Crocodile, you misunderstand me. I'm just going to grind up your kids' hearts and rub—" No wonder alligators are trying to eat us all the time. That sucks.

Sydnee: [laughs]

Justin: They would remember— that's weird enough that you would remember it and you would probably tell generations of crocodiles, like, "Oh no, no, no. Humans? Do not get me started. Let me tell— do you remember great-great-great-great-great-grandpa Jeremy? Well, okay."

Sydnee: [laughs] By the way, if there are any kids out there listening, and actually, I hope there probably aren't now, since we've already told you it's about erectile dysfunction. Alligators are not trying to eat you all the time. [laughs]

Justin: All the time.

Sydnee: Contrary to what Justin's just said.

Justin: Give them half an opening. This isn't a zoology podcast.

Sydnee: I'm just saying, alligators aren't constantly trying to eat us. So, the ancient Greeks had a lot of ideas that kinda were connected to, like, animals that they thought were symbols of virility or that were connected somehow with genitalia or just stuff that looked like genitalia or that was

genitalia. So, for instance, you could capture a rooster and eat its genitalia.

Justin: [laughs]

Sydnee: Or you could capture a goat and eat— well, I guess you don't capture. Well, no, they're kinda fast, you could capture a goat. Eat its genitalia.

Justin: Right.

Sydnee: Just eat it.

Justin: Just like that classic, uh, early internet meme, "Mr. T ate my genitalia."

Sydnee: [laughs] I don't remember that one.

Justin: You don't remember?

Sydnee: No.

Justin: It was actually "Mr. T ate my balls."

Sydnee: Ah.

Justin: And it was a whole series of eat my ball— you don't— this missed you. Okay.

Sydnee: No, this didn't... I was not...

Justin: Wasn't available on, like, Prodigy or CompuServe, whatever you were using at the time.

Sydnee: Yeah. Prodigy. That was my thing. So, you could eat a snake. I think this is one sort of—

Justin: Looks like a wiener, get it.

Sydnee: Yeah. [laughs] Good. Good. Medically speaking, looks like a wiener.

Justin: I'm gonna be providing a valuable service in this episode that is identifying different things that look like wieners.

Sydnee: Thank you, Justin.

Justin: Yeah, no problem.

Sydnee: That's good. That's um, helpful. They were, snakes were also—

Justin: It's like being on a road trip.

Sydnee: [laughs] Snake were also thought, because they shed their skin, that they were, like, they had a rejuvenating capability. That snakes inherently could, like, constantly regenerate, sorta like The Doctor.

Justin: The Doctor, yeah.

Sydnee: And so they would be good for, like, rejuvenating yourself. There's also this substance, hippomanes, hippo...

Justin: Hippo-mayonnaise.

Sydnee: It looks like hippo-mayonnaise. Hippo... hippa... hippomon... I looked this up, how to pronounce it, and I've already forgotten.

Justin: Hitmonchan? The Pokémon?

Sydnee: [laughs] It looks like hippo-manes. Anyway. It's a substance that is found on the forehead of newborn foals.

Justin: Okay...

Sydnee: And you're supposed to apply that to...

Justin: Alright? Fine.

Sydnee: I don't know. Who thought, I mean, I don't... you never know. The Romans similarly had a lot of strange ideas. Some were instead of try to treat it on the back end, try to prevent it. I like preventive medicine. I'm all about preventive medicine.

Justin: I like that. Ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.

Sydnee: So, one thing you could do is wear a talisman—

Justin: That's nothing.

Sydnee: [laughs] To ward off the chance that you'll have erectile dysfunction. One that was supposed to work was the right molar of a small crocodile.

Justin: Can we just give them a break? [laughs] Please?

Sydnee: [laughs] I don't know why we hate crocodiles so much. You could also, there was—

Justin: A small crocodile. We're targeting the children, still.

Sydnee: Just the babies. There were also these things called fascinum, which were replicas of penises that you could wear. And that's from the word for bewitch, and this would—

Justin: That's a choice. That's a fashion choice you could go with.

Sydnee: Plus, there was Priapus.

Justin: That's when it, uh... it's, like, too long. Too hard.

Sydnee: Priapism.

Justin: Okay.

Sydnee: An erection that won't go away. Yeah. Like, yes.

Justin: Yes.

Sydnee: Very good, very good. That is named for Priapus.

Justin: The band.

Sydnee: The ancient Roman god— no. [laughs]

Justin: No.

Sydnee: The ancient Roman god of, like, virility and, I don't know, penises. Of erections.

Justin: Penises. The god of penises.

Sydnee: No. But if—

Justin: He was last in line.

Sydnee: [laughs] If you were having erectile dysfunction, you would pray to Priapus to save you. That's where priapism comes from, in case you didn't know.

Justin: When it works too well? [deep voice] "Oh really? Are you sure?"

Sydnee: [laughs] When you prayed too hard.

Justin: "Well, okay..."

Sydnee: That's the tricky thing with the gods.

Justin: That's right.

Sydnee: One too many offerings and... priapism.

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: Pliny the Elder, our family favorite, had lots to say, as you can imagine.

Justin: Mm.

Sydnee: Pliny had lots of ideas. So, here are some things he said. First of all, maybe it's a problem with arousal, so maybe we just need to use something that's like an aphrodisiac that'll turn you on a little more.

Justin: Okay.

Sydnee: Some good things to turn you on are leeks or turpentine. [laughs]

Justin: Ooh, mama.

Sydnee: Maybe a little sexier, some garlic and coriander in wine. At least that sounds like it might, I dunno, smell kinda nice or aromatic. Or perhaps some boiled asparagus water.

Justin: Now—

Sydnee: Less so?

Justin: Yeah, that's not really revving my engines.

Sydnee: There were also a lot of different, like, herbal remedies. Something called donax and clematis and xiphium root, and you mix it with pearl barley and wine, and there was a lozenge he would recommend making out of a skink muzzle and feet and something called rocket seed, and then you, like, take it in white wine.

Justin: Some of these were fake. He was just trying—

Sydnee: Some of them? [laughs]

Justin: Yeah, some of these are not real. No, I mean, like, the ingredients.

Sydnee: Oh, okay.

Justin: He was trying to trick people with penises to come to his lair and bw like, "Do you have rocket seed?" And he's like, "Ahh, I got you. Your wiener's not working, huh? Ahh!" Pliny was dirty like that. It was like a dirty trick he played on people.

Sydnee: [laughs] If this doesn't sound bad enough, it got— so, in the 13th century, friar Albertus Magnus wrote in De Animalibus, uh, that— here are some treatments for erectile dysfunction. So, and this is a quote, "If a wolf's penis is roasted in an oven, cut into small pieces, and a small portion of this is chewed, the consumer will experience an immediate yen for sexual intercourse." So just get a wolf, and then its penis.

Justin: Can I ask you a question?

Sydnee: Yeah.

Justin: Is there, um, is there a difference between not wanting sexual intercourse and the wiener not working, like what we're talking about?

Sydnee: Completely. Like, these are very different things, but it was all tied in together. I mean, we didn't understand why sometimes erectile dysfunction occurred, and so you would come up with a solution like, "Well maybe you're just not aroused enough, so maybe if we do something that we think causes arousal, it will lead to an erection."

Justin: Okay.

Sydnee: These were not necessarily connected at all.

Justin: That makes sense.

Sydnee: But, you know, we didn't know anything. Also, sparrow meat. [laughs] It was considered to be a hot, dry meat. When we talk about kinda the idea of the humors, things that were hot and things that were cold and— so sparrow meat was hot and dry and so it would work as well, but also it might constipate you.

Justin: [crosstalk] Yeah.

Sydnee: [laughs] So be careful, because that could kill the mood. In addition, he recommends you could eat a starfish, but if you do this it is very powerful and you might ejaculate blood.

Justin: Might?

Sydnee: You might.

Justin: Can I get some odds on that? That's not necessarily a risk I'm dying to take.

Sydnee: [laughs] But it's okay, because if you do ejaculate blood, lettuce will fix it.

Justin: Come on.

Sydnee: So don't worry.

Justin: Come on, Magnus.

Sydnee: And as I said, like you kind of already alluded to, ideas as to why did this happen, why did erectile dysfunction occur, were pretty sparse. And so, this resulted in a lot of kind of magical cures as well. So like things that, again, kinda connect to the idea that it's an arousal issue. So, just surround yourself with beautiful men and women.

Justin: Mm.

Sydnee: And then it'll go away.

Justin: Mm...

Sydnee: Right? Which, I mean, again, that's two very different things.

Justin: Go get on the cast on Are You The One. Just go to the house.

Sydnee: [laughs] Just go to the house and you'll get an erection. There were some really bizarre ideas, like if a man is experiencing— if someone with a penis is experiencing erectile dysfunction, they can pee through their wife's wedding ring.

Justin: Okay.

Sydnee: Like, just aim through the ring.

Justin: Sure.

Sydnee: Pee through it. Or perhaps through the keyhole of the church door where they were married.

Justin: Well, you should get written permission, I would say, for sure, on that.

Sydnee: [laughs] Are you gonna get that?

Justin: Are you gonna be able to get that? How late is your church open?

Sydnee: [laughs] Or you could just drink the water— drink water from the mouth of a young horse.

Justin: Not a lot of, like, super appealing options this time.

Sydnee: No.

Justin: It definitely beats, uh, desecrating your marital church, but...

Sydnee: In the Ladies Physical Directory, which was published in 1739— also by the way, I found this subtitle to this, it's also called "A rational account of the natural weaknesses of women".

Justin: Charming.

Sydnee: So, probably not my favorite pamphlet that's ever been published. It had a lot of possible explanations for erectile dysfunction, and it was basically like, this is not something that ever just happens.

Here are all the reasons it can happen and you can fix it, or kinda the idea. So, mainly it was thought to be due to a deficiency of animal spirits.

Justin: Oh, like that Vulfpeck song that we've heard literally 100,000 times because our daughter will not listen to any other song.

Sydnee: [laughs] Yes. Cause she's got [sings] "no animal spirits", and no erection.

Justin: [sings] "heartfelt lyrics"

Sydnee: Or just that the animal spirits were no longer flowing to the organs of generation. So, they're in there, but they're not getting down to the business, right?

This was usually thought to be due to, like, stress, or things that were frowned upon anyway. Especially, this is— this was directed mainly at women at the time, and so it was common to, like, preach against excess, and like, "Your husband is living a life of drinking and loose women and fast living and this is why. These are the reasons."

Also, and we'll get into this more, masturbation was often thought to be the culprit. Was often blamed for the problem.

Justin: [high pitched] Yeah. Yeah, I could see how that could be an issue sometimes.

Sydnee: [laughs]

Justin: For sure. Yeah.

Sydnee: Please don't share any more. [laughs]

Justin: I'm done.

Sydnee: This was also thought to lead to a lack of what is called in the pamphlet animacula. They're talking about sperms. [laughs]

Justin: Oh. Well, why didn't they just say that?

Sydnee: Yeah. Well, they didn't know. They're little teeny animals that become little peoples which, uh— so basically what they were saying is that it's infertility, is what they're talking about.

But they, again, said it's all this stuff. It's fast living and things you shouldn't be doing. So, it didn't matter, though, in this pamphlet. The author says whatever the cause, who cares, because I have the solution. It is called the Prolifick Elixir.

Justin: Okay.

Sydnee: Prolifick with a C-K, Elixir.

Justin: Oh, very fancy. Gothic. I love it.

Sydnee: It was a "powerful confect" and "stimulating balm" and it promised to, and I'm quoting, "fortify the nerves, increase the animal spirits, restore a juvenile bloom, and evidently replenish the crispy fibers of the whole habit with a generous warmth and moisture".

Justin: [laughs] Sounds good to me.

Sydnee: I mean, it was basically just like, I mean, it was a bunch of different stuff. It was aloe and myrrh and saffron and wine and sage and amber, and you boil it for like ten days so it reduces into this real thick, you know, elixir.

Justin: Boiling it for ten days I don't think makes sense.

Sydnee: And you take it like multiple— no.

Justin: I don't think they boiled it for ten days. That seems wild.

Sydnee: They would, like, steep it or something for ten days.

Justin: Yeah, a low boil.

Sydnee: I don't know. Okay, listen, this was written in, like, Old English. It was very hard for me to decipher. [laughs]

Justin: Okay, fine.

Sydnee: The point is that it takes you like ten days and you get this elixir that you take, like, multiple drops throughout the day for a while and then your animacula are back.

Justin: Perfect. So happy to have 'em.

Sydnee: In the late 1700s, we moved on from these kinds of, like, cures to adding in things like electricity and magnetism. And this was very popular at the time in general, for everything.

This is when, like, electricity was being used for what ails ya. So, you know, why not for erectile dysfunction? Dr James Graham advised that he could help reverse the effects of masturbation, because it was often thought to be due to masturbation. Or marital excess, so maybe you're just doing it too much.

Justin: [laughs]

Sydnee: By having his patients take cold baths, less sex and sleep on his magic electric bed. [laughs]

Justin: Nice. Sounds very restful.

Sydnee: Dr John Caldwell said, "I think we should just directly apply electricity—"

Justin: No.

Sydnee: "To the genitalia, or put them in a bathtub—"

Justin: Okay.

Sydnee: "Filled with electrodes."

Justin: No. You lost me. Halfway through, I was with you.

Sydnee: [laughs] That sounds dangerous. And another doctor, Hammond, advised, just attach the electrodes directly to the spine, perineum, testicles and penis.

Justin: Oh?

Sydnee: Although he did say the effect is rather unpleasant.

Justin: Oh, thank you, Hammond. Thank you so much, my friend, for that completely unnecessary coda there. I really appreciate it.

Sydnee: Rather unpleasant.

Justin: Rather unpleasant. Slightly unpleasant.

Sydnee: Mm hmm.

Justin: Well Syd, I'm sure things got, uh, progressively more buck wild as we get closer to the modern era. What happened next?

Sydnee: [laughs] They normally do, and I'm gonna take you there, but first why don't we head to the billing department?

Justin: Let's go.

[ad break]

Justin: Now Sydnee, I so rudely interrupted you and I'm sorry for that.

Sydnee: That's okay, Justin.

Justin: You were about to take me— I think we were around the 1800s, yes?

Sydnee: That's right. I invited you to, so it's okay.

Justin: Fair.

Sydnee: So, I'd already mentioned electricity was popular, and I should just say, there were a lot of not— and the doctors who invented these other things that I told you about would caution you against these sort of, like, quack products of electric belts that say they can do anything.

It was common at the time to own, like, some sort of weird electric belt that would do, again, anything. They were touted for basically every illness.

But there was one specifically called the Harness Electropathic Battery Belt, which was from 1893. And it was medical electricity for self-application, and there were a lot of those, that the idea was just stimulate yourself with enough electricity and... you'll be right as rain.

There was a French physician around this time, Vincent Marie Mondat, who invented the Congestor.

Justin: That sounds unpleasant.

Sydnee: [laughs]

Justin: Not a great brand, Vincent.

Sydnee: Now, to be fair, this was basically the first penis pump.

Justin: Oh. That is my bag, baby. Austin Powers, anybody?

Sydnee: Yeah, I knew. I knew when I thought, "I'm gonna talk about penis pumps and Justin's gonna bring up Austin Powers." I knew that was gonna happen.

Justin: But you didn't predict that I would talk about it for the rest for the show.

Sydnee: Uh... just think about it for the rest for the show.

Justin: Yeah, baby.

Sydnee: [laughs] So, it would draw blood into the penis in, like, a vacuum-type fashion.

Justin: Oh, Syd. [through laughter] You don't need to explain to me how penis pumps work, okay?

Sydnee: [laughs] There were other ones like the Vital Power Vacuum Massager and there were also at this time introduced penile stents, which are exactly what you think they are. They are stents that you apply on the outside to your penis. Sort of like a splint you would apply to your arm, like if you had a broken arm and so you just splint it.

Justin: And then you just leave it on and hope your partner doesn't notice? Is that the plan?

Sydnee: [laughs] Well, no. I mean, you've gotta tell your partner.

Justin: Listen.

Sydnee: You, I mean, they, yeah. No, they have to be an active participant if you're gonna use one of these old-fashioned penile stents. So that everything comes out okay. If you know what I mean.

Justin: Yep. And [crosstalk] also.

Sydnee: [laughs] And they touted that with a penile stent you could introduce a penis into a vagina under all circumstances. [laughs]

Justin: [snorts] [laughs]

Sydnee: No matter what the weather. So, um, at the same time there was a Dr Joseph Lowenstein who was interested in trying to solve this problem in a unique new way, and he invested the Coitus Training Apparatus, which was kind of like training wheels for the penis.

Justin: Okay.

Sydnee: So, there are two rings at each end of the penis and then there are these wires in between that are covered in rubber.

Justin: Good.

Sydnee: [laughs]

Justin: Thank you for that.

Sydnee: Before— so, again, this same kind of idea of almost like a splint kinda thing. But you mentioned you'd have to— you've gotta let your partner know what's about to happen, and specifically in this case you have to use a condom to hold everything... together.

Justin: Okay. This is all very romantic so far.

Sydnee: [laughs] But you need to be very careful so that the support doesn't move in a different direction from the penis.

Justin: Okay.

Sydnee: You want it all going in the same direction.

Justin: Okay.

Sydnee: And it was best if a dexterous man, these were his words, a dexterous man attempted this.

Justin: Assisted, or just— okay. Had an erection.

Sydnee: No, just— [laughs] And the idea was that this was really supposed to be like training wheels. Like, you would use this device and after you kinda got your sea legs you would have erections, because now you know how it works.

Justin: You're reminding your penis of how it do.

Sydnee: Right. But the problem with this is that a lot of people who used this, their partners were not thrilled with it.

Justin: Uh huh.

Sydnee: Because sometimes it could be difficult to remove.

Justin: Oh...

Sydnee: Right.

Justin: Mm.

Sydnee: So.

Justin: [shudders]

Sydnee: Mm.

Justin: Mm, that's a rough afternoon.

Sydnee: There you go.

Justin: Ha cha cha cha cha.

Sydnee: I mean, he meant well.

Justin: Yeah, I mean, he was trying his best.

Sydnee: He meant well.

Justin: Woof.

Sydnee: [laughs] There were, again, a lot of cures, like, things that you could take, ingest. Tonic and patents medicines and such that were invented to, like, the idea was that we're restoring vitality. A lot of this, again, they would tie back to what they called self-abuse. Which is a really horrible way of saying masturbation. [laughs]

Justin: Yeah. It's not even accurate. It's actually the opposite.

Sydnee: Again, this is the time, this is the time. I am not calling it self-abuse. It was back then.

Justin: That's fine.

Sydnee: But basically, because of that you're losing your vitality and you need to restore it. And so, there was Dr Brodum's Nervous Cordial and Botanical Syrup, which was said to "get you ready for the married state".

Justin: [laughs]

Sydnee: And it had, like, cardamom in it and ginger—

Justin: Utah.

Sydnee: There was something called Ebenezer Sibly's Solar Tincture, and Samuel Solomon's Cordial Balm of Gilead. But this one will only work if you also, while you take it, bathe your testicles in either cold water or a mixture of alcohol and vinegar. I would not think that would be good for...

Justin: I just, the last thing I wanna do is introduce distractions into my special time of the day that I set aside for bathing my testicles in cold water and vinegar.

Sydnee: [laughs] But this cordial also had some brandy in it, so maybe it would make it more enjoyable.

Justin: No, that's not how any of that works.

Sydnee: [laughs] And there were lots of other patent medicines at the same time. Things like Dr Senate's Steel Lozenges, and The Balm of Mecca, and all kinds of different things to stimulate your senses.

In the 1800s, Frederick Hollick said he thought this whole search for a cure was ridiculous because we already have something. Something already exists that we've known about for a while that makes us warm and cheerful and in the mood. And that is cannabis.

Justin: My dude!

Sydnee: [laughs]

Justin: Alright!

Sydnee: So, Dr Hollick basically just said, "Forget all this nonsense and smoke some weed."

Justin: Perfect. Excellent.

Sydnee: And then you're gonna be down. [laughs]

Justin: Yeah, for sure.

Sydnee: This will fix your problem. There are other things that were less pleasant advised at the time. Ginseng, strychnine...

Justin: Ugh.

Sydnee: Some things that you still see, like yohimbe. I see that still marketed today, like in kinda herbal supplements and things like that. You'll find that a lot.

And then some weird things, like also, I don't know, drink pee. Take hemlock, that's probably a— don't take hemlock, that's a bad idea. That kills you.

Justin: No. That kills you. That one's poison.

Sydnee: Don't ride bikes. Get a lot of massages, especially pelvic ones.

Justin: Don't ride your bike to the massage, because then it's like, what are you doing?

Sydnee: And there were particular mixtures that had things like strychnine and phosphoric acid and orange peel.

Justin: Ugh.

Sydnee: Or one, again, that had like... zinc and damiana and then there was arsenious acid, which is kind of an arsenic and cocaine...

Justin: It's been a while since we've had one that we've tried this many things for. This is a real, a real scattershot attempt here!

Sydnee: [laughs] Well, Justin, I think it's fair to say that not everybody, but quite a few people, enjoy having sex.

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: And if you're having difficulty having sex, you're probably gonna try just about anything you can to solve that problem.

Justin: Fair. Fair, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Sydnee: Not everybody, but—

Justin: Yeah, just man alive, we are trying a lot of different stuff here.

Sydnee: [laughs] People who like sex probably would. Surgery was attempted in the early 1900s. Some of this we have kind of alluded before in other episodes. In 1913 there was a doctor at Northwestern named Victor Lespinasse, who transplanted slices of human testicle into a man with erectile dysfunction.

Justin: That work?

Sydnee: He claimed that four days after the surgery the man jumped up out of bed and said, "I gotta get outta this hospital, I gotta go have sex. I am so ready now." It worked so well that he literally left against medical advice because he could not wait any longer.

Justin: Problem solved.

Sydnee: I have trouble buying that, frankly, Victor. In 1914, Dr G. Frank Lydston implanted a dead man's testicle into his own scrotum.

Justin: And he won that—

Sydnee: I don't know if that worked.

Justin: He won that bet. So, congratulations.

Sydnee: [laughs] And there were also things like make preparations of goat, ram, boar, deer testicles, like, purify it—

Justin: All the testicles.

Sydnee: All the testicles. And just inject them. Like, just inject them into your arm. Which are probably early attempts at testosterone therapy, even though people didn't know that's what they were attempting. That was probably trying that.

There were also, like, implanting chimpanzee testicles in people, trying to fix this problem. And we've talked about John Brinkley before. He's the guy who implanted goat testicles.

Justin: Goat testicles, for sure.

Sydnee: Right. And this was all in this same era, and again, it was all the idea like, well, we've tried all these kinds of approaches to either just, like, physically make the penis stand up or to stimulate, you know, aphrodisiac style, make you aroused.

Justin: Amore.

Sydnee: So, this is like, again, like some early kind of attempt at hormonal therapy.

Justin: Okay.

Sydnee: That you absolutely should not do and would not work, but I think that's where this is going.

Justin: Alright.

Sydnee: In the 1970s and 80s they invented the first penile rods and implants. Like, prosthetic devices that would— like flexible rods that would hold the penis stiff and that could inflate at times when you needed them to.

Justin: Inside or outside?

Sydnee: Inside.

Justin: Okay.

Sydnee: And there are still versions of this today. They're better, obviously, than they were in the 70s, but these were the beginnings. And then, the big breakthrough, you probably knew where this was going.

Justin: Sure.

Sydnee: The big breakthrough in the treatment of erectile dysfunction came in 1998. Fastest-selling drug in history. Viagra.

Justin: Nice. Welcome to the show, Viagra.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Justin: Coming up on that 20th birthday.

Sydnee: Viagra, which was initially being investigated for, like, its properties as it related to, like, things like pulmonary hypertension and fixing other problems like that, like cardiopulmonary type problems. And then was also found to work for erectile dysfunction.

Justin: I wish I had been there when— in the lab test when that discovery was made.

Sydnee: [laughs]

Justin: “Um, excuse me? Sorry? Can I get some—hi, I’m in Booth Three. Can I get some attention over here, please?”

“Yeah, me, over in Booth Seven? Uh, I need some help over here as well.”

“Uh yeah, I think we all do...”

“Yeah, actually we all do.”

Sydnee: [laughs] It’s, you know what’s kinda funny is it’s crazy how many drugs we have discovered accidentally that they also do other things.

Justin: That makes a lot of sense, of course, yeah.

Sydnee: We’re investigating this for blood pressure and then also, like, oh, it makes you grow a lot of hair. In 2003, Cialis and Levitra were introduced as well. All these meds work similarly, they kinda relax the muscles in the penis to allow an increase of blood flow into the penis, and then it can become engorged and erect.

Justin: Does it make it erect?

Sydnee: Yeah.

Justin: It makes it erect?

Sydnee: Not instantly.

Justin: But it makes it erect, versus like... normally, typically, the penis does not become erect without some reason, unless it's the morning, so...

Sydnee: Well it depends.

Justin: Do you understand what I'm asking you?

Sydnee: Viagra is something you take before— like, you take it episodically. Like, you're gonna take it when you need it. So, "I'm gonna get it on tonight, I'm gonna take a Viagra ahead of time. So that, you know, it'll work when it needs to."

Justin: This is my question, does it work right away or does it work when it needs to?

Sydnee: No, it doesn't work right away.

Justin: Okay,

Sydnee: Yeah. No, it works as you become aroused and stimulated.

Justin: Okay, thank you. That was my question.

Sydnee: They can— now, they can cause erections anyway. Don't get it twisted, that's why they tell you if you have an erection lasting longer than, you know, four hours, go to an emergency room. I mean, it can just cause an erection, too.

But there's also the arousal part, because when you look at medicines like Cialis, that you can take daily, and you're not gonna walk around with an erection all day when you take Cialis, it's so that whenever— you can be spontaneous. Does that make sense?

Justin: Yeah, perfectly.

Sydnee: Yeah. But as we already talked about, they do have side effects in that sometimes you can get an erection that won't go away. Which is not great. You do need to go to the— actually, that's not a joke, like, do go to the ER if that happens.

Justin: Yeah, don't mess around.

Sydnee: And again, there are also, there are other treatments. There are injections that go straight into the penis, and suppositories as well. Sometimes it is related to testosterone deficiency. We really should do an episode on that sometime because testosterone deficiency is blamed for all number of ills that are probably...

Justin: Low T, you mean?

Sydnee: Yes, Low T. God help us, why those commercials? I'm not saying it's not a problem, it's just not as big a problem as they want you to believe it is.

But testosterone replacement in some cases is absolutely necessary, and sometimes can help with erectile dysfunction. Not always, but it sometimes can be helpful if that is the problem. If your testosterone isn't low it won't be so, you know, don't go buy illegal testosterone.

There are still penis pumps and tension rings, you know, that go with the pump after you've used the pump. Penile implants we already talked about. And then sometimes it has to do with other chronic medical conditions, and we can do things through like, lifestyle changes, diet and exercise, or proper medication management, or weight loss, or whatever.

Sometimes those different things, depending on the cause, I'm not saying generally speaking like, eat healthy and your erectile dysfunction will go away, but if it is related to, you know, heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure, something like that, sometimes medical management and lifestyle changes can also help.

Justin: Oh. Alright.

Sydnee: The important thing is, though, it has nothing to do with some concept of how virile a person is. So, if you're having this problem, go see a doctor. There are often many things we can do.

Justin: Penis doesn't make you a man, so by extension a working— a super powerful, always ready penis does not make you a man either. So.

Sydnee: Absolutely not, and I promise you today none of the treatments, none of the cures, none of the diagnoses, nothing that we recommend will have anything to do with baby crocodiles.

Justin: Probably not.

Sydnee: [laughs] Definitely not.

Justin: 5% chance, maybe.

Sydnee: No. Not at all, dear.

Justin: Folks, that's gonna do it for us. Thank you so much for listening to our podcast. Thanks to The Taxpayers for the use of their song "Medicines" as the intro and outro of our program.

Hey, I'm working— I've got a couple of other little things I wanted to mention, real quick. I'm working on a graphic novel with my brothers. It's based on our podcast The Adventure Zone, and we just put up preorders for that book this week.

So, if you have wanted to listen to that show before, this is a recap of the first arc, so it's a great place to pick it up. And if you're already a listener, then you will like it as well. So, if you go to TheAdventureZoneComic.com you can preorder that right now from Amazon and Barnes and Noble. It comes out in July 17th 2018.

Also, we're gonna be going on tour this fall and doing some shows. Sawbones will definitely be on some of those shows, but we're not exactly sure which ones yet.

Sydnee: Yeah, we'll try to give you some heads up when we know.

Justin: Yeah, but if you wanna get tickets to those you can go to McElroyShows.com/Tours. We're coming to Brooklyn, Atlanta, Nashville, Chicago, Minneapolis, Milwaukee. So come on out to those shows and—

Sydnee: More than that.

Justin: More than that?

Sydnee: DC. Boston.

Justin: Well, those are sold out.

Sydnee: Oh. Sorry.

Justin: But we are also coming to those areas as well, so if you live in those areas, we will see you there, if you bought tickets. Earlier.

Sydnee: [laughs]

Justin: [laughs] And I think that's gonna do it for us, folks. So, until next week, 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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