

## Sawbones 437: Farts

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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:** [singing] Hello everybody, and welcome to *Sawbones*: a marital tour of misguided medicine. I'm your cohost, Justin McElroy.

**Sydnee:** And I'm Sydnee.

[pause]

**Justin:** You really kind of let me... I thought we were gonna do our first ever—

**Sydnee:** [simultaneously] I thought it was kind of like—

**Justin:** First ever musical episode.

**Sydnee:** No. I thought it was kind of like— you know how sometimes in, like, a catchy theme song or jingle or something, like, you sing and then the final part is like a... "And their best pal Sydnee."

**Justin:** "And I'm Judy."

**Sydnee:** [laughs]

**Justin:** Um, yeah. This is—

**Sydnee:** That's what I was going for.

**Justin:** This is a special— a special time in the McElroy family household. We have had this wild nonstop month where it's like... we did the— we were running for office until November, and then we did tour, and then you were, like, on

service pretty quickly after that at the hospital, and we've been trying to get coats for people. It's just been a wild time.

**Sydnee:** Yes. We've been extremely busy.

**Justin:** And then Candlenights. We've got our Candlenights spectacular on the 17th.

**Sydnee:** Yes, absolutely. And we've been working hard preparing for that, bringing you something we think you'll love.

**Justin:** Yeah. And you can actually— we'll mention this at the end of the show too. But if you go to [bit.ly/candlenights2022](https://bit.ly/candlenights2022), you can buy tickets to that. It's five bucks, uh, is the minimum, and then you can kick in a bit more. It's a digital show, and you can watch it for, like, a month afterwards, but it's gonna premiere at I believe 9 PM on the 17th, Eastern Standard Time. It's gonna have lots of skits and videos, and it all goes to raise money for Harmony House.

**Sydnee:** And songs.

**Justin:** And songs.

**Sydnee:** Parody songs, maybe.

**Justin:** Anyway.

**Sydnee:** Definitely.

**Justin:** We've been swamped. Syd's at the hospital this week, but we didn't want to leave you without a new episode of *Sawbones*.

**Sydnee:** So Justin said he would research one this week, and he promised me that it would be something I'd be really excited to talk about and that I would really enjoy—

**Justin:** I didn't say that. I didn't say that. I didn't say that.

**Sydnee:** And it would be really— just something that I would find a very, like, soothing, relaxing, you know— since I'm working really hard this week at the hospital.

**Justin:** Yeah, it's been a hard week, huh?

**Sydnee:** It's been a hard week!

**Justin:** You know, Cathy?

**Sydnee:** No! It's—

**Justin:** Ack!

**Sydnee:** Ack!

**Justin:** It's been such a hard week! Ack!

**Sydnee:** Listen. All the viruses... are out... now. All the vi— it's— they're all trending. All the viruses. I'm just saying, like, wash your hands. Stay home when you're sick.

**Justin:** Even Cyrus the virus. From Con-Air is in the hospital.

**Sydnee:** Wear a mask, even, if you feel so inclined. If you're sick, stay home. It's just... it's just that season.

**Justin:** Can you not kill the mood when I'm trying to ramp up here, Squid?

**Sydnee:** Sorry. Sorry.

**Justin:** Thank you.

**Sydnee:** It's been... it's been... a bit of a week.

**Justin:** Okay. So— but I'm here to soothe you. Because today we're gonna talk... about farts.

**Sydnee:** No.

**Justin:** Medically.

**Sydnee:** No!

**Justin:** Sydnee doesn't—

**Sydnee:** Justin!

**Justin:** Sydnee doesn't like puerile topics very much, so I've been asking her to do farts for years, and she won't do it. So now I'm gonna do it. And it's all—

**Sydnee:** So now Justin's gonna talk about farts.

**Justin:** It's only gonna be barely medical. [laughs quietly] That's my warning to you. I just wanna talk about farts.

**Sydnee:** It may, uh— it may surprise you to hear this— or maybe it won't, I don't know— I'll be honest. Farting comes up sometimes in patient visits. Like, sometimes patients will be like, "And also, what can I do to stop farting so much?" But that is extremely rare. Most people, even medically, don't really want to talk to their doctors much about farting.

**Justin:** Well, they're in good company here. Let's talk about farts. And by that I mean, let's start with the word. Fart. It's a very good word, and a funny one, that's funny to say every time you say it. It's hilarious.

**Sydnee:** Don't you prefer "pass gas"?

**Justin:** Uh, I don't. But let's talk about the incredible history. According to a book I bought on the Amazon Kindle store with my own money which is called *Who Cut the Cheese? A Cultural History of the Fart* by Jim Dawson.

**Sydnee:** I don't ever wanna see that book.

**Justin:** "Fart comes— " it's in the cloud, so you can get it whenever you want.

**Sydnee:** Just like farts.

**Justin:** Fart— [laughs] that's good. "Fart comes from the Old English *vertin*, which means 'to fart.'" [wheeze-laughs] "The V became an F about 600 years ago."

**Sydnee:** So it was fertin.

**Justin:** Fertin. Well, it was vertin, and then—

**Sydnee:** Fertin.

**Justin:** The V became F, so then it was fer— fertin. And then fart. So eventually vert became fert, and then fert kind of got mixed up into fret. So if... fret could mean a disagreeable person, but it could also mean to, like— to worry about something that wasn't very important. So that word, fret, to fret, comes from the same root as fart.

**Sydnee:** But fret was already... it was already in use for other things. Like, we already knew what it meant to fret, and it did not mean to fart. So we had to—

**Justin:** No! The word fret is derived from fart. Fert. Fret. They got mixed up.

**Sydnee:** Yeah. Oh, okay. Because, like, meaning-wise I don't know how you could, like— "Are you fretting about something?" "Excuse me?"

**Justin:** Yeah, it means two different— it had two different meanings. But the word came from the root of fart.

**Sydnee:** Gotcha.

**Justin:** Fart has had a bad rap— the word, that is. See, even though it's a very old word, around 1750 writers started changing it to F-hyphen-T, omitting the offending A-R. Censoring it, basically. Self-censoring it.

**Sydnee:** [laughs]

**Justin:** Um, and in the late 1800's, fart was labeled by the Oxford English Dictionary as, quote, "Not now in decent use." Webster actually left it out of its first edition and its second edition, between 1909 and 1934 respectively.

**Sydnee:** Webster was so uptight.

**Justin:** I know, man. Just let it go. It was in the 1961 version, if you can believe it. Uh, the first time that fart was— [laughs] was in there. That was the first one with a fart in it.

**Sydnee:** That feels like a Trivial Pursuit question that only— no. I was gonna say only you, but my Dad would know the answer to.

**Justin:** But now we've infected everyone.

**Sydnee:** Now you all know.

**Justin:** Now you all know.

**Sydnee:** What year was fart first in Webster's Dictionary? 1961.

**Justin:** So Romans came up with flautus, which is the root of flatulence, as you know. But, okay, you're reading ahead. Stop reading ahead! Do I do that to you? I'm sorry. Look at me, 'cause I got all the surprises for you, and I don't want you to ruin 'em by reading ahead!

**Sydnee:** Sorry.

**Justin:** Okay.

**Sydnee:** It's flatus.

**Justin:** [sighs] Here she goes. Flatus was invented by the Romans. They called it flatus to try to sound fancy.

**Sydnee:** They invented it? [laughs]

**Justin:** But the... "[pompous] Look! Did everyone just hear that? What happened to my [holding back laughter] butt? My butt coughed!" No, they didn't invent farts. They invented [wheezes] flatus.

**Sydnee:** I mean, somebody did.

**Justin:** But the common people in Rome called it a bum-bum. Which is deri— which is survived now with when you hear a little kid say "Mommy, I made a boom-boom," that goes all the way back to the Roman root of bum-bum.

**Sydnee:** Do you ever hear children say 'Mommy, I made a boom-boom'?

**Justin:** No, but people say it when they're making fun— pretending to be a kid.

**Sydnee:** [through laughter] They're making fun of kids. Is that—

**Justin:** This one'll really throw you for a loop, okay? In the 1700's— [laughs quietly] in the 1700's, poop meant fart. [wheeze-laughs loudly] That is such a funny sentence I've gotta say it again. In the 1700's, poop meant fart. But now it means poop. [laughs]

**Sydnee:** Like poop, P-O-O— are you saying poop?

**Justin:** Poop.

**Sydnee:** Okay. Not— not poot.

**Justin:** Poop meant fart. [cough-laughs]

**Sydnee:** That would be very confusing today. Like, if you time traveled somebody from the 1700's to today.

**Justin:** "[pompous] I've pooped in my pants!" Like, oh no. You should leave. "[pompous] No, it's fine. We all do."

**Sydnee:** [laughs] You can't just hang around with that in there. "It goes away on its own!"

**Justin:** I want to tell you briefly about the most powerful fart in history, if I can, as long as we're talking about farts.

**Sydnee:** I guess— I guess you're gonna.

**Justin:** Seriously, don't read ahead 'cause this is good.

**Sydnee:** I'm looking at you!

**Justin:** Okay, good. There was a fart that caused a rebellion in Egypt in 569 BCE. This is a tale that has been oft repeated. I found a version at Mental Floss, but this is a wonderful nugget of history that may be a tiny bit apocryphal, but nobody knows.

According to Herodotus, who was a Greek historian, there was this rebellion in Egypt, and it made Apries, who was the King of Egypt at the time— he was worried about this rebellion. So he looks around. He sends his top guy there to sort of put a lid on this, to tamp down the rebellion, right? And Apries sends one of his commanders, Amasis, to suppress the rebellion.

**Sydnee:** Okay.

**Justin:** But Amasis shows up and the rebels are like, "Hey, you know what? We love your style. We love the tone, the way you carry yourself, we love your look. We would like you to be King now... of us. You're now our King. Welcome. We're gonna make you King. You seem to have it all together."

So they make Amasis the King. So Apries— [laughs] Apries, like, understandably—

**Sydnee:** Is put out.

**Justin:** Is like, "Where is Amasis? I sent him, like, a long time ago." So he sends another advisor named Patarbemis to—

**Sydnee:** And they make him other King.

**Justin:** He makes the second King. No. They make him the Supreme Magistrate. No. Uh, he sends him to handle the situation. He says, "Talk to Amasis."

So... [laughs] uh, Patarbemis shows up and Amasis hears him out, and he says, "Here is the message that I want you to carry back to Apries. [blows raspberry]" And it lifts down his pants and he farts.

**Sydnee:** Wait. He pull—

**Justin:** He pulls down his pants and he farts.

**Sydnee:** Was this a time in history where people wore pants, or was it sort of a—

**Justin:** Maybe he lifts his toga? I don't know.

**Sydnee:** Yeah, like a robe.



**Justin:** Maybe he didn't even do anything but, like, if you're gonna make a big show of it, I think you gotta... hang— hang— hang a ham out there and just really let it fly. So he farts and Patarbemis— [wheeze-laughs]

**Sydnee:** Were there underwear yet? This is a part of history we've never covered on the show. Were there underwear now?

**Justin:** Were there underwear? Nobody knows.

**Sydnee:** Nobody knows.

**Justin:** [through breathless laughter] So he farts on Patarbemis and he says "Carry that back to Apries." So presumably Patarbemis recounted this tale to the King—

**Sydnee:** Fart and all?

**Justin:** Well, we hope that he just said, like, "And then he says this, and then he farted on me, and then he said— " We hope that he didn't directly just, like, come—

**Sydnee:** Reenact.

**Justin:** Yeah, reenact. That would be a shoot the messenger case where I think you would be pretty well justified. Um, so according to Herodotus, there is no evidence about how this message was communicated back. But Apries reacted by punishing the messenger and cutting off his nose and ears. This reaction to the fart message was so, like, unhinged that everyone was mad. And, like, more people started joining the rebellion. And eventually, like, what this led to was Amasis, uh, beginning his reign over Egypt from 569 to 512 BCE.

**Sydnee:** So it was a coup.

**Justin:** Well, it was a poo. And the—

**Sydnee:** Oh my— [laughs]

**Justin:** Uh— uh, and it was apparently things went really good while he was in charge, so that's great.

**Sydnee:** That's a great... fart, I guess.

**Justin:** Um, here is another fart fact, fun fart fact for you. There was a guy named Joseph Pujol, I kid you not, that's his name. And he discovered that he could fart on command. He could breathe in air through his butt and then fart whenever he wanted to. Now, there's a lot of tutorials on Reddit now how to do this. But he had sort of, like, if you will, backed into it, and I guess discovered it on his own without any Reddit at all.

**Sydnee:** But then maybe he was the one who first put it on Reddit.

**Justin:** Maybe he put it on Reddit before 1945, when he sadly passed away.

**Sydnee:** [laughs]

**Justin:** Um, but he performed. He took this talent to the footlights! To the— to the, uh— to the stage! And he took the stage name Le Pétomane, which means fartomaniac. [laughs]

**Sydnee:** You know, the next time—

**Justin:** [snorts]

**Sydnee:** The next somebody... says something to effect of, like, "I guess that's what passes for entertainment these days." This is the story to bring up. "Well— oh, well— "

**Justin:** Yeah. "Oh yeah? Let me tell you about the fartomaniac." [wheeze-laughs]

**Sydnee:** Let me tell you about the classic days of theater. [laughs]

**Justin:** He was on tour from that point on constantly. He would use his butt to blow out candles. He would [holding back laughter] play the flute with his farts! And he would even smoke cigarettes with his butt.

**Sydnee:** Were these shows considered, like— like... blue? You know what I mean? Like, that feels like—

**Justin:** I mean, I don't think it's family—

**Sydnee:** Adult entertainment.

**Justin:** I don't think it's family— maybe it is family— you know, kids back then, French kids, they were probably drinking wine, smoking cigarettes. Ten years— I mean, I imagine.

**Sydnee:** I mean kids love farts, don't get me wrong. Kids love farts.

**Justin:** Kids do love farts. Le Pétomane outgrossed even popular actress Sarah Bernhardt with bringing in the crowds. Everybody loved the fartomaniac.

**Sydnee:** [laughs] That's... man, that's just rough. That's a comment on humanity that I just wish we didn't have to know now.

**Justin:** According to the Guinness Book of World Records, Bernard Clemmens of London has the longest official fart at two minutes and 42 seconds.

**Sydnee:** [through laughter] Congratulations, Bernard. We'll be sending you a trophy.

**Justin:** There was also a very famous, uh, essay about farting that was written by Benjamin Franklin. It is colloquially known as Fart Proudly, but its actual title is Letter to Royal Academy about Farting.

And he was sort of a defender of farting, and saying that it is, um... that people should create a drug... to make farting not such a problem.

**Sydnee:** Create a dru— like, to make it not— like, to make people fart less, or to make it not offensive?

**Justin:** That, uh— uh— he— the essay suggested that research—

**Sydnee:** [simultaneously] Like, to make it less smelly, is where I'm going here. This is where I'm going.

**Justin:** — and practical reasoning be undertaken into methods of improving the odor of farts.

**Sydnee:** The odor, okay.

**Justin:** Here's a quote. "I've perused your late mathematical prize question, proposed in lieu of one in natural philosophy for the ensuing year. Permit me then, humbly, to propose that— sort for your consideration and through you, if you approve it, for the serious inquiry of learned physicians, chemists of this enlightened age. It is universally well known that in digesting our common food, there is created or produced in the bowels of human creatures a great quantity of wind, that permitting this air to escape and mix with the atmosphere is usually offensive to company from the fetid smell that accompanies it. That all well-read people therefore to avoid giving such offense forcibly restrain the efforts of nature to discharge that wind."

Basically what he's saying is if you hold it in, it's not great for you, so there should be a medicine to make farts smell better.

**Sydnee:** I mean, he's not... he's not completely wrong, you know? I mean, it is uncomfortable. It's painful. I think many people attest to that.

**Justin:** We're gonna talk—

**Sydnee:** It's not good for you.

**Justin:** We're gonna talk even more. Somehow I haven't quite gotten to the medical part of it, but I promise it's coming.

**Sydnee:** Well, you had to torture me with fart stories first.

**Justin:** Um, and we've got just a couple more right after the break, so let's head on to the billing department.

**Sydnee:** Let's go.

[ad break]

[music plays]

**Ellen:** You probably already have a favorite animal. Maybe it's a powerful apex predator like the tiger, or a cute and cuddly panda. And those are great! But have you considered something a little more unconventional?

**Christian:** Could I perhaps interest you in the Greenland Shark, which can live for nearly 400 years? Or maybe the Jewel Wasp, who performs brain surgery on cockroaches to control their minds.

**Ellen:** On *Just the Zoo of Us*, we review animals by giving them ratings out of 10 in the categories of effectiveness, ingenuity, and aesthetics. Listen with friends and family of all ages to find your new favorite animal with *Just the Zoo of Us* on Maximumfun.org, or wherever you get podcasts.

[music and ad end]

[music plays]

**Travis:** [exaggerated posh voice] Hello! I'm a stuffy dowager countess.

**Teresa:** Travis?

**Travis:** [exaggerated posh voice] I'm judging everybody's manners!

**Teresa:** Oh no.

**Travis:** [normal voice] *Shmanners* isn't judgy. It's about teaching you to be your best self, and be a little more confident when you enter social situations that you don't understand, and maybe also teach you a little bit about history you didn't know, or give you interesting things to talk about at parties.

**Teresa:** Yeah! Like the secret life of Emily Post.

**Travis:** Or like why wristwatches are the way that they are.

**Teresa:** We can talk about table manners from the Victorian Era?

**Travis:** Sure! Or what it's like to attend a Regency ball.

**Teresa:** Yeah!

**Travis:** You can find all that and more if you listen to *Shmanners* on Maximum Fun, or wherever your podcasts come from, I guess.

**Teresa:** Manners, *Shmanners*. Get it?

[music and ad end]

**Justin:** There is obviously people that thought about farting for a long time. There is not, though, a huge body of work on farting itself in the medical research community, in terms of, like, excess farting. In comparison to other things.

**Sydnee:** Well, it's not— I mean, I have to imagine— I don't have the numbers to back this— but I can't imagine it's a huge problem.

**Justin:** No, no.

**Sydnee:** I mean, I'm not saying no one experiences this, or that the people who might experience excessive farting aren't— aren't, you know, experiencing significant distress from it. Certainly they could be. But I have never once had a patient present to me with a chief complaint of excessive farting.

**Justin:** Uh, I found this great article on The Verge called “A brief medical history of farting” by Elizabeth Lopatto. Uh, Elizabeth highlighted one specific character, a Dr. Levitt, that's done a lot of— MD Levitt, uh, who has done a lot of work in this field.

**Sydnee:** MD Levitt, MD?

**Justin:** MD Levitt, MD. That— yes. [laughs quietly] That is correct. Here is one quote from one of his pieces about excessive flatulence.

"As yet, there are no data available that prove excessive flatulence is actually caused by the presence of excessive intestinal gas."

So this is an interesting thing that Levitt highlighted in his work is that the feeling of feeling bloated or feeling gassy... is not really connected to farting a lot. Like, or passing excessive gas. He had another paper in the New England Journal of Medicine in 1975. Check this study out.

He found these people who had a lot of GI symptoms, right? They had gas, bloating, farting. And these 18 people he— they had normal amounts of gas in their stomach. Like, a normal amount. But he thought maybe it's the excess gas that was causing the problems. So he pumped argon gas into their butts,

quantitatively collected a series, uh, in 100 milliliter syringes, and analyzed by gas chromatography the farts that ensued, right?

**Sydnee:** Yeah, uh-huh.

**Justin:** And they basically found that they would pass gas at the same rate as they were being filled up with gas, and they would fart the same as anybody else. So it wasn't the sense of, like, uh, bloating that was actually causing the excessive farting. There's not really a connection there.

Um, now this study was hampered a little bit, because fully a third of patients had to stop because the pain was so bad, of having the argon gas blasted up your, uh, butt.

**Sydnee:** I would imagine! Well, it would distend your bowels, and that— yeah. That would definitely be painful. I mean, that can happen after, like, a colonoscopy or something, where they have to put air in to take a look at things.

**Justin:** This same guy, Levitt, had another study on PubMed [laughs quietly] in 1998.

**Sydnee:** Well, they don't— they don't actually put air in. I should clarify. They're putting air in by virtue of the fact that they're sticking something in there. Yeah.

**Justin:** Right. Um, so he popped back up in 1998, with studying this extremely flatulent patient who was farting a lot. And what he discovered was that by studying the gas that was put out, he could determine in part the cause of why the farting was happening, right? So it says here on The Verge, "Turns out the gas composition will tell you the gas's source. Too much nitrogen means you're swallowing air, while carbon dioxide, methane, and hydrogen tend to be found with gut-produced gas."

So there are lots of causes for farting, and there's a lot of ways that you can fart less, according to the internet.

**Sydnee:** Well, I know that your diet affects it, because different foods are going to create different amounts of gas as they're being broken down and as bacteria and eating them and generating gas, and that kind of thing.

**Justin:** Yeah. Don't get ahead of me now. I see you've been *Medical News Today*, one of my top resources for— for finding out how to not fart so much. I want to approach—

**Sydnee:** No, I just know that.

**Justin:** I want to approach it as a layman. So I'm going to run down their list. I tried to find everything I could that people suggested for, like, not farting as much. Okay, I just want to go down bullet points. You give me, like, your fast reactions, okay? Number one: eat more slowly.

[pause]

**Sydnee:** I guess it's possible, 'cause you swallow less air, but I would say it's not a huge effect.

**Justin:** Number two: don't chew gum, 'cause chewing gum I guess you can inhale more air.

**Sydnee:** You swallow more air.

**Justin:** Yeah. Three: it says look for a food intolerance.

**Sydnee:** Sure, sure.

**Justin:** Which maybe you have something that's causing you gas. Number four: avoid tight-fitting clothes. 'Cause if you feel that way, then it'll feel better. [laughs] That's not really a treatment.

**Sydnee:** I don't think that changes the gas. I think it's just, like, how you feel about it. [laughs]

**Justin:** Um, similar to the gum, don't smoke.

**Sydnee:** Sure.

**Justin:** Exercise more, stay hydrated. Hydration makes everything work a little bit better. They say avoid soda, and... [laughs] or treat your constipation. Now, *Medical News Today* has several that— this is, like, a recurring theme in the treating of farting.



"Avoid foods that create gas. But a lot of those are really good for you, so maybe don't. Take probiotics. But sometimes probiotics can cause more gas!" [laughs]

**Sydnee:** Sometimes they can cause more gas, yeah. No, that's true, and you don't want to avoid— I mean, when we're talking about foods that can cause gas, like, there are a lot of, like, are vegetables that we need, and beans, and there's lots of things that cause gas that are, I mean, really essential, and you don't want to cut out of a diet.

**Justin:** They also mention—

**Sydnee:** So destigmatize farting, maybe.

**Justin:** They also mention enzyme supplements may make it better, or worse. [wheeze-laughs] Which is like the— I love the— it's like those ads that you see on TV for, like, "If you'd like to improve the lightness of your hair, take this pill. One quick thing is that it might freeze you in place for three full hours." Like, the only thing is the night terrors. But other than that it's a really good medicine.

**Sydnee:** Yeah. No, I think what you're bumping up against, I would imagine, is that there's not a huge amount of evidence for a lot of these things because, as you said, people aren't doing a ton of research. There's not, like, a big foundation to address farting that would generate a lot of dollars to put into research. You'd have a hard time arguing that you'd have a gigantic, like, morbidity mortality impact with some of that.

**Justin:** Um, I wanted to get something a little more— or maybe a little less allopathic, maybe step outside the confines of Western medicine a little bit.

**Sydnee:** Oh, you know I love when we do that.

**Justin:** So I went to the Health site, which is the health site for— for me. And, uh, they had some more wellness-focused suggestions like, um, swallow a spoonful of carom seeds? Um, make a tea from ginger. Make lemon water. [wheezes] This seems like things to distract you from your farting.

**Sydnee:** I don't know. I mean, ginger, I know, and I will say that this has been used anecdotally for a variety of stomach ailments for a long time. And I will say that I will drink a ginger ale if my stomach is upset myself, because I feel like it

makes me feel better. Now, is it ma— I don't know. But it might be placebo. It might just be 'cause ginger ale tastes good. But, like— so some of this stuff, I don't know, there might be something to. I don't know what lemon water would do for you.

**Justin:** They also—

**Sydnee:** It'd hydrate you. You're hydrated. That's great.

**Justin:** They also suggest a drink of squeezing one lime into a half glass of water and then adding baking soda to that, and then drinking it. Apparently sodium bicarb's supposed to be good for... for the farting.

**Sydnee:** So you just neutralize...

**Justin:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** You've got an acid and a base and you just put 'em in there together, neutralize them.

**Justin:** And then...

**Sydnee:** Drink some water.

**Justin:** You feel better.

**Sydnee:** [wheezes]

**Justin:** Or different. Maybe you feel different. I don't know.

**Sydnee:** I would say not, but...

**Justin:** I'd like to talk with you briefly about Gas-X. Gas-X is, um... this is weird. I don't know if you've ever encountered this, but there's not a lot of, like, pop-sci pieces about Gas-X. It's just sort of like... it's made— what's the m— how do you pronounce it? [indistinctly] Simethi— simeth...

**Sydnee:** Simethicone.

**Justin:** Simethicone.

**Sydnee:** Mm-hmm.

**Justin:** And that's the main active ingredient in all of the Gas-X products, which are basically like... I mainly have the ta— I've seen the, like, tablets, the chewable tablets, but I'm sure it comes in other forms.

**Sydnee:** Yeah.

**Justin:** Probably a liquid or something. Can you tell me about simethicone?

**Sydnee:** Um, so I can tell you that simethicone definitely... is not, um... I know that it is not incredibly effective.

**Justin:** Okay.

**Sydnee:** I know— I was actually— I knew, um... I have looked into this before. There have been no benefits with simethicone shown for common flatulence at this point.

**Justin:** Um... none? [laughs quietly]

**Sydnee:** No. Um...

**Justin:** [wheezes]

**Sydnee:** It has been studied— it has been studied with—

**Justin:** [simultaneously] Does it help with, like, the gas feeling? Does it help with the feeling?

**Sydnee:** So, with Imodium, in combination with Imodium, it's been found to be effective in relieving abdominal bloating and gas associated with acute diarrhea. But if you're just talking about you're not having diarrhea, nothing like that, you're just, you know... farting. [laughs]

**Justin:** [wheeze-laughs]

**Sydnee:** Um, simethicone at this point has not really been shown to be... effective.

**Justin:** Um, another—

**Sydnee:** Do you know how it works?

**Justin:** No, no.

**Sydnee:** It changes the surface tension of gas bubbles to allow you to, like, absorb them easier.

**Justin:** That's wild. That's a wild thing.

**Sydnee:** But I think part of it is predicated on, like, where it works. So, like, if there is a gas bubble or pocket right there where it lands in the stomach, but I don't think it can do as much as it moves along, is the big problem.

**Justin:** Um, probably the most, like, well known... well, I don't know if it's more well known, but it's certainly culturally more relevant, is Beano.

**Sydnee:** Yes.

**Justin:** Beano is— do you know about Beano?

**Sydnee:** Mm-hmm.

**Justin:** Okay. Well, Beano is— I want to talk— before we talk about, like, what Beano does, I'd like to talk— you know what? Actually, let's talk about what Beano does, because the guy who invented Beano is a riot. So tell me about Beano.

**Sydnee:** Okay. Beano is an enzyme, basically, and the idea is that there are some things that are harder for us to digest, and so that can lead to some of these symptoms, like gas and bloating and, you know, pain and things like that. So it will help break down these more complex, like, polysaccharides, sugars, into, like, simple sugars, making them more digestible. And so then you won't have as much gas and bloating and pain and whatnot.

**Justin:** It was invented by a guy named Alan Kligerman. This is his brief, his brief bio, okay? He was studying at Cornell. He dropped out of Cornell, joined his family dairy business, and when he was making the rounds doing his deliveries he

would find customers that couldn't enjoy the products that he was selling for whatever reason. They had problems with it. So he created— the first thing he invented was called SugarLo. it was an ice cream for people that had trouble with, uh, lactose.

**Sydnee:** Ooh.

**Justin:** And then the government banned the sweeteners, cyclamate sweeteners that it used in 1969. So he started looking for other foods that give people trouble. And he found— he stumbled on, uh, his creation, lactate. So he is the inventor of lactate. He is also the inventor of Beano. This cat is, like, the guy who is willing to do the— [wheezes]— do the work that nobody else wants to think about.

**Sydnee:** Well, and this makes sense, too. Because we're talking about enzymes that you need in your body and you might not have enough of. Basically he's just synthesizing those to make and put in your body. Because, like, that's what Beano is. It's oral alpha galactosidase. So, just like Lactaid is lactase. So you're talking about things that break things down.

**Justin:** Uh, hilariously, Alan Kligerman doesn't like the word fart. [laughs] Almost as much as you dislike it. People bring up the *Blazing Saddles* scene where everybody's eating beans and farting to him all the time. And he says, "Believe me, I am no prude. But I find I have a problem with that word." [wheeze-laughs] He doesn't like the word fart! I guess this is, like, his personal mission then. Like, "I want people to talk about farts less. The only way to do it is to get give 'em all pills that... "

**Sydnee:** "Is to make... " do you know if Beano works? Do you want to know?

**Justin:** Yeah, please tell me if Beano works.

**Sydnee:** I found— by the way, I just checked. There is a huge American Academy of Family Practice. This is why, if you're a med student and you're debating, "What should I go into?" this is why you go into family practice. We tackle the issues that nobody else is willing to take. If it is in— if it is a problem for humans, we can take care of it. That's family medicine.

Um, there is better evidence for Beano. It's been shown to reduce volume of flatus associated with fermentable carbohydrates and high fiber diets.

**Justin:** Fascinating.

**Sydnee:** It is found to have a better, like, evidence recommendation certainly than simethicone.

**Justin:** I should mention, by the way, when I was looking up efficacy and then I couldn't really understand it, I should mention that activated charcoal is something that gets tossed around a lot for this, and doesn't do... [pause]

**Sydnee:** It doesn't. It doesn't, yeah.

**Justin:** Uh, just a couple more, just to check in with Alan. Um, it has made him incredibly rich, but he doesn't like to talk about it. He says "It's tasteless to put the dollar number out there. I loathe this kind of thing. It sounds like chest thumping."

This is an interview with *CNN Money*, so they were pushing at the like, "So, how much have you made?"

He's like, "Oh, I don't want to really talk about that."

He says, "I've sat in a restaurant and overheard people talking enthusiastically about a product I did," confesses Kligerman, and whose company, AkPharma, operates out of Egg Harbor township in New Jersey. "But I don't need to say anything and throw who I am in their faces. I feel good enough about it. I'm secure with it."

**Sydnee:** [laughs]

**Justin:** I love that. Do you know how far that is from me as a human being? We're on opposite sides of the globe. If I heard someone in an adjacent building, like, maybe mention the fart destroyer I made, I would be, like, sprinting across the street to tell them.

**Sydnee:** "[out of breath] That's me. [breathing heavily]"

**Justin:** "[out of breath] That's me. I did it! I made Beano!"

**Sydnee:** "[out of breath] I'm the one. [unintelligible] I'm the guy."

**Justin:** "[out of breath] I'm the Beano guy. You're welcome."

**Sydnee:** "[out of breath] I'm the guy."

**Justin:** "[out of breath] You're welcome. I haven't farted for 20 years. You're welcome."

Oh, uh, Kligerman's still inventing stuff, even though he sold off those products quite some time ago. He also invented a product that is Beano for dogs? And it's called... Curtail.

**Sydnee:** [laughs]

**Justin:** [wheezes loudly]

**Sydnee:** Wait, does it work on cats, too? Does he have a cat one? Can he make a cat one? We need a cat one for our cat.

**Justin:** I'd love a cat one. We really need a cat one for our cat.

**Sydnee:** Yeah.

**Justin:** But, Sydnee! Could farts be medicine?

**Sydnee:** No.

**Justin:** You know, in the—

**Sydnee:** [laughs]

**Justin:** We have talked about in the 17th century when there was a— I believe we've spoken on this, Sydnee. There was a thought that— we understand the, um— what's the theory of disease that is, like...

**Sydnee:** You're talking about germ theory of disease?

**Justin:** Yes. The germ theory of disea— or no, no, no. The vapor theory.

**Sydnee:** Miasma.

**Justin:** Miasma theory of disease. Basically that diseases would be, like, all around you, right?

**Sydnee:** Yeah, like bad air.

**Justin:** So there was a great plague of London in the mid to late 1600s. Um, and they thought it was the miasma, deadly air sweeping throughout. So doctors advised people at the time that, um, they could get rid of that with different smells. It's the same reason that plague doctors would have a sachet of, um, potpourri in the snout of their masks. But this is kind of like a DIY ver— [extended wheeze] [holding back laughter] This is kind of a DIY version where the doctors would tell people to store their farts in a jar! [wheeze-laughs]

**Sydnee:** And then smell 'em?

**Justin:** [claps] [laughs breathlessly]

**Sydnee:** And then smell 'em?

**Justin:** Yeah! [laughs] Yeah! [laughs] And then when they think they would be exposed to, like, bad stuff they're like, "Oh, I think I smell [laughs] I think I smell disease! [strained] I better get my jar of farts!"

**Sydnee:** Man, we've come a long way.

**Justin:** Have we?!

**Sydnee:** Sometimes I worry we're nowhere—

**Justin:** Have we?! [laughs]

**Sydnee:** I mean, we're not the— but wasn't there somebody who was selling jars of farts on the internet? Wasn't there a person...

**Justin:** It sounds like something. But one—

**Sydnee:** I thought that was a thing.



**Justin:** One thing, uh, [stammering]— a gastroenterologist at the Mayo Clinic, Dr. Purna Kashyap makes the point in this other article that eating foods that cause gas is the only way for microbes in the gut to get nutrients. If we don't feed them carbohydrates, it would be better— sorry, it would be harder for them to live in our gut. So basically farting could be a good sign, that you're giving your body the stuff it needs. Those are the happy— you know, the happy belches of microbes that are getting what they need.

**Sydnee:** It is— it is something— and this may be something you've wondered. If you've ever been in the hospital, especially if you've had some sort of procedure, some sort of surgical procedure done, and especially if you were put under anesthesia or, like, general anesthesia even more so, in these situations, us doctors may walk in your room in the morning and probably very early in the morning, and we may look at you, and the first thing we say to you is, "Have you passed gas?"

And that is not accusatory.

**Justin:** [laughs]

**Sydnee:** We are not smelling something [laughs] and accusing you. It is— we are looking for that critical sign that your bowels are working or waking back up after we knocked you out and did a surgery on you. Probably you're gonna do that before you actually have a bowel movement, and so if we the day after surgery come in and say "Hey, have you passed gas?"

And you say "No," we are watching you a little more closely to make sure you haven't developed something called an ileus, which we usually describe as, like, when your bowels sort of go to sleep for a bit and nothing moves. But passing gas is a good sign. When you tell us that we know that the bowels are working, that a poop is on its way. [laughs]

**Justin:** And a poop is on its way.

**Sydnee:** And all is well. So if you ever wondered why there is a doctor, probably a surgeon, in your room at 5 AM asking you "Have you farted?" [laughs quietly]

**Justin:** That's why.

**Sydnee:** We— we need to know this. It is critical medical information, and it is good that you farted.

**Justin:** Don't get all hung up on it. You need to fart. It's just part of the body's... natural systems. Just, you know, get your farts out.

**Sydnee:** Yeah, I don't have a— I'm not— I'm not a fart shamer. I don't have a problem with farting. I'm not, like, grossed out or weirded out if people fart. Um, I just don't want [through laughter] to talk about it.

**Justin:** Well, luckily you've reached the end of this tour of farting in medicine, as least as good as I could do with it. Uh, I want to remind everybody real quick. December 17th, 9 PM, [bit.ly/candlenights2022](https://bit.ly/candlenights2022). We've got guests. We've got skits. We've got songs. We've got stories. We probably have puppets. We had puppets last year. There'll probably be puppets again. It's all happening at 9 PM Eastern. But you can, um— you can watch it for, like, a month afterwards.

**Sydnee:** There may be a movie trailer.

**Justin:** There may be a movie trailer from our hit medical romance comedy franchise.

**Sydnee:** Romance, comedy, Christmas, medical franchise.

**Justin:** One of the top ones, I would say.

**Sydnee:** Romance comedy medical Christmas franchi— they're out of order.

**Justin:** Top. One of the top.

**Sydnee:** Top one of those.

**Justin:** But, uh, the tickets are five bucks. All proceeds go to Harmony House. You can give more than five bucks. There's also a poster on the same website that you can buy where the proceeds go to benefit Harmony House, which is a shelter for people experiencing homelessness in our area that Sydnee volunteers her services at. Speaking of benefiting Harmony House, if you go to [mcelroymerch.com](https://mcelroymerch.com) in the month of December, 10% of all merch proceeds this month will go towards Harmony House. We're trying to support them in every

way we can. It is cold here, and people need the help. Sydnee's friends and clients all need the support, now more than ever.

**Sydnee:** We really appreciate anything. Anything you can give, any help you can give us. We have a lot of people that we're taking care of, and I think most people who work in services like this can attest, we are always trying to do a whole lot with very little, so every little bit helps. Thank you.

**Justin:** Get yourself a horseshoe crab t-shirt, a vaccines t-shirt. We got some— a *Sawbones* pin, pro-vax pin. Cure-all cure nothing t-shirts, vaccines bumper stickers. I mean... you gotta come get some of this stuff. [Mcelroymerch.com](http://Mcelroymerch.com), buy us a bunch of stuff in December. Makes a great gift.

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! That's gonna do it for us for this week. So until next time, my name is Justin McElroy.

**Sydnee:** I'm Sydnee McElroy.

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

[theme music plays]

[chord]

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