

## Sawbones 385: Bruising

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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, uh... I... well, let's just cut right to the chase, folks. [beat] We dented our kid.

**Sydnee:** "We"? "We" is an interesting...

**Justin:** Well... no, fa—

**Sydnee:** ... choice.

**Justin:** —fate dented our kid.

**Sydnee:** Now, by "we" do you— you don't mean you and I.

**Justin:** Here's the very brief version of the story. We were over at Uncle Travis's house.

**Sydnee:** Yes.

**Justin:** And we were playing on the— the monkey bars, and Charlie was swinging on the monkey bars, and she, for some reason, I don't know why, I don't know what possessed this kid... she skipped a bar and jumped straight for the second bar. And much like a scene from *Wipeout*, she grabbed it and she just slipped right— no, you know what it was like? It was like the bit in *Home Alone*.

**Sydnee:** Hmm.

**Justin:** Do you know it? Where he's greased up the ladder with the slime in *Home Alone 2*, I guess it is. Where he's greased up the ladder and he jumps and he swings and he falls.

**Sydnee:** I should— I should note, Charlie is fine.

**Justin:** She's fine, but she fell on, like, a bottom support of the thing.

**Sydnee:** Right on her butt.

**Justin:** Right on her butt, and got— you know, it's one of those things where the bruise that she got was so wild that I was trying to play it cool. Like, as a parent you don't wanna act like anything's, like, something you haven't seen before, but in my head I was like, "This is the wildest bruise [holding back laughter] I've ever seen! Something is terribly wrong."

**Sydnee:** It looked— Charlie and Cooper thought it looked like a galaxy, so Charlie said she had a space butt for a while. She really enjoyed it. I mean, she was really fine. Like, it scared her, she— but, like, she's fine.

**Justin:** The size, though. The scope of—

**Sydnee:** There was no— it was just a big bruise. It looked scary, but she was totally fine. It did leave behind a small indentation—

**Justin:** Still!

**Sydnee:** —which I am hopeful will go away with time.

**Justin:** It's a dent in our kid! We dented our kid!

**Sydnee:** When you have a severe enough bruise you can actually, like, damage the adipose tissue, like, the fat cells there, and, like, destroy them, sort of. And so... my— my thought process is that if this happens in an adult, sometimes it never goes away. But if you— like, when you're pre-puberty, there's gonna be some, like, redistribution of fat tissue and stuff as you get older, so maybe? I don't know.

**Justin:** There's hope.

**Sydnee:** Not that it matters. She's fine. All that matters is that she's fine.

**Justin:** Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:** She thinks it's hilarious. She thinks the whole thing is funny. I blame Justin and Travis, ultimately, for—

**Justin:** And I blame Travis, so it's kind of a little passing it down.

**Sydnee:** [laughs] But because of this, we thought we would talk about bruises. I— Justin, I like this because we haven't done a Sawbones like this in a while, I feel like.

**Justin:** Yeah. We— it's been, uh, a lot of MLMs and— and, uh, COVID stuff lately.

**Sydnee:** Yeah. And this is kind of a good old-fashioned, "Hey, humans have been getting bruised since... you know, the beginning of humans," right?

**Justin:** Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:** Like, everybody— and because they're visible— typically, not always— but because usually you can see something, people must've been trying to figure out, like, "What are they, and what do you do about them?" As long as we've been getting them.

So when you have something like that in medical history, you get a lot of wild treatments that result, and theories. And so I thought that might be—[laughs quietly] talk about— let's talk about bruises! It's a fun respite. [laughs] From the world.

**Justin:** Yeah. A bre— a quick break.

**Sydnee:** Now, Justin, I'm assuming you know what a bruise is.

**Justin:** Yeah. I mean... wait. Do you mean what a bruise is, or what causes a bruise?

**Sydnee:** Yeah. Like, when I— when you see a bruise, what is going on there? What's the deal?

**Justin:** It's like you— it's like you, like... oh no. You— bruise—

**Sydnee:** Do you want me to tell you?

**Justin:** [holding back laughter] You bruised—[wheezes loudly]

**Sydnee:** You bruised it.

**Justin:** [laughs] I'm using the word in the defini—

**Sydnee:** [simultaneously] You're not supposed to use the word in the defi—[laughs quietly]

**Justin:** —definition, yeah.

**Sydnee:** It's— it's blood. It's just a collection of blood in the tissues.

**Justin:** Yeah. Why is it in there?

**Sydnee:** That's all it is. It's just bleeding, but there's no break in the skin, so there's no—

**Justin:** It's internal bleeding.

**Sydnee:** Yeah, it's internal bleeding. That's all it is. It's just— it's just bleeding under the skin, pretty much. Um, it usually, usually is the result of some sort of blunt force trauma. You fall, you get hit with something, you, you know, whatever. It's usually that kind of thing. Now, obviously there are lots of reasons one might get a bruise. But in most cases it's, like... you, you know, banged your shin against something, and now you've got a bruise on it, right?

Um, what happens is there are all these little tiny blood vessels called capillaries underneath your skin.

**Justin:** Right, I know about these guys.

**Sydnee:** Right? Little teeny ones. And they rupture, and then there's blood there. And then you see it.

**Justin:** Hey, that's it.

**Sydnee:** And over time, your body resorbs it, and it goes away. And that's the bruise. There was an injury, it healed, you're fine. There are bruises you can't see, like really deep bruises sometimes.

**Justin:** Phew, don't I know it. We forget that all to o—

**Sydnee:** Um, but you can feel. They can be painful.

**Justin:** We forget that all too often, you know?

**Sydnee:** [laughs] That too. And there are other words for bruises. Like, the medical term that you could— no one uses is ecchymosis. No one ever uses— I mean, like, I know that.

**Justin:** What's the other one? You use another one.

**Sydnee:** Contusion.

**Justin:** Contusion

**Sydnee:** Yeah, contusion's more common.

**Justin:** If you wanna sound fancy but you can't remember the other one, that's what Sydnee uses. Contusion.

**Sydnee:** And, like, ecchymosis, contusion, bruise, even hematoma, which is sort of a type of bruise— but, like, all these things kind of get used interchangeably, right? There's some bleeding and there was no cut for it to come out of, because then it's hemorrhage. Then if— I mean, like, if you're bleeding out into the space around your body—

**Justin:** That's bleed— yeah.

**Sydnee:** —that's hemorrhage.

**Justin:** That's bl— yeah, that's bleeding. We know about that one too.

**Sydnee:** The word ecchymosis comes from the Greek for "to extravasate blood," which is pretty literal there, and "juice."

**Justin:** [shudders] Ugh!

**Sydnee:** [laughs] Um, so that makes sense. Uh, but— and you can use any of these words for bruise that you prefer, but I'd say most people know "bruise."

Um, if we go back to the ancient Greeks for their advice on bruising, though, it's not maybe as helpful as the term, the quite literal ecchymosis term. Uh, Hippocrates advised in *De Officina Medici* that if you have a bruise or a contusion, whatever you want to call it, a sprain, some swelling— basically some sort of injury, you know. Like an athletic injury, or because you were working on something kind of injury. Uh, you need to release the blood.

**Justin:** Get it out! That's bleeding, right?

**Sydnee:** Yes. So, yeah.

**Justin:** Gotta bleed yourself.

**Sydnee:** Just bleed— bleed yourself. So bloodletting for bleeding under the skin.

**Justin:** You know, I could get— I get it. Like, when you—

**Sydnee:** "Let the blood out!"

**Justin:** Yeah. You look in there and it's like... uh, it looks like the blood— especially if there's swelling.

**Sydnee:** Mm-hmm.

**Justin:** It looks like the blood wants to come out. Like—

**Sydnee:** [laughs]

**Justin:** It looks like— oh, let the blood out!

**Sydnee:** Let the blood out! And what I love is that he couples it with, like, "So you should do some bleeding, and then you— but then you do need to wrap a lot of bandages around it afterwards," ostensibly to stop the bleeding that you have caused to treat the bleeding that...

**Justin:** Right. Vicious cycle.

**Sydnee:** ... started the whole... again. And he— he does make the note, like, "Just use lots of bandages, though. Don't wrap 'em too tightly. Just make sure you use numerous." So you really were bleeding.

**Justin:** Yeah, a lot. That's a lot of bleeding.

**Sydnee:** Um, the Egyptians, who of course came before Hippocrates but, like, were probably better at managing bruises— or a lot of—actually, a lot of traumatic injuries, if you look at, like, the Edwin Smith Papyrus, you will find a lot of, like, pretty decent advice. Like, if somebody falls, like, don't move their head, hold it still. Like, those sorts of spinal injuries. There was actually a lot of kind of pretty accurate thinking there.

Um, and for bruises, they were treated a lot like wounds in general. Like, just put some honey on it. Which again, is not gonna fix everything, but... isn't gonna make a bruise worse.

**Justin:** Yeah!

**Sydnee:** Other than, like, you might get some ants on there.

**Justin:** Make it really sticky.

**Sydnee:** Yeah.

**Justin:** Nobody likes that.

**Sydnee:** I don't know. Maybe some people like a...

**Justin:** Sticky bruise?

**Sydnee:** [through laughter] Sticky bruise.

**Justin:** A nice sticky bruise.

**Sydnee:** You know Pliny the Elder is gonna—

**Justin:** Had to weigh in.

**Sydnee:** —have some thoughts.

**Justin:** The— we— I don't know if you're gonna— like, you're gonna— you're probably gonna discuss this at length. But, like, bruising, I suspect, um, is prone to the, um, what I think of as the hiccup effect.

**Sydnee:** Mm-hmm.

**Justin:** Where it's like, it will get better. It won't necessarily get better on a predictable schedule. And whatever the last thing that happened to you before it got better is what you assume the cure was.

**Sydnee:** Exactly.

**Justin:** So a lot of random— a lot of random, uh, treatments.

**Sydnee:** Well, and it— especially as you move into a lot of topical treatments, meaning things that you would apply to your skin. The thing about that is that, like, typically the way they would be prescribed is, continue to put this ointment, salve, poultice, tincture, whatever it is— continue to put it on the bruise until it goes away.

**Justin:** So eventually it's gonna be like, "This stuff's really working."  
[laughs quietly]

**Sydnee:** Right? So, like, I mean, it— it all works.

**Justin:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** It— it—[laughs quietly] 60% of the time...

**Justin:** It works every time.

**Sydnee:** [laughs] Um, Pliny advised, in *Natural History*, putting fresh cheese mixed with wine on the bruise, which I like—

**Justin:** That's a little bougie for my tastes.

**Sydnee:** Well, I like this idea, because if you're gonna do it, like, if you're already at the fresh cheese and wine stall... like, I'm not just

gonna get a t— like, they don't even sell it in bruise-sized amounts. Like, you— you're probably gonna want to buy extra.

**Justin:** A chunk— a hunk for yourself, and then slice off a little for the wound.

**Sydnee:** Mm-hmm, and you don't want it to go bad so you're like, "Now, I've already opened the wine." You know, like, at this point in history, I bet they didn't have, like, some really sophisticated, like, wine stoppers to, like, put back, you know?

**Justin:** Yeah, you use whatever.

**Sydnee:** Yeah, in the wine. So, like, you've opened the bottle, you're gonna have to drink it. You've already got that cheese. You don't want it to get moldy.

**Justin:** No! And eventually, like, you've gotta eat your own bruise cheese. Like, right?

**Sydnee:** [laughs]

**Justin:** I mean, you get hungry.

**Sydnee:** [through laughter] Bruise cheese.

**Justin:** It's hard to find cheese back then. How would they even do it? There weren't Kraft Singles, I'll tell you that much.

**Sydnee:** I... I... [sighs] I would not put Kraft Singles on my bruise. Come on [crosstalk]. [laughs]

**Justin:** Put the— put the Kraft Singles on your bruise and then eat your own bruise cheese, please. If you wanna get better.

**Sydnee:** No, I like it 'cause it's, like, a great excuse for a party too. It's like, "Well, I mean... maybe I'll have a few friends over, help me out with the wine and cheese... and my bruise."

**Justin:** And my bruise cheese, as a dare.

**Sydnee:** He also noted that you could use old walnuts for bruising, but I feel like...

**Justin:** Old walnuts is—

**Sydnee:** Old walnuts.

**Justin:** How are these— how are these ancient peoples deciding these walnuts are old?

**Sydnee:** I don't know. And I think you can just eat 'em. Like, the way that it's written, it's not really clear on, like, the method. I think you just eat them. Like, eat some old walnuts.

**Justin:** Just eat these old walnuts!

**Sydnee:** Which if we could take the old out, like, now we got nuts and cheese and wine?

[pause]

**Justin:** We gotta— we— we're halfway to [chokes] charcuterie!  
[wheezes]

**Sydnee:** [laughs]

**Justin:** Char-bruise-erie! [laughs quietly]

**Sydnee:** [laughs] Is there— is there something that I need pancetta for? I don't know what else is on a charcuterie tray. The charcuterie— I make charcuterie trays for our children, but they're kid charcuterie trays.

**Justin:** Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:** So they don't have, like, the fancy...

**Justin:** Yeah, they have, like, the, um— where you roll out the bread really flat, then make a fluffernutter, and then roll it up into fluffernutter sushi.

**Sydnee:** Mm-hmm. I make fluffernutter sushi for their... charcuterie tray. Oh my gosh, did I just say that?

**Justin:** You should become beloved on TikTok by— by explaining at length [holding back laughter] how you make your kids charcuterie boards.

**Sydnee:** Oh, gosh, no. Because then the rest of— I don't wanna— I don't wanna, like, front, here. The rest of it is like, "Here's a pile of baby carrots."

**Justin:** "And a bunch of Goldfish."

**Sydnee:** "Here's some— here's some grapes," I... probably took the time to rinse. I at least rinse them. I didn't, you know, cut them in half, or pull— anyway. "Here are some Goldfish."

Uh, in the medieval period, there were, um, a lot of, like, bruise and wound treatments. Again, a lot of, like, uh, any sort of injury would be treated very similarly. And you have to imagine, like, the idea that a bruising was related to bleeding would not be a stretch, 'cause it looks that way, right? It looks like, "Oh, there's some blood there." So that was pretty easy for people to figure out, and so they would be treated pretty similarly.

Um, there were a lot of different recipes for salves and ointments. A lot of folk medicine at this time. Like, in a lot of houses, in a lot of homes in this period, you would've had, like, probably whoever the, like, oldest woman was in the house sort of, like, the m— like, matriarch of the house would kind of take control of this part of medicine, or of this part of, like, survival. The medical part. And would be making salves and treatments and cures and things to use in the home. And so, it would probably be some sort of herbal salve is what would result. And there are lots of different examples of these for bruises.

Um, I found one recipe from *Bald's Leechbook*. We've talked about that before, a collection of different treatments and cures. Uh, and, um, one in particular for bruises, you take a variety of herbal things, yarrow, brume, centaurea, some ground ivy, and then you boil it all together in some butter and honey, which sounds lovely. And then you just apply it to the bruise. Which would— you know, is not gonna...

**Justin:** No.

**Sydnee:** Yeah, that's nice.

**Justin:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** I bet it smells nice.

**Justin:** They don't wanna get too aggressive, 'cause it's not that big of a deal, right? I mean, if you're doing this, you're worried about the appearance of the thing. So yeah, you don't want a bunch of stinky oils on there, because that— you're just worried about the aesthetics.

**Sydnee:** Well, but then— I mean, yes, we know that. But at the time—

**Justin:** Oh, yeah. That makes sense.

**Sydnee:** You know, you have no idea. I mean, there's a very vague understanding of, like— 'cause there are gonna be, at this same time

period, maybe the home sort of folk remedy is, like, "Here's this cool salve." But if you go to a doctor, there's a decent chance he's gonna bleed you.

**Justin:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** Right?

**Justin:** Let's try to avoid that. Rub some cheese on it.

**Sydnee:** [laughs] Uh, so— and then there was also another recipe where, like, just take a bath and put some, like, bracken and green elm bark and mead in your bathtub. Just, like, chill in there, in your bath, with your mead. [laughs quietly]

Again, another great excuse to buy the whole bottle, you know? Of mead.

**Justin:** Of mead.

**Sydnee:** Yeah. Um, and this is all okay in the sense that, like you said, most bruises go away, and they're not a big deal. Um, and if you wanna smear stuff all over you in the meantime, that's none of my business. That's just fine.

Uh, the last recipe, though, that I found for bruises— and this represents sort of, like, that dichotomy. Where, like, there were— there were people who were practicing kind of these folk remedies which, certainly we have talked about many times on the show, could be dangerous. There were dangerous things, but a lot of it was this— these sort of herbal traditions that, eh, maybe some of 'em help a little bit with some things. A lot of 'em are just sort of harmless and smell nice. Um, and then there was, like, the medical world, where people were trying some really wild stuff, because nobody understood what was going on, and the scientific method was still not firmly established, and so, like—

**Justin:** Right, and ethics.

**Sydnee:** Yeah. And, like— but— and then on the flip side, though, there were— there were really aggressive methods to actually try to fix things.

**Justin:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** This last recipe was basically [laughs quietly] um, you take some different things that you're gonna cook together. There's this, uh, elecampane, the lower part of a hammer sedge and some old lard, so some different substances, herbal things, some lard. You're gonna grind it all together. You're gonna warm through a cloth by the fire. And then you're gonna scarify continually the area for seven nights.

So, we've talked about this before. This was a way of actually, like, cutting the skin.

**Justin:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** Like, abrading and cutting—

**Justin:** A light— a light cutting, right? Sort of like a— yeah.

**Sydnee:** Of the skin. So not, like, a bleeding. You're just trying to, like, scratch it all up.

**Justin:** For how long?

**Sydnee:** Seven nights.

**Justin:** Yeah! I mean, that will— the bruise will... change.

**Sydnee:** Mm-hmm. This will change things.

**Justin:** You will get a reaction, for sure.

**Sydnee:** Then you set a horn on the open scarifications.

**Justin:** Oh, good, okay.

**Sydnee:** Smear with the black salve for a night, or two, or as many as you need, because at that point, I don't know. Now we're into a whole other territory, right? 'Cause now we have a big, giant, infected open wound that you've created.

**Justin:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** That might or might not be bleeding at this point. Anyway.

**Justin:** You are definitely worse off.

**Sydnee:** [laughs] You are d—[laughs]

**Justin:** That's what we can all agree on. This has gone badly.

**Sydnee:** Also, as with many other ailments during this time period, if you had some powdered mummy... bruising was one of the things you could treat. We talked about this on the show before. There was a time period where people got confused and thought we were supposed to eat mummies.

**Justin:** Right.

**Sydnee:** Like, as in mummy— as in people who had been mummified. As in—

**Justin:** [simultaneously] It's the best period of—

**Sydnee:** —like, actual mummies.

**Justin:** The best period. If I could travel in time, I would go back to this exact party where everybody's like, "Let's eat mummies for power."

**Sydnee:** Yes. So we— you would take mummy, you would turn it into a powder, and then carry it around in a little pouch at your waist so if you got sick or whatever you would have your mummy right there and you could just, like... [quietly] not your mummy. Your mummy.

**Justin:** [quietly] Gotcha. I gotcha.

**Sydnee:** Anyway, you would put it in, like, a drink, stir it up, like Quik.

**Justin:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** And then drink it.

**Justin:** [laughs quietly] For mummies!

**Sydnee:** And then— and that was great... to take internally for a bruise.

**Justin:** Sure. Bit of powdered mummy.

**Sydnee:** Um, Justin, I also want to talk about the flip side of, like, what if sometimes bruises are good?

**Justin:** [holding back laughter] Okay?

**Sydnee:** But before I do that... [laughs] let's go to the billing department.

**Justin:** Let's go!

[ad break]

**Justin:** So, what you were presupposing is... everybody knows... bruises are bad.

**Sydnee:** Mm-hmm.

**Justin:** But what this next section presupposes is, maybe they're good?

**Sydnee:** Yes. So, I think it's interesting, and we've talked about one example of this on the show before, uh, that sometimes— and again, this is not unique to bruising. There have been many times where we thought— like, uh, for instance, laudable pus— that if a wound was doing something, it was— that was all part of the healing process. So, like, it was important if you had a cut for it to get infected and get filled with pus. Now, we didn't know that it was infected, and that's why it was filled with pus. We thought, like, "Oh, good, it's doing the thing it does on the way to healing, when you almost die but don't." [laughs]

Um, bruises have been thought to be positive, um, in some treatments. As a, like, the bruise is a desirable outcome as the result of a certain treatment.

**Justin:** Like that's how you know it's working? That kind of idea?

**Sydnee:** Exactly.

**Justin:** Okay.

**Sydnee:** As in cupping.

**Justin:** Ohhh.

**Sydnee:** We have talked about cupping on the show before.

**Justin:** Yes.

**Sydnee:** Um, where basically you take these little cups, little, like, glass cups, and you wanna create a vacuum inside them, usually, like, by lighting, like, a match or a lighter or something inside them, create a vacuum, and then stick 'em on somebody's skin very quickly.

**Justin:** If you've seen the limited series *Taste of Luxury* on YouTube..

**Sydnee:** Hmm.

**Justin:** ... those two funny guys in that one did cupping to each other in the spa episode, so you would know.

**Sydnee:** That's right. There you go. That's the best, um, reference, I think, for that.

**Justin:** Yeah. Most relatable. Everybody's seen that.

**Sydnee:** Absolutely. So basically, you put them on your back, your extremities, wherever you're trying to, like, increase blood flow is the thought, right? Like, because when you put the cup on there and you've created that vacuum, you will see, like, the skin sort of, like, zhoop! Like, get sucked up into—

**Justin:** Just zhoop right up there.

**Sydnee:** —like a—[laughs quietly]

**Justin:** If you see a bruise you know, like, "Oh, it must've been working!"

**Sydnee:** Yes, you got blood to the area.

**Justin:** Yeah. It worked.

**Sydnee:** And the blood is supposed to be good for, like, oxygenation, and just... like, the muscles will be stronger and looser and... work better, and all that kind of stuff. Which is why you have seen this as recently as this past Olympics.

**Justin:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** You'll see people with those—

**Justin:** People have tried cupping.

**Sydnee:** —cupping marks on their back or their shoulders or their arms or whatever, and that's what that is. They're having cupping done, because cupping is done to this day. Um, and it's interesting, because cupping— and we have a whole episode on this, but it spans the centuries. It dates back to, you know, thousands of years, to traditional Chinese medicine practitioners. But it's been used in ancient Egypt, in Rome, throughout the Middle Ages, and even up to now.

Um, and while there is lots of anecdotal evidence, like people claiming this really helped, um, we don't have any actually, like, hard science to back up cupping. Um, but the bruise is the point. If you don't get the bruise, you didn't do it right. So, like, the bruise is the treatment.

There's another bruising-type practice that we haven't talked about on the show before. Um, again, this is— this comes from traditional Chinese medicine, called *gua sha*. Which, uh, I had never heard that term. What I was told in medical school was coining.

**Justin:** [thoughtfully] Coining.

**Sydnee:** Coining is—

**Justin:** I've never heard of this one.

**Sydnee:** —um, in English, that is usually— like, English-speakers are taught the words "coining" or "scraping" or "spooning," but coining is the one that I was familiar with. And this is because you— basically, you're gonna use some sort of implement— traditionally this would be, like, a ceramic soup spoon that they— that they use in China, and would use this spoon and repeatedly, like, pull it across, like, oiled skin. So you would, like, oil the skin all up, on the back or wherever you're gonna do it. And most of the pictures you'll find are on the back. And then you would just continually— and it's like a— it's a blunt surface. It's a rounded, blunt surface. So you're not, like, actually scratching the skin. But this repeated pre— like, firm pressure applied motion, over and over and over again, you do result in bruising.

**Justin:** Oh, okay.

**Sydnee:** So you'll see these streaky kind of bruises in the area. And again, this is the point. The bruise indicates that you've done it correctly. You've stimulated blood flow to the area, and oxygenation. And, like, the idea is that there are places where the blood might be too stagnant, and this is the treatment.

**Justin:** Come to move it along.

**Sydnee:** Yes, yes.

**Justin:** Come on, everybody. Stop loitering.

**Sydnee:** Yes, you're— you're moving it along. Um, the reason coining comes in is because you could use a coin. And, like— for this. And in some cultures who have adopted these practices as well, a coin is more frequently the thing that is used. And so the problem, you know, with practices like this, is that if you are completely unfamiliar with it in your culture, which is why— this was the context in which I was taught about this actually, in medical school.

Not as in, like, "Here is a treatment," but "This is a practice that you will find in certain cultures, and it is mistaken for abuse."

**Justin:** Hmm.

**Sydnee:** So if someone comes in, you see this, you think that they have been intentionally harmed in some way, instead of, no, they went to a traditional Chinese medicine practitioner and they had this done willfully, and this is the purpose, so.

**Justin:** [quietly] Something to be aware of, for sure.

**Sydnee:** Yeah, yeah. It's def— and I had never— I didn't know the actual name of it, *gua sha*. I just heard coining.

**Justin:** I feel like it sounds like it'd be kind of relaxing at first. And then it— probably eventually it would get a little irritating, it sounds like, 'cause it does bruise. But, like, I feel like at first I would be kind of like—

**Sydnee:** I mean, you do have bruises.

**Justin:** —pretty safe.

**Sydnee:** Again, there are these sorts of practices that have been done for thousands of years which many people who have them done and who do them will attest work great for them, but, I mean, you know... my—

**Justin:** Scant medical evidence, you could say?

**Sydnee:** —well, my bias is that I practice evidence-based medicine. And so I look for double-blind, you know, placebo-controlled trials to tell me that something works or doesn't work, and that's the stuff that I advise to my patients. And it, you know, I— that is— that is the tradition of medicine I come from, and that's where I—

**Justin:** [crosstalk] That is the Sawbones bias. This little— yeah, we'll cop to it.

**Sydnee:** That is what I'll continue to— to advise people to do. Um, there are some, uh—I titled this section "Interesting Ecchymoses," which is really just for my own...

**Justin:** Delight.

**Sydnee:** ... delight. I realize that nobody— like, you look at that and you're like, "This— my wife is such a nerd."

**Justin:** [laughs]

**Sydnee:** "[mockingly] Interesting Ecchymoses! Hmm!" I should've said it that way.

**Justin:** Are you gonna talk about any other— can I ask about steaks? Like, you see steaks for black eyes in, like, TV a lot of the time. People put a steak on it. Is that a— is that a— is that— you think that helps? [snorts quietly]

**Sydnee:** Uh... no? I don't— I don't think it—

**Justin:** You're furtively googling like you've never seen someone put a steak on a bruise.

**Sydnee:** Yeah, but I don't— I don't know why people do that.

**Justin:** Well, you just put a steak on a— on a black eye.

**Sydnee:** Why?

**Justin:** Stea— what?

**Sydnee:** But why? What do people think they're doing?

**Justin:** I mean, I have to imagine it's to make it better, 'cause it— to make it—

**Sydnee:** Oh, it's just 'cause it's cold.

**Justin:** —to make it worse— oh, it's apparently dangerous, 'cause of course.

**Sydnee:** Well, no, I would never put raw meat on my face.

**Justin:** Yeah.

[pause]

**Justin:** Yeah—

**Sydnee:** Yeah. The— yeah, 'cause it can cause an in—

**Justin:** It's just 'cause it's cold, so maybe stick with, like—

**Sydnee:** It's just 'cause it's cold. So, this is why people do that, is just 'cause it's cold. No, I was gonna say I have no idea why you would ever put raw meat on your face. Please don't do that.

**Justin:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** I'm a— you know me. I like my meat cooked if I'm gonna eat it, 'cause... I'm— I'm not messing around with that.

**Justin:** Yeah. Just get an ice pack.

**Sydnee:** [laughs] Get an ice pack, yeah. If you need to apply— and I was gonna get to that, that you could put ice on a bruise.

**Justin:** I'm sorry. I didn't mean to—

**Sydnee:** No, that's okay, that's okay. We can jump ahead. Um, but no, I don't— no. There are— please do not put steaks on your face.

**Justin:** Yeah. Don't put steaks on your face!

**Sydnee:** Please don't put raw meat of any kind, not just steaks. Why— why stop there? Don't put raw meat on your face.

**Justin:** Heyyy, keep that stuff away from that. That's where—

**Sydnee:** Don't put raw meat anywhere on your human body.

**Justin:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** Um, so there are a few bruises that we are taught—

**Justin:** Unless you're one of those sushi table people.

[extended pause]

**Justin:** You know the people that are sushi tables?

**Sydnee:** Yeah, but I don't think the sushi— I don't think the sushi goes directly on their skin, right?

**Justin:** There's probably leaves.

**Sydnee:** Aren't there, like, the leaves?

**Justin:** There's probably leaves.

**Sydnee:** I've never been to one of those events, but I feel like I saw it on, like, a reality TV show.

**Justin:** You'd know if I ever went to one it'd be all I talked about.

**Sydnee:** [laughs]

**Justin:** "You know, one time... "

**Sydnee:** [laughs quietly] I am— I am too much—

**Justin:** This is pre-COVID, obviously. But, um...

**Sydnee:** I'm too much of a nerd for this. Like, I can't eat food off of someone else's skin. Like, it has to be on one of those leaves, 'cause if it is really, truly on their skin, I'm not— I'm sorry.

**Justin:** Don't you love that this thing has been going on so long that any time someone tells a story now that has multiple people in it, they have to announce, like, "It— this was obviously... before... "

**Sydnee:** [laughs]

**Justin:** "... this was pre-COVID, obviously."

**Sydnee:** So anyway, um, there are a few bruises I wanted to talk about, because I think— I hope you think this is interesting. I think this is interesting. We are taught certain patterns of bruises or ecchymosis that indicate something else might be going on in the body. Like, it's just like, I got punched in the arm and now I have a bruise there, or I fell on my knee and it's bruised.

Like, there— you look at someone's body, see these bruises, and go, "Oh, there's something wrong inside, and this bruise is telling me that."

Um, there is one that was named in 1920 by Dr. George Grey Turner, who was a British surgeon, who wrote a description of a patient with a very peculiar bruising pattern. He had bilateral flank bruising, right? And so, like, you wouldn't immediately think trauma, if you've got two distinct kind of symmetrical bruises on both flanks, right?

**Justin:** Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:** Um, and what he eventually figured out is that this was resulting from this particular patient had severe pancreatitis, inflammation of the pancreas, actually necrotizing pancreatitis, meaning that it was, like, dying tissue in the pancreas. Um, and that that can cause this sort of pattern of blood, and the way that there are, like, planes of tissue in the body, the blood tracks in certain patterns when you get bleeding in different organs. And it tracks symmetrically to the flanks in this case.

**Justin:** Whoa! That's wild.

**Sydnee:** So you— so this is called the Grey Turner sign. And it's— you think pancreatitis. That's what we're taught in med school. Think about pancreatitis when you see this. There are other reasons why you might have bleeding, you know, inside the spaces in the back of your abdomen that could— that could cause this as well, but, um, the Grey Turner sign is a pattern of bruises.

Similarly, in 1918, Dr. Thomas Stephen Cullen wrote of a particular, um, periumbilical, meaning around the belly button— this bruising around the belly button. And, uh, this was in a patient who had a ruptured ectopic pregnancy, so a pregnancy in the Fallopian tube, and then it ruptured. Um, and that— because of that bleeding inside the abdomen, again, just where things track, there was this pattern of bruising right around the belly button, um, and that, if you see that, again it could be some sort of bleeding in the abdomen. Um, actually, again it could— pancreatitis can also do that, but other things that cause bleeding in there.

Um, there's another one in 1903, Dr. John Henry Bryant was going actually through some, like, postmortem. Studying, like, why did patients die, and trying to understand, like, the presentation of different diseases. And he found two patients who had bruising in their scrotums, and they had had this ruptured aneurysm in their abdominal aorta, the big aorta in their abdomen.

**Justin:** Ugh.

**Sydnee:** Um, and that it caused this specific pattern of bruising in the scrotum. Um, and, uh, it is either called Bryant's sign, or—[laughs quietly] what I kept finding it referenced as was Bryant's blue scrotum.

**Justin:** Yeah... I bet people probably prefer Bryant's sign. Bryant probably prefers Bryant's sign, if I had to guess.

**Sydnee:** Yeah.

**Justin:** If Bryant were to be—

**Sydnee:** To Bryant's blue scrotum.

**Justin:** —[snorts] were to be consulted.

**Sydnee:** And I should say, too, like, all of these signs that get these names, they don't— most of them, the bruising is not gonna occur until, like, well into this being a big problem.

**Justin:** Right.

**Sydnee:** So this isn't really something that, like, you should be looking for, because in this day and age, we should really [holding back laughter] know what's going on before this happens.

Um, if you get bruising right on the bottom of your foot, right in the middle on the bottom of your foot, like, and you didn't actually, you know, step on something or whatever, it can mean a very specific fracture and dislocation of one joint in your foot. Um, plantar ecchymosis is what

we would call pathognomonic, meaning almost always indicates— if you see this, it almost always means this.

Um, and raccoon eyes, or periorbital bruising. So, symmetrical bruising around both eyes.

**Justin:** Two black eyes.

**Sydnee:** Yep. If you see that, that can mean that one of the bones in the base of your skull has a fracture.

**Justin:** Hm!

**Sydnee:** From some sort of head trauma or something.

**Justin:** That's wild. I had no idea.

**Sydnee:** That can go along with, um, if you get bruising behind the ears on both side, that can be called Battle's sign, for Dr. William Henry Battle, who, you know, saw it and said, "Hey, that's my... that's my sign."

**Justin:** "What's your sign? Or my sign?"

**Sydnee:** [laughs] "My sign?"

**Justin:** "Battle sign."

**Sydnee:** "Bruising of the mastoid process." Um, the— what I like about all these eponyms, all these things that are named for people, is that it is— if you read the history of any one of them, some— people were describing this stuff way before these dudes did.

**Justin:** Yeah, yeah, yeah.

**Sydnee:** I mean, like, some of these date back to, like, Hippocrates was talking about, um, the Grey Turner sign. Like, he— I mean, he didn't call it that 'cause, like... he didn't have a time machine, and Grey Turner wasn't around yet. Unless maybe, like, Bill and Ted got 'em both for some reason, at some point and we didn't—

**Justin:** Sydnee, we're running long. [laughs quietly]

**Sydnee:** Anyway, um... it was just that these dudes were the ones who were like, "I'm gonna call that me."

**Justin:** "This is *my* sign."

**Sydnee:** That's *mine* now."

**Justin:** "Anybody ever name this?" [laughs quietly]

**Sydnee:** It's a lesson that you should learn. Like, if there's something you find, you just get your name on it. You know? 'Cause if you don't, it sounds like a British dude's going to.

**Justin:** Yep. Get right into it.

**Sydnee:** Um, I also should note too, briefly, um, kidding aside, patterns of bruising are also really important in medicine when it comes to accidental versus not-accidental trauma. Um, so specifically, and there are people trained in this area of medicine to understand, like, whether it be largely children—

**Justin:** Looking for signs of abuse.

**Sydnee:** Yeah, looking for signs of abuse, 'cause there are some bruises we expect, especially with little kids. We can attest to this, right? They fall constantly, off of everything, all the time. So there are some bruises that we expect to happen, and then other patterns of bruising that we don't expect to happen, and there are experts in that area of medicine.

Do you know why a bruise changes color?

**Justin:** Uh, buh-buh-buh-buh-buh-buh buh buh buh... uh, because the blood's not getting oxygen? I don't know.

**Sydnee:** Basically.

**Justin:** Really?

**Sydnee:** Yeah, basically. Yeah, you're right. It's— so when you first get a bruise, it can be— the skin can look red initially, 'cause it's... fresh blood. It's red. Um, and then as it's losing its oxygen, it starts to turn, like, blue-purple kind of color, when the bruise arose.

Um, then your body starts to break down the hemoglobin over time, and it creates these other compounds that are yellowish or kind of greenish, that kind of color starts to form, and then finally brown, um, before it completely resorbs and fades away. Um, most bruises, like we already said, just need maybe some ice. You can use an over-the-counter pain reliever if they're really bothering you. Um—

**Justin:** You know, a cut man has a— a tool for this in the boxing ring. You know the— you ever see one— he— it's called an enswell. They keep 'em on ice and then they press them on to the— when you get, like, a hematoma or something like that that is impairing vision. Like, they—

they keep it on ice and they take it out— it's like a ti— it looks like a tiny iron?

**Sydnee:** Does it reduce the swelling so much that you can still see?

**Justin:** I mean, it makes it better. Well, it reduces the blood flow to the area so it doesn't get worse.

**Sydnee:** Well, that's exa— well, and you just— that was the next thing I was gonna say. This is why the ice works. That's exactly it. It reduces the blood flow to the area.

A bruise that occurs without a known trauma— and these are reasons, like— so most of the time, a bruise is no big deal. You know why it happened, right? You know what caused the bruise. You look at it, you maybe take some Tylenol, or don't, and it goes away with time.

Um, if you have a bruise and you have no idea why it happened, that could be a sign of— that could be concerning, right? Like, you— bruises shouldn't just occur randomly. Certainly people who are on blood thinners and those kinds of medications can bruise more easily, but if you do have a bruise and you don't know where it came from, that's a good reason to see a healthcare professional. If a bruise continues to grow in size or is extremely painful— these are not typical of bruises. Um, be more cautious if it's around the head or neck, you know. Uh, and if it interferes with anything. Like, a bruise shouldn't make it so that you lose feeling in your fingers or toes, or you can't move a part of your body. Um, or you can't see. If those things are happening, this is not your typical, run-of-the-mill, no big deal bruise. You need to go see somebody right away.

Um, obviously also if you think [laughs quietly] there's a broken bone underneath...

**Justin:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** ... please go get that checked out. And while Tylenol and over-the-counter anti-inflammatories are typically okay, over-the-counter anti-inflammatories can increase the risk of bleeding further. So if it is a really big bruise, you might want to talk to somebody before you take that. Um, certainly Aspirin can as well, so you gotta be careful with those kinds of medications. You can also use compression and elevation. You know, the standard treatment stuff.

**Justin:** Just w— I would just wait.

**Sydnee:** Um, but that's the good thing. Like, if you wanna smear some nice, smelly herbal ointment on your body when you get a bruise...

**Justin:** Don't let anybody tell you you're not allowed to do that.

**Sydnee:** Yeah. Well, don't do it too close to me though, 'cause so many things irritate my allergies. So if you could just do that in your home.

**Justin:** Nerd alert!

**Sydnee:** I'm just saying.

**Justin:** Thanks so much for listening to our podcast. We hope that you have not suffered any bruises today. And if we have, we provided at least context.

**Sydnee:** [laughs]

**Justin:** Thanks to The Taxpayers for the use of their song, "Medicines," as the intro and outro of our program. And thanks to you for listening.

Oh, uh, we did a live show with *My Brother, My Brother, and Me* that you can still watch if you want to. You can head on over to [bit.ly/mbmbamvirtual](https://bit.ly/mbmbamvirtual). We rebranded vaccines as a TikTok wellness trend. It was a lot of fun, and you can still watch that for the next couple weeks, so it's ten bucks and, uh, please go check it out if you didn't get a chance to live. It was— it was a lot of fun.

**Sydnee:** And go get vaccinated if you haven't. And tell a friend.

**Justin:** Thanks. Yeah, thanks so much for liste— oh, your— don't forget your flu shot. We'll start harping at that regular—

**Sydnee:** Yeah, flu shot time, too.

**Justin:** —yeah.

**Sydnee:** There's two vaxes you can get now!

**Justin:** Woo hoo! And others, probably. Like, if you wanna get wild about it. Just, like...

**Sydnee:** Well, I mean, just— like, if— go check with your doc and make sure you do. Like, don't just go get—

**Justin:** Get all the vaccines they got!

**Sydnee:** Well, no. N— make sure you need the... you know. You need them.

**Justin:** Back up the truck. Load 'em up. Vax me to the moon and back.

**Sydnee:** [laughs]

**Justin:** [laughs] That's gonna do it for us. 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]

[chord]

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