

Sawbones Ep 22: Headaches

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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 song Medicines by The Taxpayers plays]

Justin:

Hello everybody, and welcome to *Sawbones*, a marital tour of misguided medicine. I'm y-... oh... I'm your co-host Justin McElroy.

Sydnee:

And I'm Sydnee McElroy, are you okay Justin?

Justin:

Yes. The, yes, Sydnee. I'm, I'm fine. I just, I have a headache.

Sydnee:

Oh, I hate to hear that. I'm sorry.

Justin:

A-, and, it seems to be all anybody's talking about right now. Uh, it's, it's top of Yahoo News, uh, #Justin'sheadache.

Sydnee:

Is it really? 'Cause I thought it was, like #WalmartFights or something.

Justin:

No, this headache has gone viral, Sydnee. It's the biggest deal that is, uh, uh, a deal right now. And, I think everybody is talking about it.

Sydnee:

Ca-, just to be fair, Justin. Every time you have an illness, w-, whether it be real or imagined, you tend to think it is the biggest story going on.

Justin:

It i-, it is. It's a headline news story. Um, and here's the problem. Mankind has no way of treating headaches.

Sydnee:

Oh. Is that so [laughing]?

Justin:

Yeah. You just have to-

Sydnee:

Wh-, where did you read that?

Justin:

You just have to live w-, that's something I know. That's-

Sydnee:

That's something you know?

Justin:

That's, that's intu-, uh, institutional knowledge.

Sydnee:

That's the kinda intuition you just have?

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

Being Justin McElroy?

Justin:

I just know there's nothing. But, I th-, I'm, I'm sure we've tried stuff, this is debilitating. I'm barely speaking l-, uh, I'm barely breathing, let alone podcasting. Um, and, I'm hoping that you've heard of something from the annals of history.

Sydnee:

Well, I, I definitely have. And, um, I may actually have some ideas for what could fix your headache now. But, I'm gonna make you sit through the history of headache cures before I tell you what that is.

Justin:

By the way, this isn't a bit. I, I have a pretty bad headache [laughing].

Sydnee:

[Laughs]. He really does, though [laughing]. Just strap in for the chuckles.

Justin:

Yeah, get ready. I'm sure it'll pass. But...

Sydnee:

Uh-

Justin:

... With these prices, these Christmas prices.

Sydnee:

The-

Justin:

Uh, shopping season's here again.

Sydnee:

The first-

Justin:

What a headache.

Sydnee:

... uh... the first question, Justin-

Justin:

Sydnee.

Sydnee:

... speaking of headaches, uh, would be, why, why does your head hurt? Do you know?

Justin:

Um... I don't know. I, uh, slept on it wrong?

Sydnee:

Do you think you upset the Gods in some way?

Justin:

Yes. Absolutely.

Sydnee:

Oh, that's always true [laughs].

Justin:

I don't keep the Sabbath, I don't keep Kosher. I don't, um, you know, I step on cracks in sidewalks.

Sydnee:

Right. That's definitely-

Justin:

Regularly.

Sydnee:

... that's definitely part of a religion. Um, m-, more frighteningly, do you think you were possessed by a demon?

Justin:

Hmm, that may be a stretch. I don't know. Um...

Sydnee:

'Cause that's-

Justin:

I used-

Sydnee:

... I mean, that's a possible cause of headaches. Or, at least, we thought it was.

Justin:

I used to listen to The Cure a lot. Is that the same thing?

Sydnee:

That's close enough.

Justin:

All right.

Sydnee:

Uh, I think, more interestingly, and, and quite possibly, uh, do you think you coulda lost some hairs somewhere, and maybe someone stepped on 'em?

Justin:

Well, yes. That, statistically speaking, that almost certainly happened.

Sydnee:

Well, 'cause that could be the reason your head hurts.

Justin:

You just took a shower, you probably stepped on some of my hair.

Sydnee:

Exactly. It's my fault.

Justin:

You did this?

Sydnee:

Or, you know, some of those hairs could be used in a bird's nest, and that could be the cause of your headache. Which I, I love this theory, because I guess the cure, then, would be f-, finding the bird's nest-

Justin:

Finding and dismant-, uh, the only thing-

Sydnee:

[laughs].

Justin:

... your only solution [laughing], the only treatment you have available is to go bird's nest to bird's nest, and just dismantle it.

Sydnee:

And just tear 'em apart. Just, that would be brutal.

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

Um, the other possibility-

Justin:

And, and, and, literally the last thing you would feel like doing if you had a really bad headache.

Sydnee:

[Laughs].

Justin:

Ugh.

Sydnee:

I'm not doing that for you.

Justin:

Pay a neighborhood child.

Sydnee:

Uh, or maybe you, uh, do you think maybe you just left your hat on the bed?

Justin:

Um...

Sydnee:

Or, maybe somebody else put their hat on your bed? Because, either way, whoever sleeps in that bed next might just have a headache.

Justin:

Wow. I mean, that's a, that doesn't even make a lot of sense, but I guess it's probably accurate.

Sydnee:

Or, maybe you just blew the foam off of your beer.

Justin:

Now, who says that? Who would say-

Sydnee:

The Talmud says that that could be the cause of a headache. Maybe you just, you know...

Justin:

[crosstalk 00:05:11]-

Sydnee:

Maybe you couldn't appreciate that good, thick, foamy head on you beer, and...

Justin:

I blew it off, and it gave me a headache?

Sydnee:

And th-, [laughs], yep. So, uh, any of these things, really, since you've done them all, certainly-

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

... could be the cause of your headache, including demon possession.

Justin:

Not just do-, I mean, I've, I seek some of these out. Like, intentionally. I-

Sydnee:

Like, you give birds your hair to build their nests out of [laughing?]

Justin:

Yeah, it's v-, it's a very, sort of, uh, Disney Princessesque scene where I just extend strands of my hair, uh, uh, o-, with my hands outstretched, and just let neighborhood birds come and take my hair away.

Sydnee:

And then they dress you.

Justin:

It's either that, or-

Sydnee:

In ribbons, and lace, and...

Justin:

It's either that, or Pay It Master Cuts, and, with these Christmas prices, I'm just not sure I can afford it.

Sydnee:

[Laughs]. Uh, this is a very different gifts of the magi that we're getting into.

Justin:

Yeah [laughs].

Sydnee:

[Laughs].

Justin:

I gave birds my hair.

Sydnee:

[Laughs].

Justin:

I gave my watch to a bird.

Sydnee:

That's so ironic, 'cause I [laughs] bought a cage for a bird.

Justin:

It turn, it's turns-

Sydnee:

I don't know.

Justin:

... it turns the gifts of the magi into, like, the sweetest bird story ever. Like, it's a very heartwarming story for birds.

Sydnee:

Maybe that's the story, maybe that's the version they tell birds.

Justin:

A human have me hair. A human gave me a watch. What are we gonna do with these? The birds.

Sydnee:

What are we gonna do with a watch?

Justin:

[crosstalk 00:06:23].

Sydnee:

And then birds began to tell time.

Justin:

Oops. Br-

Sydnee:

And everything changed.

Justin:

Birdvolution started there.

Sydnee:

[laughs].

Justin:

And they became birdmen.

Sydnee:

so, let's talk about some ways to fix this headache.

Justin:

Thank God [laughing].

Sydnee:

[laughs]. Uh, the ancient Egyptians had a great idea.

Sydnee:

So, just, okay. Take some clay, and then, kinda, sculpt it into a crocodile that's holding grain in its mouth, that's key. It's gotta be a crocodile that's holding some grain in its mouth. And then, I guess you fire it, or wh-, however you, you know, harden it. So, now you have a clay crocodile, and then you're gonna bind that to your head. Like, just, kinda, put it on your head, and then wrap a piece of cloth around there to hold it in place, but make sure that you've n-, written the names of the Gods that you wanna help you on the cloth.

Justin:

Gee-, my head hurts. I don't wanna do any of this. I-

Sydnee:

[laughs], well you gotta take the time to make a clay crocodile if you wanna make that headache go away.

Justin:

I, there's no part of me that wants to belly up to the kiln when my head is throbbing. Especially not when there's gonna be some intricate grainwork.

Sydnee:

[laughs]. Well, maybe, maybe the Greeks had a, had a better idea. So, as we move into all the, the theory of, of humors, um, a lot of, you know, when we've talked about this before, that you have four humors, and you gotta get 'em in balance. Uh, so, it was noted by Hippocrates that a lot of people, um, threw up when they had a really bad headache, and that they tended to feel better. So, just go puke.

Justin:

Okay. Easy. I'll be right back. It didn't work. I, I threw up.

Sydnee:

Well, okay. Then, let's try some blood letting.

Justin:

Oh, great.

Sydnee:

Blood letting is always a bit favorite when it comes to curing, well, anything. Um, but specifically, if you wanna cure a headache with blood letting, I, I found this particular technique intriguing. So, take a goose feather... all of these are so involved for somebody with a headache.

Justin:

I know, I have a headache.

Sydnee:

[laughing].

Justin:

I don't know what old timey people were doing.

Sydnee:

I think the main thing was to take up so much of your time in the headache cure that by the end, statistically, your headache was probably gone.

Justin:

Right.

Sydnee:

Uh, so take a goose feather, and you're gonna take, like, the end that, you know, is connected to the goose, like the little stem, whatever you call that end.

Justin:

The goose end.

Sydnee:

The goose end of the feather.

Justin:

[laughs].

Sydnee:

[laughs]. And, you're gonna, kinda, cut teeth into it, like it's a little saw.

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

And then you're gonna stick that up inside your nose, and you're gonna, kinda, move it around until you bleed a whole lot.

Justin:

I wish you all could see my face right now.

Sydnee:

[laughs].

Justin:

This is ghastly. What, why... uh...

Sydnee:

Why a goose feather? Why you have to cut it into a sa-, I don't, why not just a stick? Why-

Justin:

This is-

Sydnee:

... your nose? I, I think the idea was that there were a lot of blood vessels there, so you'd bleed well, and, I mean, it's close to your head.

Justin:

I guess, right? But it, is it, I mean, is it really a problem with my blood brain volume?

Sydnee:

Well, it could be.

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

It could be.

Justin:

Okay, so this could work?

Sydnee:

I mean, definitely...

Justin:

You're saying I should try it.

Sydnee:

... kinda jumping ahead a little bit, by the 1600s, trepanation was also being used for headaches, so it could be your blood brain volume.

Justin:

Um, who else? Who else has something for me-

Sydnee:

Um-

Justin:

... 'cause the goose feather thing didn't work, and there's a mess.

Sydnee:

Well, this was also, uh, about the time when people would try cupping, are you familiar with cupping?

Justin:

I am, a little bit. It's where you create, like, a vacuum-

Sydnee:

Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Justin:

... uh, with a, with a cup by setting a match inside of it, right? And, it sucks up all the oxygen, and...

Sydnee:

Exactly. At the time they were more like glass tubes, and then they would, they'd get 'em hot, create a vacuum, put it on the skin, and it would, the idea was to form, like, a blister of some sort. A sore, or a blister, you could also just, kinda, burn somebody.

Justin:

Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Sydnee:

Um, but, then the stuff that would seep out of it, hopefully, would be whatever was causing the pain, or infection, or whatever. And you could do this on your head if you wanted to cure a headache. Um, but I thought it was interesting, Hippocrates did note that if your headache was brought on

by either exercise or sex, which I think he called a venereal activity
[laughs]...

Justin:

Ugh, romantic.

Sydnee:

... then there was no hope. Don't try cupping, don't try blood letting, you just gonna have to let it ride.

Justin:

Just live with your sex headache.

Sydnee:

[laughs].

Sydnee:

Um, in the late 900s in Spain, uh, Albucasis, who was, uh, the surgeon, the royal surgeon for the King, had a great idea, which was, uh, so, h-, you know, your head hurts, it's something going on with your head, obviously. That's-

Justin:

Right.

Sydnee:

... where the problem is.

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

So, let's just cut open the skin at your temples...

Justin:

Done.

Sydnee:

... and put some garlic cloves in there.

Justin:

Okay. See, that doesn't... that is good if it is a vampire-centric headache, or a vampire's in your brain causing the headache, a tiny vampire. Uh, but I don't even think they had vampires in the late 900s in Spain.

Sydnee:

When were vampires invented, honey?

Justin:

They didn't get over to Spain until, like-

Sydnee:

[laughs].

Justin:

... 1910? Or 1950?

Sydnee:

How, where, what history book are you reading?

Justin:

Vampires: A World Tour, by Justin McElroy.

Sydnee:

D-, did you see this [laughs] on the Discovery Channel over Halloween?

Justin:

Yeah. It was in their-

Sydnee:

Or, on the History Channel.

Justin:

It was-

Sydnee:

Sorry.

Justin:

It was in their special, Vampires: A World Tour, based on the book-

Sydnee:

[laughing].

Justin:

... Vampires: A World Tour by Justin McElroy.

Sydnee:

You have to write that book now.

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

I smell a kickstarter.

Justin:

Yeah, I a-, I gotta claim the, uh, ISBN number now. Uh, it's already been registered in the library congress, since I said it out loud.

Sydnee:

[laughing], now, shoving garlic under your skin is a terrible idea, uh, for headaches. But, if [laughs] you're making a chicken, that's a great idea for flavor.

Justin:

Or, a hea-, uh, yeah, if you're making chicken out of your head-

Sydnee:

Well, no, don't... [laughs].

Justin:

That's delicious.

Sydnee:

I meant, like, an actual chicken. Like, you know-

Justin:

Oh, right.

Sydnee:

... put it under the skin, some garlic-

Justin:

Put it under the skin.

Sydnee:

... some butter-

Justin:

Bacon fat.

Sydnee:

... maybe some fresh herbs.

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

You know?

Justin:

Yeah, now I'm hungry-

Sydnee:

It's good.

Justin:

... and have a headache, cool.

Sydnee:

So, in the medieval times, um, and they always had great ideas in the medieval times, really. At least this isn't, I don't think this is particularly gross, I s-, I will say that for, um, for y-, medieval people, usually it involved, like, putting some kind of excrement on your body to fix something. All they, uh, advise for headache, just try a mixture of opium and vinegar, and rub it all over your head.

And, I like that, because the idea was, we knew opium helped with pain, so ma-, and vinegar was thought to, kinda, open the pores. And so, you put vinegar up there, it opens the pores, you put opium up there, you absorb it faster, and then you're high on opium, and who cares about the headache.

Justin:

Yeah. Headache gone. Solved.

Sydnee:

I think the vinegar could have been cut out for a more effective, and fast cure.

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

But...

Justin:

Just eat some opium.

Sydnee:

Um, similarly, I like this. In the 1600s, uh, it was advised that you could, uh, if you wanted to fix your headache, you can shave your head... drastic.

Justin:

Yeah. A little bit. 'Cause it, who knows? It might pass.

Sydnee:

It-

Justin:

This has to be a serious headache, then.

Sydnee:

I, and that's what, I have to assume with a lot of these treatments, that these were, like, last resort kinda things.

Justin:

Right.

Sydnee:

That, like, if your head hurt a little bit, like, I don't know, they just, like, sprinkled some magic water on your head, or prayed over you or something. But, wh-, it's when, like, your head won't stop hurting. Then you go, and you're like, dude, just shave my head, and you're not allowed to do this, by the way.

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

Um, and then you apply cantharidin to your head. Now, what is that, you may ask?

Justin:

I am asking that.

Sydnee:

Well, that's Spanish Fly, Justin.

Justin:

[laughs], my, oh my.

Sydnee:

[laughs].

Justin:

So, uh, so...

Sydnee:

It's an irritant, uh, it's from a, a beetle of some, it's from a Spanish fly.

Justin:

Um, okay.

Sydnee:

From a bug.

Justin:

Right.

Sydnee:

And, uh, it will irritate your skin, so it will actually probably cause some blistering, um, on your head. Uh, which was, the thought that that's why it would work, again, you form a blister, stuff comes out of the blister, that's the, that's the pain coming out. But, Spanish Fly also is, uh, known to be a potent aphrodisiac.

Justin:

O-...

Sydnee:

I think they were trying to remove a woman's excuse to, you know... oh, not tonight, I have a headache. Yeah [laughs].

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

Well, I'm gonna show you.

Justin:

Yeah, you're about to be-

Sydnee:

I'm gonna shave your head, and rub Spanish Fly on you.

Justin:

You're about to be entwined with lust, for me.

Sydnee:

Uh, y-, I thought it was interesting. It said that y-, it was, you would know you had put too much on when you began to have dysuria, which is burning when you pee. Um, and I, I thought, well, that's interesting, why would, uh, an aphrodisiac cause burning when you pee? That seems like something that would not make you wanna have sex?

Justin:

Right.

Sydnee:

Uh, that irritation of the genitals is what it's supposed to do to make you wanna have sex. Yeah, that's the way that they, I, it, I guess it, I guess in-

Justin:

You just wanna put it somewhere soothing.

Sydnee:

... small amounts, [laughs], in small amounts, it just, like, mildly irritates them. Maybe, like, tickles? I don't know. And that would make you wanna do it.

Justin:

What is wrong with people?

Sydnee:

Isn't that weird? I didn't know that's how that worked.

Justin:

That is weird, that's how Spanish Fly works, you rub it down there, and it, it get a little like, uh...

Sydnee:

I guess.

Justin:

... itchy.

Sydnee:

Well, I don't think you rub it down there, I think people take it orally.

Justin:

Oh, okay.

Sydnee:

I saw it once in a, uh, in a gas station bathroom. You know, in one of those dispensaries?

Justin:

Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Sydnee:

Like, in the... they give you condoms, and Spanish Fly.

Justin:

Yeah. You know, it's funny, uh... selling aphrodisiacs in a gas station. Um, I would say that if you're willing to buy any sort of sexual aide from a gas station vending machine, you're already pretty horny.

Sydnee:

[laughs].

Justin:

Like, your libido is just fine right now. You're buying this from a gas station.

Sydnee:

Yeah, nothing will stop you-

Justin:

Yeah, you are-

Sydnee:

... essentially.

Justin:

... yeah, you are a force of nature at that point. Like, you're not gonna be dissuaded from it. Why do you need something to amp you up?

Sydnee:

You are gonna be waiting in line in a minute, and staring at, like, packs of cigarettes, and, like, those rotating taquitos that have been there for three years.

Justin:

Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Sydnee:

And, you're thinking about boning down.

Justin:

[crosstalk 00:15:43].

Sydnee:

So, you don't have a problem.

Justin:

That's all you're thinking about.

Justin:

What else, Syd?

Sydnee:

Well, if all else fails.

Justin:

That has.

Sydnee:

[laughs] in the si-, and we're still in the 1600s at this point. What you can do is just, so, take a hot iron, and put it on your head.

Justin:

Okay. Hold on-

Sydnee:

Wherever it hurts.

Justin:

... wait, one second.

Justin:

All right.

Sydnee:

Okay, wherev-, just the place where it hurts.

Justin:

It hurts right about where I put the hot iron.

Sydnee:

Right. And, and then just keep cauterizing right down to the muscle.

Justin:

Mmkay, hold on one second. And, yes, cauterized.

Sydnee:

[crosstalk 00:16:14].

Justin:

And, and this is still-

Sydnee:

Ni-

Justin:

... extremely painful.

Sydnee:

Right. Well, yeah. Now, wait, I forgot to ask, are you someone with a vigorous body and much courage?

Justin:

Uh, yeah.

Sydnee:

Because this should not be undertaken-

Justin:

Look at my, look at my business card.

Sydnee:

... [laughs].

Justin:

Look at this t-shirt I'm wearing. Of course. It says, it says exactly that right here on it.

Sydnee:

"Justin McElroy, I have a vigorous body and much courage." You're right, it does!

Justin:

Yeah, it's right there.

Sydnee:

Well, uh, that, that was one thing that they, this one stipulation is that you're gonna cauterize someone's head down to the muscle, you wanna make sure that they are vigorous and courageous. Um, and now if you want to cauterize down to the bone, which, how you determine, I guess, it depends which kind of weirdo doctor you are, um, you might want to pick an area without a lot of muscle, because they knew that cauterizing muscle was painful [laughs]. Which, I think cauterizing anything on your head is probably painful-

Justin:

Cauterization-

Sydnee:

Um-

Justin:

... in general is not, like, a pleasant...

Sydnee:

But, once you get to the bone, obviously you can't keep cauterizing the bone, so then you start chiseling.

Justin:

I, did they s-, think that they were just gonna find, like, a frigging gremlin at some point? Like, "Oh, here's your problem."

Sydnee:

[laughs].

Justin:

There's a little guy in here-

Sydnee:

Well-

Justin:

... causing it. He's inside your, he lived inside your bone.

Sydnee:

A lot of this, you have to, it was the same kind of time where they were doing things like trepanation, and there were people who would try to cure headaches with trepanation, and find, like, maybe, like, a bleed. Maybe they would chisel in, and then they would find some blood there, and then thi-, and then relieving the pressure of that blood would actually relieve the headache.

Justin:

Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Sydnee:

So, that happens once, and then all of a sudden, everybody's doing it.

Justin:

Yeah. Everybody has hole in the head fever.

Sydnee:

Now, by the 18th Century, um, and I think we've mentioned this before, electricity was a very popular thing to be used in medicine.

Justin:

Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Sydnee:

Uh, but at the time, we didn't have a lot of ways of generating electricity just everywhere, everybody. So, um, the best thing to do is if you had a headache, just grab an electric eel [laughs].

Justin:

Yeah, I, I don't have one of those lying around, but I'm sure if I drove to the local aquarium.

Sydnee:

That, there were many different species of, uh, electric fish that they recommended, but there was s-, particularly some eels that were the most, um, that had the highest voltage, I guess?

Justin:

[Laughs].

Sydnee:

And so, so, you could do that. If you don't live near electric eels, um, then there were machine-generated electrical currents that you could be shocked with in order to get rid of your headache.

Justin:

I'm a, I'm a purist. I like free range el-, electrical animals.

Sydnee:

Yeah [laughs].

Justin:

[crosstalk 00:18:35].

Sydnee:

You're not gonna go grab your eel with your bare hands.

Justin:

I don't need a machine to do it for me.

Sydnee:

I like it, that, what, the way you do that, by the way, is you grab the eel in one hand, and then you put your other hand on your head [laughs].

Justin:

That would create a... well, would that even complete a circuit? I don't know.

Sydnee:

I mean, it's that you're already grabbing it, right?

Justin:

Yeah, it's-

Sydnee:

Like, it doesn't...

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

It's gonna hi-, it's gonna shock your head.

Justin:

What if you just put a lightbulb in the other hand, entertain the neighbors.

Sydnee:

[laughs]. That was, that's in the footnotes.

Justin:

Okay, good.

Sydnee:

Um, and at the time, you know, a lot of the things that were being tried for anything else was also being tried for headaches. Like hydrotherapy, mustard baths-

Justin:

Ugh.

Sydnee:

... vibration therapy, so they thought that if you rode in a, um, like, a buggy for a long time, your headache went away, so maybe, you know, if we put you in a vibrating chair, uh, dunk you in cold water. Um, uh, Darwin's grandad was a scientist working at the time, and he advised spinning people around, like, by their head, so that all the blood would rush to their feet.

Justin:

Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Sydnee:

To relieve the pressure from the blood in your head, and then that would [crosstalk 00:19:35].

Justin:

This is only possible, of course, if you have a very large big brother.

Sydnee:

[laughs].

Justin:

Capable doing that for you.

Sydnee:

And, I hope they were grabbing people by the head.

Justin:

No, I think you grab them by the arms, and, I mean, but you'd really need, like, an Andre the Giantesque figure a-, at this point for me.

Sydnee:

Did you do that to your little brothers?

Justin:

I d-, yeah, when they were little. But, they didn't have headaches, they just had dumb faces that needed to be put in check.

Sydnee:

[laughs] how many times did you drop 'em?

Justin:

None, that I will admit to.

Sydnee:

[laughs].

Sydnee:

Um, in the 19th Century, uh, some medications were actually being inv-, and, of course, all throughout time, there were medications that were-

Justin:

Sure.

Sydnee:

... funny and ridiculous. But, uh, one that I like, uh, by Gowers, uh, who is an important figure in the history of neurology, um, is a concoction of nitroglycerine and alcohol.

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

Sure.

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

Um, that will probably make you feel better.

Justin:

That's potent.

Sydnee:

But, he said, you know what, if you don't have time, I guess, to stop by the drugstore, or wherever, my house, and get some of this, just smoke some pot.

Justin:

Well, okay, now you're cheating.

Sydnee:

[laughing]. That was one of his biggest recommendations, if you're somebody with a lot of headaches, and they won't go away, just... you know.

Justin:

Probably.

Sydnee:

Smoke a doob.

Justin:

Smoke a doob, she says.

Sydnee:

[laughs], brought to you-

Justin:

Brought to you-

Sydnee:

... by avid drug user, obviously, I know all the lingo.

Justin:

[laughs].

Sydnee:

Sydnee [laughs].

Sydnee:

I'm such a nerd.

Sydnee:

All right, laudanum was also around then.

Justin:

Sure.

Sydnee:

Speaking of drugs.

Justin:

Everybody's on that laudanum, too.

Sydnee:

Yeah. So, everybody was, you know, taking laudanum for their headaches, wink, wink. And their female troubles. Um, now, by the 20th Century, people started doing surgeries for headaches. And this is kinda scary.

Sydnee:

So, some of these surgeries we understand, and are familiar with today. Like, taking out your tonsils and your adenoids. Or, doing some kind of, uh, sinus surgery. Thought being that you had some kind of sinus problem, nasal drainage, something like that that was causing your headaches. Which actually may have been possible, that you had, you know, a sinusitis, or some kind of sinus problem, and, and that was the cause.

Um, but they also started doing, you know, a lot of really complex surgeries where they were trying to, like, stop different nervous pathways in the head, and neck, and brain area. And all of that is probably a bad idea. Um, they also did lumbar punctures a lot for headaches.

Justin:

Now, does any of these have any sort of gr-, I mean, 20th Century, I start to assume that there's some sort of grounding in...

Sydnee:

We were sh-

Justin:

... reality for, for treatments.

Sydnee:

Well, some of these things. I mean, like I said, we were, we were starting to understand, like, certainly there were probably some people who had headaches because of sinus problems. There were probably some people

who, you know, who had migraines, and trying to start working on, like, vascular, um, pathways, was it because a lot of the people were, were contemplating, is it because veins are dilating, or because they're constricting? Or, you know, was it certain, like, nerve bundles that are causing it? We were starting to understand why headaches were happening a little bit. And we were dividing headaches into different categories. You know, this is a tension headache, this is a cluster headache, this is a, this is a migraine, that kinda thing.

Justin:

Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Sydnee:

So, yeah. I mean, to some extent, we kinda knew what we were doing. And, certainly, if you have increased intracranial pressure, doing a lumbar puncture would probably... you know, release that pressure, and fix your headache. Um, but most people with headaches do not have increased intracranial pressure, so...

Justin:

[crosstalk 00:22:57]-

Sydnee:

You know, kinda like the same thing with trepanation, most people with a headache don't have a bleed in their head that they need to be relieved by drilling a hole in their skull. But, if you are that person, I guess that works.

Justin:

Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Sydnee:

Uh, you could also at that point, we started doing things like hypnosis and psychotherapy, recognizing that some people who had chronic headaches might, as a result of, you know, depression, or anxiety, or, you know, stress, tension, those kinds of things. I don't know so much about the hypnosis.

Justin:

Yeah, I, I don't know if you could... that seems a little, a little, uh... uh, uh, ungrounded in science for me. That you could hypnotize someone out of their headaches.

Sydnee:

Y-, you're against the hypnosis?

Justin:

I am not a fan of hypnosis.

Sydnee:

So, you're gonna let me remove your adenoids, tonsils, do a sinus surgery on you that I don't know how to do, and a lumbar puncture, which I actually can do, and some psychotherapy, but the hypnosis is where you draw the line?

Justin:

What if you tried to subliminize me, while I'm under.

Sydnee:

Subliminize you?

Justin:

Yeah, you can try to subliminize me, and give me, like, messages that would be stuck in my, uh, you know, way back in my brain, towards my, like, hypothalamus. And you would give me, like... messages-

Sydnee:

You're really good with your neuroanatomy, by the way.

Justin:

Oh, thank you.

Sydnee:

[laughs].

Justin:

Uh, and you, you would give me, like, secret commands. Or, you could make me, like, bock like a chicken, when you say suitcase, or something like that. I can't, I can't leave my psyche op-, what I'm saying, Sydnee, is that I can't leave my psyche open to attack like that. I can't, I can't be defenseless in that manner.

Sydnee:

But, you're okay with me cauterizing your head down to the muscle?

Justin:

Yeah. I mean, I'm, I'll try stuff, physically. But I need to b-, have my wits about me at all times.

Sydnee:

[laughs]. Let's try some folk remedies, what do you think?

Justin:

Yeah, those were made up.

Sydnee:

So, so there are a whole lot of folk remedies for getting rid of a headache that, uh, when did they first, you know, show up? Who knows. Uh, some of them, obviously, people aren't doing now, and then probably others of these, there are people still trying today.

Sydnee:

Um, so, one that I really liked was, if your head's hurting, all you gotta do is find a rope, and wrap it around your head. Now, th-, one stipulation, this has gotta be a rope that was used to hang someone.

Justin:

Okay. What?

Sydnee:

Yeah. Yeah.

Justin:

Where, okay, where are you even finding that?

Sydnee:

Y-, eBay? [laughs].

Justin:

[laughs]. Okay.

Sydnee:

I don't know [laughing].

Justin:

Fair, fair dinkum. Yeah, probably eBay.

Sydnee:

I guess, hang somebody.

Justin:

They got everything there. Oh, man, how bad does your headache have to be before you hang a fool...

Sydnee:

So, hang somebody, and then tie the rope around your head after you have, you're done hanging them.

Justin:

Done.

Sydnee:

Um, actually, they said if you could find a rope that was used in a suicide, that those ropes have special powers. And those might cure your baldness, or your gray hair as well.

Justin:

So, that's, like, the, that's like the foil wrap, chase, chase card of, of suic-, of ropes that you [crosstalk 00:25:46]-

Sydnee:

That one's the Lexus of hanging ropes.

Justin:

Right. That's a r-, that's a rare one. That's the Charizard of ropes that you use to kill people, and also cure headaches.

Sydnee:

Um, you could also, if you don't like that idea, or maybe you don't know anybody who hung themselves, hanged themselves, hanged themselves...

Justin:

Hanged? Yeah.

Sydnee:

Uh, you could just take some earthworms...

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

... mash 'em up, and then apply it, now, make sure that you mash them up and you know how many are in each little, like, earth, earth worm mushy pile, because you need to rub an even number into your forehead and each temple.

Justin:

Otherwise, you'll just look ridiculous.

Sydnee:

[Laughs]. I mean, if you rub, like, three into each temple, and two into your forehead, what are you even doing?

Justin:

You'll be a laughing stock.

Sydnee:

And that's gonna work for sure.

Justin:

Um, okay-

Sydnee:

Or, you could-

Justin:

... I tried that, didn't work.

Sydnee:

... go outside and feed some birds afterwards.

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

[laughs].

Justin:

From your head.

Sydnee:

That's nice.

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

Stick 'em in a, stick 'em in a, uh, a bird's nest. Oh, nooooo!

Justin:

Oh, no, don't let them get to your hair.

Sydnee:

Or, you could, um, in the, in the great medical tradition of strapping animals to your body, which is th-, one of my favorite things, uh, you could strap a frog to your head.

Justin:

There's no way, there's no way th-, uh, I've already got a clay alligator up there. There's no way a frog can get up there.

Sydnee:

[laughs].

Justin:

He'll freak, he'll lose his mind.

Sydnee:

Well, you leave it there 'til it dies.

Justin:

Oh, perfect. Okay. Well, good.

Sydnee:

Yeah. Or, you could just go ahead and, in, if you just wanna deal with something that's already dead, so you don't have to worry about it struggling, and trying to hold it there, and maybe peeing on you or whatever. Um, a dead mole will work.

Justin:

I would give any price to watch someo-... I have to see the entire thing, though. I have to see someone walking along with a headache, seeing the mole on the ground, looking to see if anyone's watching, they don't see me...

Sydnee:

[laughs].

Justin:

... and, put, picking up a mole, and just tying it to their head. I have to see that, I would pay any price.

Sydnee:

[laughs]. Well... why don't you go do it, and I will film you, and-

Justin:

Chris-, uh, Christmas is just around the corner, Sydnee. All I want is a video of someone putting a mole on their head.

Sydnee:

All right, you heard it, internet. You gotta help me out [laughs].

Justin:

[laughs]. P.O. Box 54, Huntington, West Virginia. 2-[inaudible 00:27:49]-7-0-6.

Sydnee:

[Laughs] send me a dead... no. Don't send me a dead mole. Send me a video-

Justin:

Don't send dead moles.

Sydnee:

Send me a video [laughing] of somebody strapping a dead mole to their head.

Justin:

[crosstalk 00:27:57], through the USPS that's a federal crime, send moles.

Sydnee:

Is it?

Justin:

Probably, I don't know.

Sydnee:

Um-

Justin:

I'm not a lawyer.

Sydnee:

You could also wrap a snake around your head. I'm hoping it's a dead one, it doesn't specify. Um, if it's not dead beforehand-

Justin:

Let's go with dead, just so we can avoid a lawsuit.

Sydnee:

Yeah. Uh, or a dead salt herring will work. So, lot's of dead animals you can strap on your head. Um, so, go ahead and do all that, Justin. Along with that clay alligator with the grain in its mouth.

Justin:

I'm honestly running out of space up here. I'm running out of real estate, of animals, and animal-shaped clay figurines to attach to my head.

Sydnee:

Well, maybe we should'a just, uh, you know, focused on preventing the headache to begin with.

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

So, here's the thing-

Justin:

It's a little late for that, but, fine.

Sydnee:

Here's some things you should have done.

Justin:

[Laughs].

Sydnee:

It's too late, but, hey, maybe our listeners will benefit from this. Carry a buckeye, or a nut with you at all times.

Justin:

Okay, I already do that.

Sydnee:

Which one?

Justin:

Yes. Absolutely, I carry a buckeye and a nut, one in each pocket, to balance me out.

Sydnee:

Why do you do that?

Justin:

Slingshot [laughs].

Sydnee:

[laughs]. Oh, okay. Of course.

Justin:

[laughs] I have to be ready at all times.

Sydnee:

[laughs]. You, you're... you're like Dennis the Menace.

Justin:

Exactly.

Sydnee:

You're just-

Justin:

I'm like Dennis the Menace, [crosstalk 00:29:07].

Sydnee:

You're a little scamp.

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

Yeah.

Justin:

L-, little Justin.

Sydnee:

Lil-

Justin:

With his slingshot, and his nuts in each pocket.

Sydnee:

And his clay alligator strapped to his head.

Justin:

[laughs].

Sydnee:

Next to the dea salt herring.

Justin:

[laughing] and the mole.

Sydnee:

You could also wear-

Justin:

I'm not a popular child.

Sydnee:

[laughs]. You could also wear a coral or a jade necklace, that can help.

Justin:

Beautiful.

Sydnee:

Yeah, that's love-, that seems harmless enough.

Justin:

This is a look, now.

Sydnee:

[laughs].

Justin:

This is coming together as a look.

Sydnee:

It's just a very [laughing], this is what you're going to s-, as for Halloween next year.

Justin:

Yeah, next year.

Sydnee:

A guy who's [laughs], desperate to get rid of his headache [laughing].

Justin:

Guy with a headache. Guy with a super bad headache.

Sydnee:

Um, or, or, you could have just, uh, so, catch a rattle snake... kill it, don't kill it, I'm not, I'm not recommending anybody kill any animals, this is hypothetical. Um, kill it, take its rattle, and strap it to your hatband.

Justin:

It's...

Sydnee:

[laughs]. So, that'll work.

Justin:

That'll work.

Sydnee:

Um...

Justin:

That'd look fancy, too.

Sydnee:

There were, there are all kinds of-

Justin:

Put that on a trilby, that's gonna look real nice.

Sydnee:

[laughs] there are all kinds of poultices, you know, that people are always a fan of. Some of the ones I particularly liked, um, you could put some potato, and some salt on your head. Um, some buck-, buckwheat cakes, but only if they're Pennsylvania Dutch buckwheat cakes. [laughs].

Justin:

That's saying, that's-

Sydnee:

Those are the only ones that work.

Justin:

That sounds like a, a... a-

Sydnee:

An advertising ploy?

Justin:

Yeah, I was gonna say.

Sydnee:

[laughing].

Justin:

Try a genuine Pennsylvania Dutch buckwheat cakes, uh, for a headache.

Sydnee:

The only buckwheat cakes guaranteed to get rid of that headache.

Justin:

And, by guaranteed, we mean we're lying.

Sydnee:

[laughs].

Justin:

Sorry.

Sydnee:

Uh, you could try some cucumber peels. Uh, some Jimson weed.

Justin:

No. I'm not trying any of this.

Sydnee:

No? Okay.

Justin:

Is there anything real?

Sydnee:

Uh, you know, throughout all of, all of these different time periods, as I was researching all of these terrible ideas for headaches, a lot of people said things that probably would work occasionally. So, cold compresses were, were recommended many different, many different times, all throughout the years. Uh, massage was recommended. Um, especially as you move into, like, the, the 18th Century. Um, and, you know, if you have a really bad tension headache, a nice neck, back massage could help.

Um, getting a good night's sleep was something that a lot of people recommended. So, that can help with certain kinds of headaches. Or, or taking a war-, a warm bath, as they got into, like, hydrotherapy, there as weird stuff like we're gonna squirt warm water at your feet. But, then there was, like, good ideas, like, just take a warm, relaxing bath with some herbal things in it that smell nice, and... yeah, I, you know, that kind of thing. Depending a-, again, on the kinda headache might have helped.

Um, and then there was also a push to try to identify, like, hey, when you have a headache, is it just when you drink alcohol? 'Cause maybe that's causing your headache. And, of course, whenever any of these triggers

would be found, it would be generalized to everybody, so, oh, nobody can, you know, eat potatoes now, or whatever. But...

Justin:

Right.

Sydnee:

Um, but, uh, trying to avoid your headache triggers is actually something we still recommend patients. Um, for real, though, it depends on the kind of headache, and getting into all of the different treatments for whether you have tension headaches, or migraines, or cluster headaches, or chronic daily headaches, or just your regular old, run-of-the-mill, everybody gets them every once in a while kinda headache, um, it really depends.

Justin:

[laughs], there you go.

Sydnee:

Well, I'm not gonna...

Justin:

[crosstalk 00:32:22].

Sydnee:

I can't-

Justin:

There's a lot of th-, you know, headaches.

Sydnee:

You can't generalize.

Justin:

Just go take some pills for it, I don't know. Headaches.

Sydnee:

No, don't, no don't just go take some pills for it.

Justin:

Eh, take a pill.

Sydnee:

No, most, most of the, um, regular ol', average headaches that I get, or that you get, Justin-

Justin:

Mine are no, uh, not, uh, not average, Sydnee. There's nothing average about my headaches, they're settting the world on fire.

Sydnee:

Have you tried to take any over the counter pain reliever, Justin?

Justin:

Yeah, I took three ibuprofen.

Sydnee:

Has it helped?

Justin:

I don't know. I, Sydnee, I took 'em, like-

Sydnee:

What do you mean, you don't know?

Justin:

I, they take a half hour to work. I took 'em, like, 25 minutes ago before we started recording. Well, okay. Wait, there, no, yep, it's a little better.

Sydnee:

Well, there you go.

Justin:

Uh, thank you so much. Uh, we hope our show was not a headache for you to listen to.

Sydnee:

Oh, did you get that? Did you get that great joke?

Justin:

'Cause headaches, uh, listen, this is my, this is the best I can do right now, all right? Uh, cut me some slack.

Um, thank you to people tweeting about the show, like Robby, Ralph,
[crosstalk 00:33:17]-

Sydnee:

Um, and can I just say, if you really do need help with your headaches, you should probably talk to your doctor.

Justin:

Yeah, like, but, that's like everything.

Sydnee:

Well, yeah.

Justin:

If you really do need medical treatment-

Sydnee:

Well, I don't want everybody just doing what you do, strapping a bunch of crap to your head, and taking ibuprofen.

Justin:

It's a look. Sam Pfeiffer uh, thank you for tweeting about the show, as well as Doug Piker, Joe Pangraisse, Justin Lewis, uh, Bubble Monkey, Ian Kelly, Max, um, Peter, Tom... uh, Jackie Collins, Richard Laurie, Karl Gladstone. Uh, we really appreciate you guys sharing the show. We're @sawbones on Twitter-

Sydnee:

Or, you can tweet at us, @justinmcelroy-

Justin:

And she's @sydneemcelroy, S-Y-D-N-E-E.

Sydnee:

We're sorry last week for missing our episode.

Justin:

We were out of town. Sorry.

Sydnee:

We were across the Atlantic, but we are back.

Justin:

And it, and it-

Sydnee:

And wish you all a happy belated Thanksgiving.

Justin:

Everything's gonna be great now, because we're home.

Sydnee:

Don't worry.

Justin:

Don't worry.

Sydnee:

Everybody calm down.

Justin:

And, just relax.

Sydnee:

Calm down.

Justin:

A-

Sydnee:

Take a warm, soothing bath.

Justin:

Go review us on iTunes, and make sure to, uh, listen to some other shows on the Maximum Fun network, *like Jordan Jesse Go, Judge John Hodgman, Stop Podcasting Yourself*. Um-

Sydnee:

My brother, My Brother, and Me.

Justin:

Tickets went on sale today for Max Fun Con, uh, go buy your tickets for that, right now.

Sydnee:

Immediately.

Justin:

It's an amazing time. [crosstalk 00:34:35].

Sydnee:

Stop. Drop everything you're doing.

Justin:

Drop what you're doing. Stop. Go.

Sydnee:

Unless you're in the bathtub, then just treat yourself.

Justin:

Yeah, just relax [crosstalk 00:34:41].

Sydnee:

But, then go buy tickets.

Justin:

At least 'til the headache passes.

Justin:

Uh... and, that's gonna do it for us. Make sure you join us again next Friday, on *Sawbones*.

Justin:

Until then, I'm Justin McElroy.

Sydnee:

I'm Sydney McElroy.

Justin:

And, as always, don't drill a hole in your head.

[theme music plays out]

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