

Sawbones 163: Cranberries

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[theme music plays]

Justin:

Hello everybody and welcome to Sawbones: A Marital Tour of Misguided Medicine. I am your cohost, Justin McElroy.

Sydnee:

And I'm Sydnee McElroy.

Justin:

Syd, I'm so hungry.

Sydnee:

I know.

Justin:

I'm a hungry baby, Syd.

Sydnee:

I know. We messed up. We delayed all of our meals today, and now it's late, and we need to record, but we're also hungry.

Justin:

Do you ever have one of those times where you don't think you're hungry at the time that the baby eats dinner, and then it's like, "Oops, I forgot I have two hours of things to do before I can eat again."

Sydnee:

And then you're staring at your baby's mashed potatoes like, "I know those are cold, and her fingers have been all in them—"

Justin:

Yeah, all up in them.

Sydnee:

"... like, all over them, every potatoey drop, but I still kind of want to eat them."

Justin:

The good news is, though, that his parents brought over Thanksgiving leftovers from last night. I have some of my chess bars and Kelsey Grammer's over here that I made, and then—

Sydnee:

My sweet potato casserole that Justin can't get enough of.

Justin:

Oof. Ooh, oh it's gonna be a good dinner—

Sydnee:

Turkey, of course. Of course.

Justin:

... after this. Soon as we're done with this, it's gonna be a good dinner. I'm stoked.

Sydnee:

Right, and do we have a... do we have a staple, uh, Thanksgiving staple with us, the cranberry sauce?

Justin:

Ew. God, no. [laughter] No. Ew, gross, no. There's stuff in the can now. That was never—

Sydnee:

Or any kind of cranberry relish? Any—

Justin:

Nope, cranberries were never a thing at my house ever.

Sydnee:

Really?

Justin:

I never had cranberries at the table ever.

Sydnee:

We always had... Mom makes, and then she got the recipe from her mom, makes a, uh, a cranberry, like, it's like a relish I guess is the best name for it. It's a sauce, but it's not... it's not that can of stuff.

Justin:

No, it's not the can of stuff.

Sydnee:

It's not the gelatinous... the gelatinous wine-colored log.

Justin:

Yeah, it's sweet, yeah.

Sydnee:

It's cranberry colored, but that seems redundant.

Justin:

No, I, um... No, I'm okay with cranberries, especially now that I've gotten older, I get it a bit more. I used to think they were really like sour and unappetizing, but I—

Sydnee:

I mean, they're tart.

Justin:

They're very tart.

Sydnee:

It's kind of their thing.

Justin:

It's a tartness.

Sydnee:

Yeah.

Justin:

But yeah, I'm not for eating, no. Not with savory, no.

Sydnee:

No, well, I get it. I think cranberries are good with savory stuff. I was never much on like the cranberry sauce Thanksgiving thing. Just not my jam. I'd go the gravy route, but cranberries are really interesting, so that's why I brought them up.

Justin:

Uh, what do you mean, like medicinally?

Sydnee:

Medicinally interesting.

Justin:

I know that some people buy into that, and I've heard of them being used for like actual purposes, so I'll be interested to see if—

Sydnee:

Yeah, there's a little bit of truth here, so... So, let's talk about cranberries.

Justin:

Um, later I want to tell you my cranberry... like, more about cranberries because I think they're really neat.

Sydnee:

Yeah.

Justin:

I think the way we get cranberries is really interesting.

Sydnee:

Okay. All right, so you have some cranberry facts. Some cran facts.

Justin:

I have cranberry... It's a rock fact. [laughter] It's cranberry fact.

Sydnee:

Uh, cranberries, or *Vaccinium macrocarpon*. Do you prefer that name, or would you rather just call it cranberry?

Justin:

Uh, let's go with cranberries. [laughs]

Sydnee:

They're one of... They're one of the... They're native to North America which is rare, I guess. There aren't a lot of berries. We've got like three. We've got like cranberries, blueberries, concord grapes.

Justin:

Oh, really? Right on.

Sydnee:

That's it. That's it. I mean, there are other fruits here, like we have other berries now, but—

Justin:

Yeah, I've had some other fruits, I think.

Sydnee:

[laughs] There are other fruits here.

Justin:

I feel like I've had other fruits.

Sydnee:

Um, but these are the ones that grow here. As the—

Justin:

Cereal, marshmallows, like, Trix. Is that...?

Sydnee:

Oh, no.

Justin:

No?

Sydnee:

That's not... Mm-mm.

Justin:

No.

Sydnee:

No, not fruit. No. As the glaciers receded from North America, they left these, like, holes that were filled with, like, sand and clay and a lot of debris, and those became cranberry bogs. That's where they formed. Cranberry vines—

Justin:

Most appetizing.

Sydnee:

... started to grow there. So, bogs, and you know they're not... Like, they don't grow in water.

Justin:

Right.

Sydnee:

Did you know that?

Justin:

Yes.

Sydnee:

I didn't know that.

Justin:

That's what I want to tell you about.

Sydnee:

Oh, okay.

Justin:

I'm gonna tell you about it. All about it.

Sydnee:

Is this the moment, or do you want to wait? Are you gonna keep me in suspense?

Justin:

Well, so like, you want me to talk about them as a food product, and then we can talk about them medicinally?

Sydnee:

Sure.

Justin:

Because... Is that... Does that work for you?

Sydnee:

Yeah.

Justin:

I don't want... Okay. So, and I'm... I'm not like an expert on this or anything. I just think—

Sydnee:

No, this is... This is our edition of 'Justin Googled it.'

Justin:

Justin Googled it a while ago and then, like, tried to refresh myself. But, so, cranberries are... For the longest time, cranberries... Okay, so there's two ways you can make cranberries, right? There's dry harvest... Not make, only God can make a cranberry.

Sydnee:

[laughter] Man cannot make a cranberry.

Justin:

There's two ways you can harvest cranberries, dry and wet. All right? So, dry cranberries is just picking them out of the bog, right?

Sydnee:

Right, off the vine.

Justin:

Off the vine, and then that's like really labor-intensive and meticulous work.

Sydnee:

Mm-hmm. Sure, sure.

Justin:

Um, but, uh, there's another way that people discovered in the '30s which is wet harvesting, which is basically, when the cranberry bog floods, the cranberries rise up, and then machines can harvest them, right?

Sydnee:

Right.

Justin:

So, it's like, a really super quick way to get the cranberries. But, there's a catch. The cranberries that you see in the bag at the store...

Sydnee:

Uh-huh. Yeah.

Justin:

Those are all dry harvested because wet harvesting makes... It messes the cranberries up too bad.

Sydnee:

Oh.

Justin:

They don't look good for, um...

Sydnee:

Really?

Justin:

Yeah, so, the... If you see them in a bag at the store, those are dry harvested, but you can't sell them fresh otherwise. So, they had this thing where they had this technique of, "Well, we've got these great cranberries, and we, like, we can get them easier now, and we can grow more of them, but, like, we don't have a market with which to sell them." So, enter...

Sydnee:

The gelatinous cylinder.

Justin:

Enter the gelatinous cylinder, right.

Sydnee:

Yeah. Oh, that makes sense.

Justin:

Yeah, so we have the—That was the— the, um, implementation—

Sydnee:

Or juice I guess.

Justin:

Hmm?

Sydnee:

Or juice I guess.

Justin:

Yeah, I don't feel like that was as big of a thing at the time, but the cranberry sauce as, you know, sort of popularized by a coop of growers that we came to call Ocean Spray said, "Okay, now we have a way for cranberries to be like... Not just... First of all, to be available year-round because they have that one season, and then that's it."

Sydnee:

Right.

Justin:

And they weren't a big... a hot ticket item anyway because they were too hard to grow wherever. So, with wet harvesting came cranberry sauce because, like, well, you can use all these ugly berries that we harvested with machines.

Sydnee:

That's cool, and that explains those commercials where they're standing chest-high in cranberries.

Justin:

Exactly, exactly.

Sydnee:

Cool.

Justin:

So, that is—

Sydnee:

Well, thank you.

Justin:

That's wet harvesting versus, um, dry harvesting, and the log... The cranberry log was, um, uh, like '40s, came up around there.

Sydnee:

Well, thank you, Justin.

Justin:

Yeah, well, it's really the least I could do.

Sydnee:

Do you know, um, Americans love cranberries? We eat like 40 million pounds a year, and we eat about 20% of that in the week around Thanksgiving.

Justin:

That is not surprising to me whatsoever.

Sydnee:

That is a lot of cranberries in that week.

Justin:

It's weird, those foods that you're like... You know the one's like that? Stuffing. When I eat stuffing, I'm like, "Man, this is good. This is really good."

Sydnee:

Yeah. "I think I'll eat this again in a year."

Justin:

"I'm gonna eat this again in like exactly 12 calendar months from now."

Sydnee:

"In like one year from now."

Justin:

Like, your mom's stuffing that she makes, and I think Teylor's made some— some real, like, some like with sausage and nuts and, like, just stuffing. It's so—

Sydnee:

But not cranberries.

Justin:

Not cranberries.

Sydnee:

So, let's focus.

Justin:

All right. You're right, just like I like stuff... That's upstairs too!

Sydnee:

I know, well, we're getting to that.

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

Um, I mean like not on the show.

Justin:

Right.

Sydnee:

We're just gonna get there, to the... to the stuffing. Uh, Native Americans, uh, cultivated and ate cranberries. They were aware of their... First of all, if you added something sweet to them like honey, that they tasted good. You know, because cranberries are pretty tart, so that was a popular way to...

Justin:

Right.

Sydnee:

Add a little bit of honey, and mash up the berries, and then it's yummy. You know, it's a nice balance of flavors. Um, it also... They didn't... Now, the— there was no understanding of the reasoning behind this, but it warded off scurvy.

Justin:

Hm, okay.

Sydnee:

You could eat cranberries, and you wouldn't get scurvy. Now, the reason people thought this was true is that they believed that scurvy was due to an excess of salt, and they thought that the sour taste, the tartness of cranberries somehow could draw the salt out of your body. So, that—

Justin:

Okay. Well, that's not true, right?

Sydnee:

Well, no, but that was the theory behind it. So, nobody understood that they... that cranberries actually do have a lot of vitamin C, so that's really what they were getting and why they didn't get scurvy from, you know, while— when they ate cranberries. But, you can kind of think of... We've talked about scurvy on this show before when we talked about, like, British sailors eating limes.

Justin:

Sure.

Sydnee:

I mean, those didn't really work. Or lemons, a better source of vitamin C of course. Cranberries were to American sailors as limes or lemons really were to the English sailors.

Justin:

Oh, cool! I didn't know that.

Sydnee:

Yeah, I didn't realize that either because they were a good source of vitamin C. Um, the Native Americans also used cranberries, uh, in like a poultice. So, if you had some sort of wound or injury, um, they believed that cranberries had properties that would prevent infection and inflammation, again, without knowing these terms at the time, just that it healed better. And so, they would take like whole cranberries and mash them, put them in kind of a... like, fresh cranberries into a poultice and apply it to the wound.

Justin:

Mm-hmm.

Sydnee:

Um, they were used for all kinds of, like, fever and swelling, seasickness. Fresh cranberries were often prescribed for those kinds of things. They also were believed to purify blood, or to fight infections in the bloodstream. So, if

somebody was very ill, you might give them cranberries. Uh, they were used as a laxative. I think maybe if you ate enough, probably.

Justin:

That seems legit.

Sydnee:

Like, if you eat enough cranberries...

Justin:

That seems legit, yeah.

Sydnee:

Yeah, sure.

Justin:

That sounds about right.

Sydnee:

Um, and lots of different complaints related to childbirth. Basically anything going on with childbirth, you could say, "Hey, well, I don't know, take some cranberries—"

Justin:

"Cranberries, I guess?"

Sydnee:

"... Eat some cranberries." Uh, what's also interesting is there was this early form of what we'd probably think of as kind of like an energy bar—

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

... like a super food called pemmican.

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

And it—

Justin:

Like the jerky brand?

Sydnee:

Huh?

Justin:

There's a jerky brand called Pemmican.

Sydnee:

I didn't know that.

Justin:

Yeah, it makes sense. That tracks.

Sydnee:

Well, this is where this... I am certain this is where this came from. So, it was ground, dried deer meat, and then you mix it with cranberries, fat tallow, and then you pack it all in an animal skin, and you would take that with you if you had like a long journey or something, and it was like a, you know, nutrient-rich superfood. It was— was like an energy bar or protein bar, yeah, that you would... that you would take with you. So, that's where that comes from.

Justin:

Oh.

Sydnee:

Um, and pemmican was a very popular food, and— and I read... As I was reading about cranberries, there was a lot of talk about the first Thanksgiving and were cranberries really there. There are a lot of people who want to know, like, were cranberries really at the first Thanksgiving?

Justin:

A lot of Google autofill, autocomplete searches for that.

Sydnee:

Yes. I don't know if cranberries were there for the first Thanksgiving. If they were there, it may have been in this form. It would not be odd to think that someone would have had this substance, this pemmican on them. So, so maybe they were in that form. Um, but, like I said, the Native Americans

were eating cranberries, they were aware of them, so who knows. I don't know. Uh, when the Europeans arrived, they... that was when we first see them called cranberries.

Justin:

Now, what?

Sydnee:

Well, they called them crane berries.

Justin:

Crane berries?

Sydnee:

Because the, um, the flowers of the... of the berries, the flowers on the cranberry plant looked like the, like the head and neck area of sandhill cranes.

Justin:

I'm double-checking this right now.

Sydnee:

Why?

Justin:

What?

Sydnee:

Now, just for sure?

Justin:

No, not the fact. I'm double-checking their—

Sydnee:

Oh, you wanna look at them?

Justin:

... their...

Sydnee:

So, therefore, they were called crane berries, and then eventually that just kind of became shortened to cranberries.

Justin:

All right. Yeah, I get it. I do. I get it, okay. All right, yeah, okay, I can see it. I can see it.

Sydnee:

There were lots of other names for them. One of my favorites that I found were bear berries.

Justin:

Because bears like to eat them?

Sydnee:

Because bears like to eat them. [laughs]

Justin:

Okay, I've known a lot of bears in my time. I cannot imagine there's a lot of berries that where bears are like, "No thanks. I'm good. I'm looking for cranberries right now."

Sydnee:

When you say you've known a lot of bears in your time, do you mean like—

Justin:

Yogi. Just one.

Sydnee:

Oh, like on TV bears?

Justin:

Like, fictional bears, but like, not a—

Sydnee:

Like, fictional bears.

Justin:

I don't hang with real bears.

Sydnee:

Well, Yogi wasn't a big fan of cranberries.

Justin:

He wouldn't have turned his snout up at them though.

Sydnee:

He liked picnic baskets, I believe.

Justin:

Yeah, he liked pic-a-nic baskets, but if there was... I mean, there's food in them, he didn't eat the basket lid, so like... [laughter] He probably... If there was cranberry relish in there, he would probably enjoy it. [laughter] Thanksgiving picnics.

Sydnee:

I don't remember Winnie the Pooh eating cranberries. He did eat honey though.

Justin:

[imitating Yogi Bear] "I wish people would bring cranberries other times of the year. I cannot go to the store. [laughter] It's only Thanksgiving pic-nics, Boo-Boo." Thanksgiving picnic's a big thing.

Sydnee:

Um...

Justin:

Probably not. I've never heard of that happening. I'm sure it does somewhere.

Sydnee:

Uh, as Europeans began to kind of adopt... They arrived in the New World and found cranberries to be yummy, first of all, and so they adopted them into like their—

Justin:

You ever eaten one straight though?

Sydnee:

No.

Justin:

No, I can't imagine eating that. Yeah.

Sydnee:

I imagine it's too tart, I would think. But that's why... But, I mean, even like I mentioned, it was traditionally being prepared with something sweet.

Justin:

Yeah, that makes sense.

Sydnee:

So, you know, they probably would've gotten that too. Uh, they began to expand like the medicinal uses for them as well because they were observed to be this kind of like super food and that, you know, they were prized. And so, throughout the 17th century, we see this expansion to, like, liverish use, which back then could have meant anything, like, it didn't necessarily mean it had anything to do with your liver.

So, if you were kind of grouchy, maybe somebody would tell you to eat some cranberries, you know? If you were really puny or weak, or just get tired a lot, it's a bad liver. Here's some cranberries. Of course, like blood disorders, anything that made people lose weight, lose their appetite, so maybe even like cancer before we knew cancer, those kinds of things, you may have been prescribed cranberries, and anything wrong with your stomach...

Justin:

Cranberries.

Sydnee:

Eat some cranberries.

Justin:

Um, you know, cranberry sauce did make its way back to the UK in some form, but it—their version is unsurprisingly a lot more, um, sour than ours is sweet.

Sydnee:

Is it like a chutney?

Justin:

I bet, yeah. I don't know.

Sydnee:

I'd read that there was like a cranberry chutney as well.

Justin:

It wouldn't... It doesn't surprise me that theirs is less sweet. The folks, British folks, I love you, and I love Montgomery Barry for sure, no doubt. I've cooked a ton of her recipes. You always got to up that sugar. Like, I just, everything's gotta be up by about 20% because y'all... Listen, it's okay to put more in. Trust me.

Sydnee:

It might be us. We might have the opposite problem. We like things too sweet.

Justin:

Probably, but like, that's all a matter—

Sydnee:

We do. We like things that are sweeter.

Justin:

That's all perspective though. I'm an American, I get to say that they're doing it wrong. They probably think I'm doing it wrong. That's fine. It's kind of strong special partnership that our—keep our countries in sync.

Sydnee:

I read that Julia Child was a big fan of cranberry chutney.

Justin:

Sounds about right.

Sydnee:

And it had like her own recipe for it, and it was like a little bit of tart, a little bit of sweet, a little bit of heat, it had everything.

Justin:

Sounds like the perfect super food.

Sydnee:

Mm-hmm.

Justin:

So, wait, cranberries... You've talked some about eating them and fake things, but like, are they not good for something?

Sydnee:

There are some things they're good for, and I want to tell you about that. But first, why don't you come with me to the billing department?

Justin:

Let's go.

[ad break]

Justin:

So, Syd, you were gonna tell me about real stuff that cranberries do.

Sydnee:

So, yes. If you... If you have ever thought of cranberries as medicine, um, most people—

Justin:

And I have, which is why I'm sick a lot of the time and don't seem to get better.

Sydnee:

If you think of cranberries as the only medicine, I'm surprised you've made it this long, but... [laughter] But, most people, I think, are vaguely aware that there's something to do with cranberries and the urinary tract.

Justin:

Right.

Sydnee:

Right?

Justin:

Yes.

Sydnee:

I've had that said to me many times by patients that, "Well, I thought I was getting an infection, so I was drinking a lot of cranberry juice," or, "I thought I had a kidney stone, so I drank a lot of cranberry juice," or, "I was diagnosed with these things, so I also drank a lot of cranberry juice thinking that would fix it." Um, this dates back to, like, the 18th century.

Justin:

Hmm, that's troubling.

Sydnee:

Yeah, and that's when we first thought cranberries, especially when juiced, but cranberries in any form could be used to treat or maybe prevent an infection of the urinary tract. They were kind of thought to be antibacterial, and I referenced this. You know, we had this concept that they were good for wounds, that they were good for inflammation and infection. Anyway, and then there was also this belief that people started to have that it somehow acidified your urine—

Justin:

Mm-hmm.

Sydnee:

... and that that would kill the bacteria as well, and so that that was how it worked. Um, and then a lot of people used it, and some people felt like it treated or prevented or whatever their UTIs, and so then it was... then it perpetuated. This theory was later found to be wrong, because they had this theory based on hippuric acid and the amount in your urine, and it was tested, and... Anyway, that was wrong. But.

Justin:

Right.

Sydnee:

But.

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

Cranberries also contain a substance that can help to prevent bacteria, specifically, they've done a lot of studies with E. Coli bacteria, that can prevent E. Coli from attaching to the outside of your cells, so to tissues.

Justin:

I love you. I think that you are arguing semantics at this point if you do not think that that's antibacterial. That's antibacterial, right?

Sydnee:

Yeah, I mean, like, it's definitely not pro-bacteria.

Justin:

It keeps the bacteria—right. You're correct, right.

Sydnee:

But it's not, I mean, it doesn't do anything to kill the bacteria necessarily. It doesn't stop their growth. It just stops them from attaching to—

Justin:

But, your whole body's tissue, so if it can't attach to tissue, it's just gonna go on its merry way. You're fine.

Sydnee:

Right. No, that's—well, yes, and—

Justin:

You know, it's like the catch and release. It's a more humane way of dealing with bacteria. [laughter] "Move along, nothing for you here friend."

Sydnee:

Yes, that is very true.

Justin:

"Sincerely me, cranberries."

Sydnee:

It's much better than like sticky traps for bacteria.

Justin:

Right.

Sydnee:

Um, this... There have been studies that show that drinking cranberry juice... well, actually, taking cranberries. The juice things get more questionable because there's not as much of this substance in the way the cranberries are processed in the juice, and then you also get like sugar and stuff, so the juice is actually probably not as good as maybe like a cranberry supplement or some other form of cranberry, but it can maybe help reduce

the frequency of urinary tract infections. It doesn't treat a urinary tract infection. Once it's there, it's there.

Justin:

Too late for cranberries.

Sydnee:

Exactly. Once you've got an infection, you got an infection. And it isn't 100%, so I'm not saying that you eat a cranberry a day, and you're never gonna get a urinary tract infection, but there have been some compelling studies that show this effect that it prevents the bacteria from adhering like they usually do, and the result is maybe you get fewer urinary tract infections.

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

And for most people, it seems like a kind of harmless thing to try, especially if you do get recurring urinary tract infections. So, there is... there is some truth to this for UTIs, specifically for that. But, when you see success in one area, the uses of cranberries for other things of course are gonna keep growing, um, and to meet this demand, people had to actually start cultivating more cranberries, right?

Justin:

Mm-hmm. Right.

Sydnee:

Because we're still... I mean, we're still talking about like wild cranberry growing. Cultivation of the cranberry began in 1816, shortly after Captain Henry Hall, who was a Revolutionary War veteran of Massachusetts, noticed that the wild cranberries in his bogs grew better when sand blew over them.

Justin:

So, he just moved them to places where that could happen easier?

Sydnee:

Yeah, and spread sand on them.

Justin:

Wow.

Sydnee:

There you go.

Justin:

I can't think of a lot of things where spreading sand on it is like helpful, but I guess.

Sydnee:

Put some sand on it.

Justin:

Put some sand on it. Maybe that will fix it.

Sydnee:

I mean, if you want a beach.

Justin:

That's true, Sydnee, a lot of sand together does make a beach.

Sydnee:

I'm just saying, if you have a place where there isn't sand, and you put a lot of sand there, eventually it will be a beach, I guess.

Justin:

I guess this, like, caught on, and—

Sydnee:

Or a desert.

Justin:

Or a desert.

Sydnee:

You need water, too.

Justin:

Whoa, you went too far!

Sydnee:

Oh no.

Justin:

Take some of the sand out.

Sydnee:

Take the sand out, that's not... You went past beach into desert. Right now, just a little bit of sand, you get cranberry bog. Um, of course his technique was copied after he was successful, uh, and so you started to see more and more people growing cranberries, and as cranberries grew, their use spread. Um, they also began to ship them from the U.S. back to the... Can I say the Old World?

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

Back to Europe.

Justin:

Back to Europe.

Sydnee:

Uh, and, uh, one kind of interesting anecdote that came with that because then people started eating them and, you know, using them for medicinal purposes and everything back in Europe, but, uh, there was a shipwreck off the coast of Holland where a bunch of crates of cranberries went overboard, and they washed up on the shore of this island, Terschelling Island, and they started taking root because there was... It was a sandy, beachy area on the edge of this island, um, and cranberries like to grow there, and they have been cultivating cranberries on this island ever since from this just random shipwreck.

Justin:

That's so weird. Like, oh, dunk, a cottage industry just washed up, no problem. [laughs]

Sydnee:

"Look at all of these crates of cranberries. What should we do with them?"
"Leave them there. Watch what happens."

Justin:

[laughs] Um, I've heard, but you mentioned like an actual use for them, but I've heard cranberries, like, recommended for lots of stuff.

Sydnee:

You'll hear cranberries... I think blueberries kind of get this same rap too, I don't know if my... I would have guessed blueberries before cranberries, but the antioxidant thing—

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

... is what a lot of people will tout, is that there are substances in cranberries that are antioxidants, so they protect your cells, they protect you from... your DNA from damage, they help to repair damage that's done to your DNA from, like, especially carcinogens, is the thought. Um, so people will say that they can help prevent heart disease. There are people who say they help prevent or cure cancer which is always problematic—

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

... when you start to hear that. And, I mean, you'll hear people say that like, "I use it for my arthritis. It's great for my eczema. It's really good for gout. Nope, it's great for asthma, but also gallbladder disease."

Justin:

Uh oh, they're starting pile up a little bit.

Sydnee:

Yeah, they're starting to pile up. It's becoming a little bit of a cure-all.

Justin:

Which they still do cure nothing because once you've already got the thing, it does not cure it, so—

Sydnee:

Yeah, they still cure nothing, so that they think—

Justin:

Okay, technically, semantically, we're on solid ground.

Sydnee:

Yes. They fit our definition, our theory on cure-alls. There isn't evidence for a lot of these things I've just named. I mean, just because something is an antioxidant, just because you can prove that in a laboratory, does not mean that it prevents or cures cancer in a human, um, which everybody in the scientific community knows that, but it can... If that is presented as a layperson the wrong way, it may be very misleading.

Justin:

Right.

Sydnee:

And there are certainly a lot of misleading things out there, not... I will say this. If you're going to talk about cures that maybe don't really work, but like what their risks are, cranberries are pretty, pretty low-risk.

Justin:

They're cheap.

Sydnee:

And maybe delicious.

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

Um, and if you are still seeking conventional medicine, I think you're okay. There is some interesting other just kind of compelling tidbits. Maybe they're good for gum disease and plaque. Um, they've looked into kind of the same idea I talked about, like, preventing bacteria from adhering to the tissues inside your bladder—

Justin:

Yeah, it tracks.

Sydnee:

... that maybe they can do some of the same things with some of the bacteria that might grow in your mouth, um, and in addition, there's a certain bacteria, uh, *Helicobacter pylori*, *H. pylori*, which causes stomach ulcers, and it may also do the same thing to that to help prevent it from attaching to the lining of your gut and causing ulcers.

Justin:

Yeah, I see.

Sydnee:

So, these are still kind of tentative, early studies. I mean, nobody's... As we've said many times on this show before, when we're talking about something like cranberries, you're not going to have like a major pharmaceutical company doing a, you know, multi-million dollar, double-blind study.

Justin:

Sure, right. This is like, "Go eat some, I don't know. We're not selling them."

Sydnee:

Exactly, exactly. So, you're not gonna see the kind of robust data behind something like cranberries that you would see behind, you know, a medication that is being prescribed and— and sold and, you know, made by a pharmaceutical company. You're just not gonna find it.

Justin:

And is there anything people need to like... I guess, are there any other facts about cranberries, any other dangers... I guess they're not as dangerous.

Sydnee:

Well, there's not... I wouldn't call them dangerous, certainly. I mean, we all eat... Most of us have eaten cranberries and done okay unless you're like allergic to them or something in which case, like, don't.

Justin:

Don't. Yeah, don't.

Sydnee:

Um, it can interfere with some blood thinners, so if you're on a blood thinner, it can actually make your blood even thinner, uh, because it interferes with the metabolism of them and makes them last longer.

Justin:

Dang, cranberries!

Sydnee:

Well, there's actually a lot of foods that can do that with some blood thinners. But, what I would is that if you are on medication like that, and you're considering, like, trying to mega dose cranberries for some reason—

Justin:

[laughter]

Sydnee:

... I would talk to a doctor. I'm not saying you can't ever eat cranberries. I'm just saying, if you are on a medication like that, I would talk to a doctor about it. They can upset your stomach if you eat enough of them.

Justin:

Okay, Syd, you're just—

Sydnee:

Maybe true for like all food.

Justin:

Yeah, like everything.

Sydnee:

Like, everything. I mean, if you drink too much water, you'll feel kind of lousy, so... And they may, again, if you eat too many of them, increase your likelihood to make a kidney stone, um, but I think these are probably fairly minor risks and specific to certain patients and populations. I think if you like cranberries...

Justin:

Have fun. Have fun out there.

Sydnee:

You know, eat your cranberries, but if you think that cranberries are like the secret... the secret cure that nobody has ever thought of before, well...

Justin:

Well, sorry.

Sydnee:

Sorry, no.

Justin:

There's probably other podcasts you would enjoy more. Folks—

Sydnee:

[laughs] They're just yummy.

Justin:

They're just good. That's gonna do it for us. Uh, Thank you so much for listening. Thank The Taxpayers for letting us use their song Medicines as the intro and outro of our program. Uh, we wanna welcome to Earth, uh, Henry McElroy.

Sydnee:

Yay. Baby Henry's here.

Justin:

He's a... Baby Henry, Griffin and Rachel had baby Henry today, the day we're recording this. So, welcome Henry.

Sydnee:

Welcome, Henry.

Justin:

As you make your way through the Sawbones backlogs as a teen, uh, I hope you're enjoying the show.

Sydnee:

Congratulations, Griffin and Rachel.

Justin:

Congrats to them.

Sydnee:

Strong work.

Justin:

Thanks to, uh, the Maximum Fun network for having us as a part of their extended podcasting family. There's a lot of great shows you can check out there, and they're all waiting for you at maximumfun.org. Uh, I did want to mention, by the way, Sydnee's other show, uh, Still Buffering, uh, just added t-shirts for their show, and we've got t-shirts too which we don't mention nearly enough. Uh, both shirts designed by your sister.

Sydnee:

By my sister Teylor.

Justin:

Taylor, and then you can find those at TopatoCo, T-O-P-A-T-O-C-O.

Sydnee:

Yes.

Justin:

Yes. Yeah. TopatoCo.

Sydnee:

Maybe. Yeah.

Justin:

What? Yeah, that's right! Don't... See, you're giving me the yips, making me think that... making me think I don't know. No, I got it. Yeah, that's right.

Sydnee:

Good job.

Justin:

TopatoCo, yes. Got it. Topatoco.com.

Sydnee:

Go there if you like the shirts.

Justin:

Go there, you can find all that stuff.

Sydnee:

There are holidays coming.

Justin:

Holidays are coming.

Sydnee:

If there are holidays coming for you—

Justin:

Goose is getting fat.

Sydnee:

Yeah. Where you would like to give or receive gifts, consider these.

Justin:

Do it.

Sydnee:

Uh, can I thank a few people.

Justin:

Please do.

Sydnee:

We received some gifts.

Justin:

Yes.

Sydnee:

Uh, Morgan, thank you for the aloe drink. We have not tried it yet.

Justin:

I haven't touched that yet.

Sydnee:

I have cooled it. It is now chilled in the refrigerator. We will check it out and let you know. Uh, thank you to... I cannot read your handwriting. I know your initial is J, and you know who you are because you made our daughter, Charlie, a lovely little blue hat—

Justin:

She loves it.

Sydnee:

... and it is adorable on her, and you also sent us some stamps, some anaphylaxis stamps, and thank you. J, I wish I could figure out what your first name was, but... Your script is lovely but also very doctor-esque.

Justin:

Yeah. [laughs]

Sydnee:

Um, and thank you to Beth for sending us a copy of not just any book but her book, *Outbreak*, and an autographed copy no less. Thank you.

Justin:

Fantastic. Um, folks, that's gonna do it for us. Until next week, my name is Justin McElroy.

Sydnee:

I'm Sydnee McElroy.

Justin:

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

[theme music plays]

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