

## **Sawbones 77: The Four Humors**

Published February 25, 2015

Listen here on [themcelroy.family](http://themcelroy.family)

### **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 music plays]

### **Justin:**

Hello, everybody. Welcome to Sawbones, a marital tour of misguided medicine. I'm your co-host, Justin McElroy.

### **Sydnee:**

And I'm Sydnee McElroy.

### **Justin:**

Hey, Syd.

### **Sydnee:**

Hey, Justin. Um, I think you're gonna be excited for our topic today.

### **Justin:**

Oh, yeah?

### **Sydnee:**

Yeah. Because I think it's quite humorous.

### **Justin:**

Oh. Um, well, that's good. I mean, that's kind of what we do on the show so I'm happy to hear that it's a humorous, uh, you know, topic. Uh...

### **Sydnee:**

No, but, I mean, I think this one especially will be very humorous.

**Justin:**

Okay. I mean, that's kind of my department. And so that's more of me— up to me to, like, decide and make sure it's funny but I'm glad to hear...

**Sydnee:**

Well, but it... This one, I mean, will be, I think, filled with humor.

**Justin:**

Well, it's frankly not off to a great start now. Why do you think it's gonna be—

**Sydnee:**

Okay, never mind. It's about humors.

**Justin:**

Oh. About humors.

**Sydnee:**

I thought you'd get it eventually.

**Justin:**

You don't know me very well.

**Sydnee:**

It's the humors.

**Justin:**

Humors. Got it. Pun.

**Sydnee:**

Yes.

**Justin:**

Pun. Got it. I'm with you.

**Sydnee:**

Pun. The pun is the highest form of humor.

**Justin:**

Of comedy. Sure. Of humor. So one—

**Sydnee:**

[laughs] Did you get it?

**Justin:**

Okay. I'm with you.

**Sydnee:**

I threw in another one there at the end.

**Justin:**

Now, I'm with you.

**Sydnee:**

Yeah.

**Justin:**

I'm on board.

**Sydnee:**

I thought, you know, we talk about the idea of humors and the four humors a lot in our show.

**Justin:**

Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:**

Just kind of in passing, so I thought we should finally kind of take a step back and maybe talk about, you know, what the four humors actually were, what the system of medicine that I suppose you could call humorism...

**Justin:**

Okay.

**Sydnee:**

... really is.

**Justin:**

I, um, so where did, uh, did... Where'd we come up with this one?

**Sydnee:**

Well, before we talk about it, I thought we should thank someone who suggested it and I think a lot of people have mentioned this to us before. Actually asked us, like, "Hey, have you done one on the humors yet?" But somebody who mentioned that we should do this a long time ago is, um, Chris.

**Justin:**

Grant. My boss.

**Sydnee:**

Yes. Well, I didn't know if you'd wanna...

**Justin:**

No, that's fine. I'll blow up his spot.

**Sydnee:**

Okay. So thank you, Chris.

**Justin:**

Thank you, Chris. Other people recommended this topic but he's the only one of you who will fire me if I don't mention his name specifically, so thank you, Chris.

**Sydnee:**

Justin has to mention his name at least three times a day...

**Justin:**

It's the law.

**Sydnee:**

... in a podcast form.

**Justin:**

Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:**

Or else he fires him.

**Justin:**

That's why I do so many podcasts.

**Sydnee:**

[laughs]

**Justin:**

To get all the mentions of Chris in that I need to do.

**Sydnee:**

So let's talk about humorism.

**Justin:**

Okay.

**Sydnee:**

So it's an old system of medicine. It dates back to, probably, Hippocrates. I mean, a lot of people during that time period were talking about— were probably influencing this concept of medicine. I don't wanna say that it was all just Hippocrates. But he was one of the first ones to write it down and so we'll give him credit.

**Justin:**

Okay.

**Sydnee:**

Um, this... What's cool about this, I think, is that it was so practiced by the Greeks. The Romans followed in this tradition. The Indian Ayurvedic system of medicine, it sort of takes it and there's a twist on it. It's not identical, uh, but you see this humorism as the basis of medical theory all the way throughout the 19th century.

**Justin:**

Hmm.

**Sydnee:**

To... I mean, that's crazy.

**Justin:**

Yeah. That this system persisted for as long as it did.

**Sydnee:**

Yes, especially with, as we're kind of gonna talk about, it's a little wild. I mean, it's definitely not just, uh, anatomical or scientific basis of thought. It's not all empiric. There's a lot of, um, maybe even a little magical thinking, some influence of the planets.

**Justin:**

Hmm.

**Sydnee:**

Stuff that's not just scientific as a way of looking at the human body.

**Justin:**

So what is it? I mean, we've talked about it a lot, like you said. But like, broadly speaking, what is it?

**Sydnee:**

Okay. So it mainly focuses around the idea that there are four fluids in your body that you have to keep in balance in order to maintain physical and mental health. So it's not just physical. It also has to do with your psychiatric health, which is... I do think is a kind of interesting point about the humors system of medicine is that it, um, recognized the mind-body connection. I mean, intrinsically. Um, the four fluids are created...

**Justin:**

Blood.

**Sydnee:**

Well—

**Justin:**

Pee pee.

**Sydnee:**

What?

**Justin:**

Blood, pee pee, and air.

**Sydnee:**

That's a fluid? Air is a fluid in your...?

**Justin:**

Blood, pee pee, liquid air, and...

**Sydnee:**

Liquid air.

**Justin:**

Liquid air and snot.

**Sydnee:**

Is that your guess?

**Justin:**

Blood, pee pee, liquid air, and snot.

**Sydnee:**

Okay. That's wrong.

**Justin:**

Wrong. Okay.

**Sydnee:**

That's wrong. Well, I mean.

**Justin:**

Kind of good opening sell, but that was a good place to start.

**Sydnee:**

Not that the four humors were right but...

**Justin:**

Well, okay.

**Sydnee:**

But that is wrong.

**Justin:**

Right. Okay.

**Sydnee:**

No. So the four fluids that we're gonna talk about are, uh, blood, phlegm, yellow bile, and black bile.

**Justin:**

Okay.

**Sydnee:**

They are created in the liver and then they're stored in various organs. Okay? And the idea was that they are the products of digestion. There used to be this belief that as we took in food or drink or whatever, that our body went through four different, like, series of digestion. And the first time, the first digestion took place in your stomach and it actually made, like, your stool. You know. Your poop.

**Justin:**

Yeah. I'm with you. Okay. I got it.

**Sydnee:**

You looked confused.

**Justin:**



No. I know what stool is.

**Sydnee:**

Thanks.

**Justin:**

Yeah.

**Sydnee:**

The second one. The second digestion would release the four humors. It took place in your liver and it would release the, you know, the four fluids that we talked about. The order in which the humors arise reflects how important they are and how inter— you know, how vital they are to your wellbeing.

**Justin:**

Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:**

Um, just in case you wondered, the third and fourth digestions, uh, make pee and then sweat, I think.

**Justin:**

Okay.

**Sydnee:**

So...

**Justin:**

Okay. Got it.

**Sydnee:**

They don't. But...

**Justin:**

They don't.

**Sydnee:**

This was the belief at the time.

**Justin:**

Okay.

**Sydnee:**

That your body, like, took in stuff and then digested it at different places. Like, I think the fourth digestion takes place in your skin or something.

**Justin:**

Ew. Okay.

**Sydnee:**

So... And the third, I think the third was in your blood vessels. So like, no. This doesn't really happen.

**Justin:**

Right.

**Sydnee:**

Anyway. So the humor— The order in which the humors arose was first blood, which was seen as, like, the richest in nutrient and so you had the most of it in your body. The thing you had the most of was blood. And...

**Justin:**

Okay. Well, that makes a certain kind of sense.

**Sydnee:**

Yeah. So your liver broke stuff down, blood came out first. And it was filled with all kinds of good stuff that you needed. Second was phlegm. And it's important that when we talk about phlegm in this context that you understand it's not just like... [coughing noises]

**Justin:**

[laughs]

**Sydnee:**

[laughs and hocks a loogie]

**Justin:**

Yeah. Oh, no, no. That's pleasant. Keep that coming.

**Sydnee:**

Yeah. I thought everybody listening would like that.

**Justin:**

It's really...

**Sydnee:**

You want me to keep hocking stuff?

**Justin:**

Really. Enjoy.

**Sydnee:**

No. So it's not just that. It's not just, you know, mucus. Phlegm was kind of this intangible, clearish substance that definitely existed in the body and, yes, could come in the form of, like, saliva and mucus and that kind of thing but was also just there and you didn't always see it but could be responsible for all kinds of ills. So it was more than just phlegm.

**Justin:**

Okay.

**Sydnee:**

Then there was yellow bile. Oh, and phlegm was also— it also did have some nutrients in it and you needed a fair amount of phlegm in your body. Uh, the next thing that came out was yellow bile and you don't need a lot of yellow bile, is the thought. You need a little bit to help you function.

**Justin:**

Now, what— Would they have ever seen yellow bile? Like, is there an actual yellow bile in the body that they're referring to?

**Sydnee:**

Well...

**Justin:**

Or is it, like, jaundice?

**Sydnee:**

Well, that is what the— That is where they're coming from there. So if somebody were, like, to throw up and we talk about somebody throwing up bile.

**Justin:**

Okay. Yeah.

**Sydnee:**

You would see like, kind of a yellowish fluid.

**Justin:**

Okay.

**Sydnee:**

Or if somebody turned yellow because they had liver disease and they were jaundiced. So they were probably basing it on bile. You know?

**Justin:**

Right.

**Sydnee:**

Somebody may... Or somebody who has an elevated bilirubin and so they turn yellow. So they're probably basing on this concept but it wasn't, I mean, their idea of it wasn't entirely correct. Does that make sense?

**Justin:**

Yeah.

**Sydnee:**

Um, and then finally, you make black bile. That was the thing that you needed the least amount of. Um, and you stored everything that you didn't need and the reason is that black bile was, uh, nutrient poor. It didn't do a lot for you and too much— You could tip the balance really easily. Black bile,

too much of it could make you really, like, depressing and like, Eeyore probably had too much black bile.

**Justin:**

[imitating Eeyore] I got too much black bile.

**Sydnee:**

[laughs] That's a good way to think about it.

**Justin:**

Okay. Remember Eeyore whenever you think of black bile.

**Sydnee:**

Which I'm sure you do often.

**Justin:**

Yeah.

**Sydnee:**

As to where this came from, because I mean, you got to wonder, like, so we saw somebody bleed and we thought, "Okay, well, they've got blood in there... Blood does something."

**Justin:**

Check.

**Sydnee:**

And then they spit and you were like, "Hey, there's some phlegm."

**Justin:**

"Now, was that blood? No."

**Sydnee:**

"No."

**Justin:**

"It was different. It looks different."

**Sydnee:**

"It looks different. Let's call it something else." Um, I could see the yellow bile showing up somewhere.

**Justin:**

Well, you were yellow for some reason so that...

**Sydnee:**

Yeah.

**Justin:**

They... You know, they must... Although, you would think they would think it was pee pee. Wouldn't you?

**Sydnee:**

Yeah, that's true. And they didn't connect it with that.

**Justin:**

No. Weird. Maybe they were better hydrated than we are.

**Sydnee:**

Yeah.

**Justin:**

So they didn't get a lot of yellow pee pee. I don't know.

**Sydnee:**

So they didn't— So their pee was nice and clear.

**Justin:**

That seems crazy.

**Sydnee:**

Although, I'm certain that would be considered a symptom of— If your yellow bile was too high, your pee pee would be darker.

**Justin:**

Right.

**Sydnee:**

Absolutely. Um, but then the... I don't know where the black bile comes from in terms of their belief in black bile. But there is a theory, uh, there are a lot of theories. But one theory that I particularly liked so I'm gonna tell you about it. A Swedish physician came up with it in the 1920s trying to study the system of humors and think, like, why did people buy this? And so he thought it was from if you take blood and let it just sit out. Like, in a container.

**Justin:**

Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:**

Out in the open air for a while, fresh from the human body without any kind of, you know, like, when we put— When we draw your blood and put it in a test tube, there can be stuff in there that's gonna help the blood like, separate out in certain ways or preserve certain chemicals in it.

**Justin:**

Right.

**Sydnee:**

So you just take fresh blood, set it out, and then it separates out so that there is like, a dark clotted part. Like, your blood will clot. So like, that could be maybe what the black bile was thought to be.

**Justin:**

So like, scabs.

**Sydnee:**

Yeah. Sort of like scabs.

**Justin:**

Scabby material.

**Sydnee:**

Or have you ever seen, like, a blood clot?

**Justin:**

No.

**Sydnee:**

It gets darker. That's the point.

**Justin:**

Where would I have seen a blood clot?

**Sydnee:**

Well, I mean, I see them pretty frequently.

**Justin:**

Sure, sure.

**Sydnee:**

[laughs]

**Justin:**

Where would I have seen a blood... You know me pretty well. What of the media that I ingest do you think I would've searched out?

**Sydnee:**

When you get your nose bleeds.

**Justin:**

Uh-huh.

**Sydnee:**

It clots eventually.

**Justin:**

Okay. Yeah. Uh, fine. I'll grant you that. You got me.

**Sydnee:**



And it's darker.

**Justin:**

Okay.

**Sydnee:**

So you could imagine. Black bile.

**Justin:**

Thanks for bringing that up, by the way. Super, super appreciate that.

**Sydnee:**

That you didn't wanna ruin your cool Danny Zuko image that you don't get...

**Justin:**

Cool dude. My nose bleed-free cool dude lifestyle is now on blast.

**Sydnee:**

There was a— So, okay. So if you separate out the blood, at the bottom, there's the dark clotted part. There would be a layer of, like, red blood. Like, red blood cells. So that would look like blood. There might be a white-ish layer sometimes or at least a more clear layer that could be like, white blood cells or stuff or if there's other substances in the blood so you may see something a little, kind of whitish that you could mistake for phlegm. And then there's the yellow-ish serum, which you could mistake for yellow bile, which is part of the thought is that maybe yellow bile was actually the serum, you know?

**Justin:**

Okay.

**Sydnee:**

In our blood. Um, so this is one theory as to where did we come up with these four fluids, who knows? So let's talk about the four fluids a little more.

**Justin:**

Okay.

**Sydnee:**

So first of all, the black bile. Because it's more than just that it's in your body. It was connected to all sorts of, uh, temperaments and the seasons and there were planetary influences on each one of these four humors. For instance, black bile was a cold and dry humor. It was seen as, uh, good for building like, solid structures. So like, you needed a little bit of black bile because it helped to form your teeth and your bones and like, your connective tissue. So that's why you had to have some of it.

**Justin:**

Okay.

**Sydnee:**

Um, they associated it with the element earth. Each one was associated with an element, so black bile was associated with earth. It was associated with the season autumn.

**Justin:**

[laughs] Okay.

**Sydnee:**

So your black bile will raise in the autumn, automatically. Just in response to, you know, the seasons.

**Justin:**

Sure.

**Sydnee:**

And you store the excess that you don't need in your spleen.

**Justin:**

Okay. That makes sense.

**Sydnee:**

Which I would say the average person doesn't know what the spleen is for anyway, so...

**Justin:**

No. You're just guessing.

**Sydnee:**

Yeah. So why not for storing black bile?

**Justin:**

Most people are probably surprised they have a spleen.

**Sydnee:**

Yeah. You do. I mean, unless it's been removed. Um, okay. Yellow bile is hot and dry. So not cold and dry. It's hot and dry and yellow bile was seen as good for digesting things. So I could see where that connection could come if you thought it had something to do with the liver and blah, blah, blah and is connected through the GI tract. So it was good for the digestion of various substances. It was associated with the element fire.

**Justin:**

Ooh. Spicy.

**Sydnee:**

[laughs] And the season summer. That fits together. And excess yellow bile is stored in the gallbladder. Eh, you know?

**Justin:**

Okay.

**Sydnee:**

Close. Phlegm is cold and wet.

**Justin:**

[laughs]

**Sydnee:**

Yes. That's a good— That's a true statement.

**Justin:**

If you're a dog and you're sick, then it is. Yes. Correct.

**Sydnee:**

I don't know. If you spit on somebody, it's not...

**Justin:**

It's not pleasant.

**Sydnee:**

Well, I guess it's warm at first. It was good for flushing things out of your body.

**Justin:**

Okay.

**Sydnee:**

For, like, purifying your body. So like, cleaning out, like, when you spit things out or sometimes even urine, if it was really clear. You have a lot of phlegm in there. It's cleaning you out.

**Justin:**

Okay.

**Sydnee:**

Um, it's associated with water, the season winter, and excess phlegm is stored in the brain.

**Justin:**

Oh, perfect.

**Sydnee:**

So I don't know why your brain would be good for that.

**Justin:**

Yeah.

**Sydnee:**

I don't know why. I would think that would be a problem if you had a lot of phlegm in your brain.

**Justin:**

No. I don't— The brain needs that to run.

**Sydnee:**

Um, and then, finally, blood. Blood was hot and wet. It contains... It was the most important. So blood contained your heat and your vital essence. Um, and, you know, um, we're talking about a time when heat was very much associated with life and so your blood is where your heat was and if you lost it, you would die. Um, it was associated with the element air and the season spring and excess blood was stored in your heart, which, again, isn't a terrible... Yeah.

**Justin:**

It's not stored there.

**Sydnee:**

No. But...

**Justin:**

It makes a trip through there though.

**Sydnee:**

Yeah. Yeah.

**Justin:**

It takes a pit stop.

**Sydnee:**

So it's an important part of the circulatory system. And the other thing about the four humors is, like I said, you had to maintain a balance but that balance was specific to you. Everybody had a slightly different balance of the four humors that they had to maintain.

**Justin:**

There must've been somebody whose job it was, right? To just like, check those humors. Check those levels.

**Sydnee:**

Check your humor levels.

**Justin:**

Check your dipstick.

**Sydnee:**

Well, I mean, that's the thing. It's like, you couldn't exactly— There were no specific tests. There... It was kind of a feeling.

**Justin:**

Well, no. I mean, I wouldn't think so.

**Sydnee:**

An assessment. Like, "I feel like you're being really grouchy today. I feel like your black bile must be high." Um, and you might need more blood or yellow bile than I would to maintain balance. And they're, um, influenced by your age, by the time of year, by, uh, your diet, your exercise routine. And then, of course, different substances that you could take accidentally or intentionally to change the balance of your humors.

**Justin:**

Mm-hmm. Um, so what, uh, what else did the humors, like, play into?

**Sydnee:**

Well, Justin, I'm gonna tell you all about that but before I do that, why don't you take a trip down with me to the billing department?

**Justin:**

All right. Let's go.

[theme music plays]

[ad break]

**Justin:**

So, Syd. We were talking about how they can, uh, how the humors can affect your personality.

**Sydnee:**

That's right. So that... I... Like I said, I think that's one of the more interesting things about the humors is that it wasn't just your physical well-being. You know? You wouldn't just get, uh, physically ill if your humors were out of balance. They also were linked to your personality. So for instance, somebody who had too much black bile would be depressed.

**Justin:**

Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:**

Um, and this is... We actually get some terms there. People who were seen as just always having too much black bile, that was just who they were. They were somebody who, at their base line, at their perfect balance, just has a little more than extra, has a melancholic temperament.

**Justin:**

Too much black bile.

**Sydnee:**

Right.

**Justin:**

Eeyore.

**Sydnee:**

So they're melancholy.

**Justin:**

Got it.

**Sydnee:**

Yeah. So we know where that... We know that word. Uh, if you have too much yellow bile, that was thought to cause, like, anger or even derangement if you had a whole lot.

**Justin:**

So like, Winnie the Pooh is yellow and he's deranged like that. Right?

**Sydnee:**

[laughs] Do you think Winnie the Pooh is deranged?

**Justin:**

Uh, Rabbit. Would Rabbit be better from Winnie the Pooh? Rabbit. Okay. Rabbit is the one that has too much yellow bile.

**Sydnee:**

Yes.

**Justin:**

And he's angry and deranged.

**Sydnee:**

Yes.

**Justin:**

Yes.

**Sydnee:**

No, I think that works.

**Justin:**

Yeah. I wish Tigger was yellow.

**Sydnee:**

So he has a choleric temperament.

**Justin:**

That would be actually... Okay.

**Sydnee:**

No, Tigger's not yellow.

**Justin:**

Tigger's blood red.



**Sydnee:**

Yeah.

**Justin:**

That'll be important later.

**Sydnee:**

Okay. No. Rabbit would have too much yellow bile.

**Justin:**

Okay.

**Sydnee:**

Okay. Um, too much phlegm causes you to be apathetic. You're just kind of like, whatever. You're phlegmatic. If you've heard that term.

**Justin:**

Piglet? Would you put Piglet... Piglet doesn't seem to have a lot of ambitions.

**Sydnee:**

[laughs] What?

**Justin:**

Is Piglet the one that's like...

**Sydnee:**

What are you expecting from Piglet?

**Justin:**

I got— I don't know. I mean, I— You hope he has some goals. But, uh, so...

**Sydnee:**

Yeah.

**Justin:**

... phlegm is like, Piglet.

**Sydnee:**

Yeah.

**Justin:**

Okay. Got it.

**Sydnee:**

I don't know. If phlegm like Winnie the Pooh?

**Justin:**

Winnie the Pooh is phlegm like. I would say that. He doesn't have a lot of goals. I mean, once he gets his head stuck in a honey pot, he does have the goal of removing his head from the honey pot.

**Sydnee:**

Only when the honey is gone.

**Justin:**

That's true. At first, he's just kind of chilling in there. He's fine.

**Sydnee:**

Yeah.

**Justin:**

Okay. Let's say, uh, Winnie the Pooh is phlegmatic.

**Sydnee:**

I think he's kind of phlegmatic.

**Justin:**

Okay.

**Sydnee:**

Uh, and then too much blood would cause you to be really care free and happy. So Sanguine.

**Justin:**

Like Tigger.

**Sydnee:**

Yeah.

**Justin:**

Okay.

**Sydnee:**

There you go. So black bile, Eeyore. Yellow bile, [laughs] Rabbit.

**Justin:**

Rabbit.

**Sydnee:**

Phlegm...

**Justin:**

Phlegm.

**Sydnee:**

... Winnie the Pooh.

**Justin:**

Winnie the Pooh.

**Sydnee:**

And too much blood is Tigger.

**Justin:**

Tigger. Too much blood. That's the problem.

**Sydnee:**

We've just... So you can connect that. There are all kinds of nice little charts you can find online with like, the four elements and the four humors and the four seasons and they connect all of this together.

**Justin:**

Make sure to...

**Sydnee:**

And you can throw in Winnie the Pooh characters.

**Justin:**

Yeah. Just Photoshop Winnie the Pooh characters...

**Sydnee:**

Yeah.

**Justin:**

... into them, like I do, onto all of my t-shirts.

**Sydnee:**

[laughs] This... I think it's also kind of interesting...

**Justin:**

People try and make fun of my Winnie the Pooh t-shirts and I'm like, "Back off. TTFN," is what I say to them.

**Sydnee:**

He's just doing his thing.

**Justin:**

Doing my thing.

**Sydnee:**

You can't blame him for that. He's doing his thing.

**Justin:**

I got Winnie the Pooh shirts and Taz jeans.

**Sydnee:**

[laughs] All mine have Tweety Bird on them.

**Justin:**

Yeah.

**Sydnee:**

And it's like...

**Justin:**

And they look great.

**Sydnee:**

But it's Tweety Bird with attitude.

**Justin:**

Yeah. He's a little sassy. Got...

**Sydnee:**

She's like... He?

**Justin:**

Well.

**Sydnee:**

Is Tweety a he?

**Justin:**

Yeah.

**Sydnee:**

I always thought Tweety Bird was a she.

**Justin:**

What? Ugh.

**Sydnee:**

I don't know. Well, he's sassy.

**Justin:**

Doesn't matter. Pansexual bird.

**Sydnee:**

[laughs] He's like, "Don't mess with me. I'm Tweety."

**Justin:**

Yeah.

**Sydnee:**

I don't know. Whatever those t-shirts...

**Justin:**

He's pangender. I don't know. I think he's—

**Sydnee:**

Is it a— Is it a dude?

**Justin:**

I don't... I literally don't know.

**Sydnee:**

I don't know either.

**Justin:**

It doesn't matter.

**Sydnee:**

This is not an area where I'm an expert.

**Justin:**

It doesn't matter.

**Sydnee:**

I didn't learn that in medical school.

**Justin:**

Whatever, however Tweety wants to identify is Tweety's business.

**Sydnee:**

[laughs]

**Justin:**

Uh, what's— What were we saying? Sorry. I didn't mean to talk about my Taz shirts. You know how I get. [laughs]

**Sydnee:**

I used to have a Tasmanian Devil matching hat and shirt that I wore with red jean shorts.

**Justin:**

[laughs]

**Sydnee:**

[laughs] And I thought it was a really cool look. I modeled it in a mall fashion show once.

**Justin:**

Oh, my God.

**Sydnee:**

[laughs]

**Justin:**

That's the most '90s thing I've ever heard in my entire life.

**Sydnee:**

Uh, the four humors also kind of mimicked your lifespan. Um, so there was... Children were seen as having excess blood so they were very sanguine so they were like, happy and it's spring and they're kids and yay!

**Justin:**

Yay!

**Sydnee:**

"We have a lot of blood!" And then you move onto your adult years and you are choleric. So you're angry, you're passionate, you're like, frustrated. You've got all this...

**Justin:**

Right. Right. Right.

**Sydnee:**

... stuff, you're worrying about stuff all the time. Like, you're, you know, you're like, "Urgh. I've got lots of yellow bile."

**Justin:**

"Urgh. I'm gonna vote!"

**Sydnee:**

"I'm gonna take on the world."

**Justin:**

"And vote."

**Sydnee:**

And it's summer.

**Justin:**

Got it.

**Sydnee:**

And then you're, like, middle aged, I guess. And then like, stuff starts to, like, worry you and you're like, "Everything is really hard and I'm kind of depressed and, like, am I ever gonna get to retire?" And...

**Justin:**

Okay. I know...

**Sydnee:**

"I got a lot of black bile. I'm kind of melancholic."

**Justin:**

I found my people.

**Sydnee:**



I'm just like...

**Justin:**

Where I'm at now.

**Sydnee:**

Oh, my gosh. I'm just...

**Justin:**

All right.

**Sydnee:**

I'm very Eeyore right now.

**Justin:**

Yeah.

**Sydnee:**

Just very, you know.

**Justin:**

Okay.

**Sydnee:**

Laying guilt trips on my kids and everything.

**Justin:**

Sure.

**Sydnee:**

And then finally, uh, and it's autumn. And then, finally, you move onto winter. You're kind of at peace.

**Justin:**

That sounds nice.

**Sydnee:**

You're filled with phlegm. [laughs] You're just overflowing with phlegm.

**Justin:**

Ugh.

**Sydnee:**

And you are just like, "I don't really care. I'm kind of apathetic. Like..."

**Justin:**

I'm so...

**Sydnee:**

I'm at peace.

**Justin:**

I'm so phlegmy.

**Sydnee:**

Um, it's over.

**Justin:**

It's wonderful.

**Sydnee:**

I'm just filled with phlegm.

**Justin:**

I got to get air.

**Sydnee:**

You kids with your angry blood and your melancholy moods. You just chill out.

**Justin:**

Your hot blood.

**Sydnee:**

I don't have time for that anymore. [laughs]

**Justin:**

No time.

**Sydnee:**

It's winter. I'm gonna sit in my rocking chair and chill out.

**Justin:**

I'm gonna watch NCIS.

**Sydnee:**

[laughs]

**Justin:**

Just hang.

**Sydnee:**

There's, like, eight NCISes I can watch.

**Justin:**

Yeah. I've got a full schedule.

**Sydnee:**

[laughs] Um.

**Justin:**

All I want to be at that point in my life, I just wanna be chilled out, watching NCIS and not caring. That's not asking so much. Is it?

**Sydnee:**

[laughs] I don't think I've moved out of the yellow bile yet.

**Justin:**

Yeah.

**Sydnee:**

I still get angry.

**Justin:**

Hang in there as long as you can. Trust me, sister.

**Sydnee:**

[laughs]

**Justin:**

It's all Eeyores out here.

**Sydnee:**

Uh.

**Justin:**

Cling to that warm blood.

**Sydnee:**

[laughs] Well, you can fix it. So if you've got...

**Justin:**

Oh, thank God!

**Sydnee:**

... too much of something...

**Justin:**

Where have you been for the past three years?

**Sydnee:**

... you can feel better. You just have to eat the right foods or take the right medicines to get rid of a humor or get more of a humor.

**Justin:**

I've been in my 30s for four years and you're just now telling me this.

**Sydnee:**

So like, do you... So if you wanna get phlegmatic, just eat some cold food.

**Justin:**

Okay.

**Sydnee:**

And then you'll make more phlegm.

**Justin:**

Popsicles?

**Sydnee:**

Yes. Go eat a box of popsicles.

**Justin:**

I don't wanna skip to the old person part if I can do something to do the young person thing.

**Sydnee:**

Okay. Eat more hot foods and then you'll have more yellow bile.

**Justin:**

Spicy.

**Sydnee:**

There you go.

**Justin:**

Yeah. Love it.

**Sydnee:**

Yeah. Um.

**Justin:**

Let's get pad thai tonight.

**Sydnee:**

If you have too much... That sounds good.

**Justin:**

It sounds really good.

**Sydnee:**

Okay.

**Justin:**

It's really spicy, man. Okay?

**Sydnee:**

Yeah. Back to the podcast that we're recording. [laughs]

**Justin:**

That is a bit on the podcast. I just did a podcast joke.

**Sydnee:**

[laughs]

**Justin:**

That is serious. That I do want pad thai tonight but like, I want it to be spicy to fit in with the joke we did.

**Sydnee:**

Okay. We'll get some Thai House.

**Justin:**

Okay.

**Sydnee:**

Sounds good.

**Justin:**

Okay.

**Sydnee:**

Um, bloodletting, of course, was the best way to get rid of excess blood if you have too much blood.

**Justin:**

[laughs] Yeah. I was wondering when this bad boy was gonna...

**Sydnee:**

If you're too sanguine.

**Justin:**

... make his appearance.

**Sydnee:**

If you're too carefree and happy then you've got to get rid of some blood and, uh, and of course, we did that with zest and gusto.

**Justin:**

With zeal. [laughs]

**Sydnee:**

We did that, yes. Zeal. That was the word I was looking for.

**Justin:**

Flashing razors through the air. Yeah.

**Sydnee:**

Um, if you had too much phlegm, if you're too phlegmatic, if we need to like, get you up off your butt and have you do something, we could give you some diuretics to make you pee a whole bunch.

**Justin:**

[laughs]

**Sydnee:**

And get rid of your phlegm. And then yellow and black bile, we usually try to balance with either laxatives or things that would make you puke, called emetics. So like, eat this. You'll puke everywhere. You'll get rid of all that yellow bile and you'll feel better.

**Justin:**

Okay. Excellent.

**Sydnee:**

Um, and we knew. A lot of this is in herbal form but physicians all throughout history have been, I mean, the Greeks, the Romans, I mean, no matter what time period we're looking at, we're pretty skilled at knowing like, eat that plant and you'll poop all day.

**Justin:**

Yeah. We mastered that skill.

**Sydnee:**

Yeah.

**Justin:**

We can make anybody poop.

**Sydnee:**

We were really good at making people poop and vomit and pee. And then cutting them...

**Justin:**

Right.

**Sydnee:**

... to bleed them. Like, we were really good at those things.

**Justin:**

Maybe that's why we stuck with this humor system for so long because we knew how to do these four things.

**Sydnee:**

Well, that's a good point if... Yeah. Um, and in that sense, the... Your physician was very much a dietician.

**Justin:**



Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:**

Not now. But we used to be because we would use herbs to influence these things but then we would tell you like, we'd give you a diet. Like, "Well, you're a really choleric person so you need to stay away from these foods and eat these foods and, otherwise, you know, you're gonna get worse."

**Justin:**

Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:**

Um, so, you know, hey, and it'd be the same if you went to your doctor and were like, "I don't know. I'm just feeling really sad." Be like, "Well, I have the cure for that. Stop, uh..."

**Justin:**

Eating.

**Sydnee:**

"You have too much black bile so stop eating all those..."

**Justin:**

Popsicles.

**Sydnee:**

"... foods that have a lot of black bile in them."

**Justin:**

Right. Also, stop eating things with black bile in them. That's disgusting.

**Sydnee:**

Yeah. That's really gross. [laughs]

**Justin:**

Why did you do that?

**Sydnee:**

Some specific treatments for things, um, so if you had the plague and we did a whole episode on the plague so there were lots of things that you could do that would help not at all, would not help in the least with the plague but one of the things you could do that wouldn't help would...

**Justin:**

[laughs]

**Sydnee:**

... [laughs] would be, um, to get rid of some of your humors. It was thought that the plague just represented like, you were overwhelmed with all of your humors.

**Justin:**

Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:**

Your blood, your phlegm.

**Justin:**

Ready to pop.

**Sydnee:**

Both your biles. You're just filled with humor and so you need to get rid of it and arsenic was good for that. [laughs]

**Justin:**

Oh, excellent.

**Sydnee:**

So.

**Justin:**

That's gonna perk you right up.

**Sydnee:**

Uh, to be fair, it probably wouldn't kill you any faster than the plague was going to.

**Justin:**

Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:**

Uh, if you had a fever, then it was thought that you had too much heat and, of course, remember, heat is in yellow bile.

**Justin:**

Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:**

Heat. You know, that they're connected. So to remove excess heat, you need to have some chamomile and then you'll get rid of yellow bile.

**Justin:**

Ah. Okay.

**Sydnee:**

Um, and if you have too much phlegm, so if you're a laid back, apathetic, phlegmatic person then you should drink some wine.

**Justin:**

That is empirically untrue.

**Sydnee:**

I don't think that will help.

**Justin:**

That one will not work. I have researched this thoroughly. It is not a way to kick start your day.

**Sydnee:**

I like to think that was something that somebody who was really phlegmatic came up with. Like, "Uh, I just need to drink more wine."

**Justin:**

"I know what'll do it."

**Sydnee:**

"That's my treatment. Then I'll definitely wanna go do the laundry."

**Justin:**

Paint the house.

**Sydnee:**

Whatever. Um, it was... This was referenced in popular culture pretty frequently, uh, to the point where, you know, a lot of your characters in a play would be like, they would reference certain, um, aspects of their personality in terms of the four humors to, like, clue the audience in. Like, oh, this is a phlegmatic person. They're never gonna get anything done. Or like...

**Justin:**

You know how they are.

**Sydnee:**

Watch out. He's choleric.

**Justin:**

I wonder if they thought it was hereditary. Like...

**Sydnee:**

Oh, for sure.

**Justin:**

I mean, obviously, they didn't necessar— I mean, we kind of understood heredity for quite a long time. And I mean, even broadly speaking like, I would assume since the dawn of man, we've sort of understood heredity.

**Sydnee:**

Yeah.

**Justin:**

At least in a conceptual sense.

**Sydnee:**

Well, at least looking at somebody. You kind of look like your parents.

**Justin:**

Right. Exactly. Yeah. That's what I'm saying.

**Sydnee:**

Yeah. So no. I think they definitely, you know, thought that there was some influence. Like, if you come from a line of melancholic people. You know? Or if everybody's pretty sanguine you might also.

**Justin:**

Right.

**Sydnee:**

Um, in, uh, one specific, uh, cultural reference, in the Taming of the Shrew, so they mention at one point that there are certain characters who shouldn't be served mutton.

**Justin:**

Why?

**Sydnee:**

Because they're already choleric so they're already really grouchy and mutton was considered a food that would make you have more yellow bile.

**Justin:**

'Cause nothing's gonna make me grouchier than being denied mutton.

**Sydnee:**

[laughs] That would be a good excuse for me to not have to eat mutton. Like, well, I'm just really choleric already. I'm good.

**Justin:**

I'm crazy.

**Sydnee:**

Thank you though. Um, this is also why we still call certain foods hot or like, uh, that wine is really dry.

**Justin:**

Hot. I mean, isn't hot just hot?

**Sydnee:**

No. Not like hot temperature. Like, hot spicy.

**Justin:**

Oh.

**Sydnee:**

Why is something that's spicy considered hot?

**Justin:**

That's just, you know, it's like, hot. Like, it burns you.

**Sydnee:**

Well, no. It's because it used to be considered, like, a hot...

**Justin:**

Oh, okay.

**Sydnee:**

'Cause remember when we talked about this before. There was hot and dry and wet and...

**Justin:**

Sure.

**Sydnee:**

... cold.

**Justin:**

That makes sense. I guess it just...

**Sydnee:**

The balance of all of them equaled the humors and then that balance inside your body equaled good health or bad health and, um, certain foods could influence them so...

**Justin:**

Oh, okay.

**Sydnee:**

Yada, yada, yada. There you go.

**Justin:**

All right.

**Sydnee:**

Um, also... So like I said, anyway, this was continued through the 19th century and then we realized that this doesn't make a lot of sense. Empirically, there's not a lot of grounding for it and it was replaced by, you know, cutting people up and then looking inside and like, the study of anatomy and actual medicine.

**Justin:**

Sure.

**Sydnee:**

But if you're interested as to what humor, did they exist, might, uh, predominate in your personality, there are tests online that you can take.

**Justin:**

Oh, yeah?

**Sydnee:**

To find out which humor...

**Justin:**

Which humor am I?

**Sydnee:**

Yeah. You were dominated by. So do you wanna take one?

**Justin:**

Uh, yes. Yes. I believe we have time.

**Sydnee:**

Okay. Let's find out which humor you are.

**Justin:**

Okay.

**Sydnee:**

Okay. So you've driven eight hours instead of four on your way to your holiday destination, stuck in traffic jams and getting lost repeatedly. When you arrive, you: start a fight with your partner, go help host prepare dinner, fall asleep, sit down with a glass of white wine and complain or sit down with a glass of champagne and make jokes?

**Justin:**

I would do the last one.

**Sydnee:**

You would do the last one.

**Justin:**

Sit down with champagne and make jokes.

**Sydnee:**

Okay. Your grandma calls you three times in a row to tell you, "Remember to bring my special medicine," [laughs] "when you come to see me."

**Justin:**

Okay. I...

**Sydnee:**

By the third call, you: laugh, cry, scream at her, don't answer or just say, "Grandma, you know I got you. I already bought it."

**Justin:**



I would definitely do that one. Chill, grandma.

**Sydnee:**

I don't know why your grandma needs her special medicine. It sounds like she's got a problem.

**Justin:**

Yeah. Chill out, grandma.

**Sydnee:**

[laughs] Uh, so you just got married.

**Justin:**

Okay.

**Sydnee:**

And now I have to... So to me.

**Justin:**

Okay. All right.

**Sydnee:**

And now I have to leave town for a few weeks.

**Justin:**

Whoa.

**Sydnee:**

This is very sad. And we've been together for months. So right after I leave, do you feel sad but then you call your best friend and you have lunch? Do you feel sad and you just lay on the sofa like, unwilling to do anything? Do you have some chocolate and then read some poetry...

**Justin:**

That one.

**Sydnee:**

... and go for a long walk?

**Justin:**

I don't need to hear the rest.

**Sydnee:**

Okay. You finally take a holiday, exhausted after a 10 month stretch of hard work. Your first choice is the desert, the beach, the spa, a country cottage or an expedition in the jungle.

**Justin:**

Spa.

**Sydnee:**

Really?

**Justin:**

At a beach. A beach spa.

**Sydnee:**

I can't choose both.

**Justin:**

Okay. Just spa then.

**Sydnee:**

You need to lose a little weight.

**Justin:**

Okay. Wow. This is a cool time to tell me.

**Sydnee:**

Yeah. That's not a question.

**Justin:**

Oh, okay.

**Sydnee:**

Burn.

**Justin:**

Burn.

**Sydnee:**

No.

**Justin:**

Ouch.

**Sydnee:**

That's a question.

**Justin:**

Ouchies.

**Sydnee:**

Do you ignore the fat? Become obsessed, exercise and cut down on sweets? Get depressed about it and just eat more? Or you never need to lose weight.

**Justin:**

I guess exercise and cut down on sweets. I mean, this is an ideal person I'd like to be so that sounds fine.

**Sydnee:**

Let's see. These questions look rather long. You wanna skip to the end.

**Justin:**

Which am I?

**Sydnee:**

I'm gonna ask you the last one.

**Justin:**

Okay.

**Sydnee:**

You're late for dinner at a friend's house and leave in a hurry but on your way, you realize that I, who shut the door after you, may not have locked the door. Do you forget about it? Do you tell me that robberies happen all the time? Do you ask me repeatedly why I forgot and yell at me about it? Do you go back home and lock it yourself if you have a problem? Or do you say nothing but worry all evening?

**Justin:**

I'm gonna worry all evening.

**Sydnee:**

All right. So do we wanna see what your personality is?

**Justin:**

Yeah. What's my humor?

**Sydnee:**

Blood.

**Justin:**

42 percent blood.

**Sydnee:**

That means you're sanguine.

**Justin:**

Yeah. Well, this test is bad. [laughs] You need a new test.

**Sydnee:**

That's the best of all the humors.

**Justin:**

Yay!

**Sydnee:**

Look at that. You're thoughtful and you're balanced.

**Justin:**

I didn't answer the other ones though. I'm gonna go back and answer the rest.

**Sydnee:**

It looks like you need some melancholy though. You have too much.

**Justin:**

Ah. Sorry. What?

**Sydnee:**

Yeah.

**Justin:**

I have too much what?

**Sydnee:**

Blood.

**Justin:**

I need some melancholy.

**Sydnee:**

You need some more melancholy.

**Justin:**

Excellent. I will definitely look into that. Seeing as it's been February for five months now.

**Sydnee:**

[laughs]

**Justin:**

And it's been winter for seven years and I'm actually full up on melancholy right now. Thank you very much.

**Sydnee:**

I'm sorry. You're gonna need to get some more.

**Justin:**

We live in a frozen tundra wasteland. I have never left this house.

**Sydnee:**

We'll work on getting you some more melancholy later.

**Justin:**

Excellent. Well, I'm looking forward to it. Uh, can I just listen to Mellon Collie and the Infinite Sadness? Is that an option?

**Sydnee:**

Well, I think that would work actually. I think that's fine.

**Justin:**

Yeah, actually. Probably end up just fine.

**Sydnee:**

That'd be a good idea. You could listen to that while I'm doing my '90s fashion show at the mall with my Taz shirt.

**Justin:**

Folks, thank you so much for listening to our podcast. We hope you've had some fun. Uh, thanks to the Taxpayers for letting us use their song Medicines, uh, as our intro and outro. Thanks to you for listening. If you get a sec, if you could go to [itunes.com/sawbones](https://itunes.com/sawbones) and rate and review our show, that would just be swell.

Uh, we would certainly appreciate that and, uh, tell you what? We got Max Fun, the MaxFunDrive, uh, coming up next week. So, uh, that's gonna be fun. There's always a lot of exciting stuff going on and we're sure to have a lot of good stuff for you.

So, uh, get hyped for that. That's starting soon. Not next week but week after. Soon. Very soon. That's the important thing. And, uh, anyway, that's gonna do it for us until next Tuesday. I know it's Wednesday but until next Tuesday. [laughs] I'm Justin McElroy.

**Sydnee:**

I'm Sydnee McElroy.

**Justin:**

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

[theme music plays]

MaximumFun.org

Comedy and culture.

Artist owned.

Listener supported.