

Sawbones Episode 98: Honey

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Intro (Clint McElroy):

Sawbones is a show about medical history, and nothing the hosts say should be taken as medical advice or opinion. It's for fun. Can't you just have fun for an hour and not try to diagnose your mystery boil? We think you've earned it. Just sit back, relax and enjoy a moment of distraction from that weird growth. You're worth it.

[theme song Medicines by The Taxpayers plays]

Justin:

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

Sydnee:

And I'm Sydnee McElroy.

Justin:

Syd, I was, uh, I was wanting to ask you. I was over... We were over at your folks' place yesterday.

Sydnee:

I remember.

Justin:

And, uh-

Sydnee:

I was awake and aware.

Justin:

I saw a book about, uh, beekeeping.

Sydnee:

Yes.

Justin:

What, what's that about?

Sydnee:

Well, beekeeping, I think, is the, the process of keeping bees.

Justin:

Yes, I'm a-... Yeah.

Sydnee:

Like, I think you have them at your home, like, in-

Justin:

I-

Sydnee:

... your yard, I would assume.

Justin:

I just sorta linguistically pieced that together. I'm saying, like, why are your parents reading about beekeeping?

Sydnee:

Oh, okay. Well, that makes more sense as a question.

Justin:

Thanks.

Sydnee:

Uh, well, my dad wants to get into beekeeping. He wants to get hives and... Not like hives like, you know.

Justin:

He should just eat some shellfish.

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

He's really allergic to those.

Sydnee:

No, like, like, get beehives and have a bee, what do you call it, a bee farm? A bee garden? Either way.

Justin:

A bee hostel.

Sydnee:

Yeah. He's, he's concerned 'cause, you know, the bees are disappearing.

Justin:

Sure.

Sydnee:

Which is a big problem. It's a big problem for our ecosystem. And, uh, he read something, something online that said, "You need to do your part to provide more homes for bees to encourage more bee growth, increase the bee population." And so he wants to get some hives and have some bees.

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

Which is a little scary for me.

Justin:

Yeah, I would worry about... What, you're just worried about, like, stinging?

Sydnee:

Yes. I'm a little, I'm a little worried about bee... I'm a little scared of bees.

Justin:

I-

Sydnee:

Just a little, little scared of bees.

Justin:

I'm more worried about the clutter because you know your parents, like, it's gonna be every day: "Hey, we got another jar of honey." [sighs] We can't have this. We can't feed it to our baby. It's poison to babies.

Sydnee:

Yes. You can't give honey to... Although, she's almost a year.

Justin:

Aw. I'm, I'm getting her-

Sydnee:

That's true.

Justin:

I'm getting her a honey birthday cake.

Sydnee:

Yeah, we're get-

Justin:

With honey drizzle.

Sydnee:

We're getting close to honey time. But you know, uh, while I am-

Justin:

It's always honey time at the McElroy house.

Sydnee:

[laughs] While, while I am a little, a little anxious about bees and the whole stinging thing, um, the honey is actually... that would actually be pretty cool, not just because honey, you know, is tasty.

Justin:

Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Sydnee:

Because it is. But honey is a great, um, thing to use medicinally for real sometimes in some cases.

Justin:

For real?

Sydnee:

For real.

Justin:

Why is it on our show?

Sydnee:

[laughs] Well, because so many people have been asking us to talk about it-

Justin:

Okay. Well, that's fi-

Sydnee:

... for so long.

Justin:

Perfect.

Sydnee:

I-

Justin:

That's as good enough reason as any.

Sydnee:

I casually mentioned honey in, I don't know, an episode a long time ago. I'm sure somebody's gonna know which one it is. And, and I said, "We should do a show on honey sometime," because, uh, my perception of honey was that overall, it's not, it's not as good for your health as people think it is. And, and that, that's probably still a fair statement.

I mean, nothing is as good... Everybody kinda gets, like, a thing they li... People latch onto a thing like, "This is the thing that will fix you." Like, some people just tell you, "Drink water all the time and you're... you'll never get any diseases," or whatever. And I think there are people who feel that way about honey, um, and that's not true.

But honey is actually fairly useful in some cases, and there are some real medical applications for it. So it doesn't quite fit our criteria, but, uh, along with the masses, uh, Maura, Stephanie, Amy, Kelsey, Madison, Jennifer, Matt and many other people have asked us to talk about it. So.

Justin:

Well, that-

Sydnee:

So here you go.

Justin:

That sounds good. If I make a stink face, by the way, while we're, while we're recording, I poured my smoothie into a mason jar that I just emptied pickles out of and it still has, like, a distinctive pickle smell. So, like, when I go in for, like, a smoothie gulp and I'm getting, like, pickles, it's really heinous.

Sydnee:

That's really on you.

Justin:

It's on me. No question about it. I thought I'd need a travel smoothie container. I didn't realize I'd be here for a little bit longer so I don't, I don't-

Sydnee:

And-

Justin:

... know why I did this to myself.

Sydnee:

And what else do you choose for a stravel... a travel smoothie container but a mason jar?

Justin:

Nothing else we have is big enough. This isn't relevant.

Sydnee:

Honey.

Justin:

I have a mason jar full of honey.

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

That's not true, but, like, let's pretend that that is true-

Sydnee:

Okay.

Justin:

... so I have some reason-

Sydnee:

So-

Justin:

... for the tangent.

Sydnee:

So while I'm beginning to tell you about honey, you can sit there and drink a mason jar full of honey.

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

Yes.

Justin:

I heard that it's great for me.

Sydnee:

Oh, no.

Justin:

And that it'll cure all my problems.

Sydnee:

Oh, great.

Justin:

Is what you said.

Sydnee:

Okay, I've already ruined everything. Okay, we've been using honey as medicine since at least 2,000 BC, so for a long time.

Justin:

2,000 bee C? [snorts]

Sydnee:

Is there gonna be a lot of that? I just wanna know now.

Justin:

There's no way of knowing.

Sydnee:

Okay, great. Uh, tablets from ancient Sumer talk about how you could mix, like, honey and water and some cedar oil and some river dust? Which I'm assuming is, like, river rock dust, river, river dust.

Justin:

To make honey?

Sydnee:

No. You mix that with honey.

Justin:

Oh, okay. I was gonna say, you guys don't need a recipe for honey.

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

Just get, get, just get some.

Sydnee:

I think people knew where to get honey. I didn't read about that, like, where, where did, where... how did we first figure out, like, "Hey, if you can get past the bees-"

Justin:

Right.

Sydnee:

... "this is deli-... this is delicious. Go get this." Um, but you mix all this stuff together, and you can put it on wounds and it will help heal them. Uh, so we've thought about honey not just for its tastiness, but for its medicinal

qualities for a really long time. The Ebers Papyrus mentions 147 different prescriptions, so to speak, medical concoctions, that contain honey.

Justin:

Hmm.

Sydnee:

Uh-

Justin:

But it's also just, like a good... Like, from a physics point of view, it's just a good bonding agent. It makes it look like a, like a thing, rather than just a bunch of crap that you stirred together.

Sydnee:

It gives it, like, a, like some viscosity?

Justin:

Yes, exactly.

Sydnee:

Is that your thought? [laughs]

Justin:

Yeah. The viscosity.

Sydnee:

More like a syrup at that point?

Justin:

It looks like... more like a treatment. Yeah.

Sydnee:

Okay. I gotcha.

Justin:

Looks more impressive.

Sydnee:

Well, if you wanted to use it for baldness, here's a, here's an example. You could mix honey with red ochre and some powdered alabaster.

Justin:

Ooh.

Sydnee:

So it's very fancy.

Justin:

Where do I get that?

Sydnee:

And then just coat your head with it, I guess. I don't know.

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

I, I don't know if you're supposed to take that internally or... I'm gonna pretend you coat your head with it. Do that.

Justin:

That, that was the, the way for a lot of baldness treatments back in-

Sydnee:

That's true.

Justin:

... ye olden times.

Sydnee:

That's true. Um, if you had a surgery and you survived it, which is a pretty big assumption when we're talking, like, Ebers Papyrus days.

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

[laughs] The, uh... You could use honey as an enema afterwards for inflammation and, like, constipation.

Justin:

That's really, like... You're really pushing your luck at that point, right? Like-

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

You already survived that and you're like, "Well, maybe next up something in my butt? I guess. I don't know. I'm playing-"

Sydnee:

Just put some honey in there.

Justin:

"I'm just playing with... I'm apparently indestructible 'cause I survived a old-timey surgery. So."

Sydnee:

I think if you managed to survive an old-timey surgery, just treat yourself and eat the honey.

Justin:

Y-yeah, yeah. Don't put it in there.

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

Put it up there. Up, no, up higher. Up, up, up. There! Yes, there! Your mouth!

Sydnee:

A less popular papyrus called the Smith Papyrus that we don't talk about nearly as much as the Ebers Papyrus, um, they mention that to, to cure a wound, this is, this is a prescription, first put some raw meat on it-

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

... and wait a day. And then put-

Justin:

Uuuuugh!

Sydnee:

... a mixture of honey and grease and lint on it, and keep doing that and you should be fine in a few more days.

Justin:

Probably not.

Sydnee:

No, I wouldn't do that.

Justin:

Honey and grease and lint on it. That's an insane combination-

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

... to put on an open wound. That's crazy.

Sydnee:

You see this... A lot of these recipes had honey with some kinda grease, so I, I almost wonder if it was just to, like, like, loosen it, you know?

Justin:

Loosen it up a little bit.

Sydnee:

Loosen it up a little bit so it wasn't so thick. It would be easier to app-... I don't know. That's just my theory. I don't know if there was, like, a-

Justin:

That's absolute madness.

Sydnee:

... medicinal property to the grease. Um-

Justin:

Well, we've got honey and grease on it, but it still doesn't look... How 'bout some lint? Okay. Lint? You sure we'll try lint?

Sydnee:

I'm assuming they don't mean, like, pocket lint, like, from your jeans.

Justin:

I'm assuming they don't mean dryer lint.

Sydnee:

No.

Justin:

'cause those weren't invented yet.

Sydnee:

That's true. That's a great... Good job, Justin.

Justin:

Thanks, Syd.

Sydnee:

Thanks for that excellent point.

Justin:

Thanks.

Sydnee:

Uh-

Justin:

I come for the... I'm here for the insight.

Sydnee:

Uh, honey is mentioned as, um, something to, um, sustain your life, not sustain your life, to make you live longer and to make you healthier, and that it's good for your body and soul in both the Bible and the Quran. Um, the Greeks also were fans of eating honey, uh, not just, again, because of its sweet deliciousness, but because it could... They thought it could make you live longer. Uh, Hippocrates and Aristotle both wrote about it and, uh, they also advised using it for wound healing.

Justin:

Hmm.

Sydnee:

Um, Pliny, of course, weighs in on honey.

Justin:

Gotta get in there.

Sydnee:

He's got to. He's gotta talk about it. He talked about everything else, literally everything you could put in or on your body, so why not honey? And he advised that-

Justin:

He had a section on, like, pills and actual medicine, and he just discounted all of 'em like, "Tylenol? Nope. Not real."

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

"Advil? Come on. [inaudible 00:09:45] that somewhere else. Penicillin? Put a no thank you."

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

"Don't want it."

Sydnee:

Which would be really impressive if he predicted the invention of all these compounds.

Justin:

He predicted them and then he instantly discounted them.

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

Just dismissed them out of hand.

Sydnee:

Impressive and disappointing.

Justin:

Yeah. It's... that's Pliny for you in a nutshell.

Sydnee:

Uh, so Pliny advised that you use honey for pneumonia, for pleurisy and for snake bites. Um, the Mayans advised using honey for cataracts.

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

Again, something I think you would topically apply, which sounds a little unpleasant.

Justin:

Just for the flies.

Sydnee:

You'd think that it... the default with honey would've just been to tell people to eat it 'cause if nothing else, like, nobody's gonna be mad at you-

Justin:

No.

Sydnee:

... afterwards. Like-

Justin:

You just ate some honey.

Sydnee:

Like, "That didn't work, but it was good." Um-

Justin:

Most of... Well, I, I think it's just because most ancient healers were actually bears. So they wanted-

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

... humans to walk around dipped in honey.

Sydnee:

Is that true?

Justin:

A lot of people don't know that. Yeah. Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Most ancient doctors. Pliny? Bear. Aristotle? Bear. Ebers? Bear. Smith?

Sydnee:

Yogi? Bear.

Justin:

Bear. Yogi? Bear. Bear? Grylls. Those are some different bears.

Sydnee:

You got any, you got anything else?

Justin:

All the bears I got.

Sydnee:

I was just gonna let you go.

Justin:

Nope.

Sydnee:

Okay. Berenstain Bears.

Justin:

Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Sydnee:

Does that work?

Justin:

Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Sydnee:

Okay. In traditional Chinese medicine, um, honey is seen as a neutral food, or it's like a balanced food. So it's not just yin or yang, so that makes it particularly good for you. Um, it can also strengthen your spleen.

Justin:

I could use a little bit of that.

Sydnee:

It can clear your skin.

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

Give you rosy cheeks, prevent dehydration, prevent constipation, reduce inflammation. Also, it's good for... And there's a really long list here that I'm about to get to and, and, and a variety of infectious diseases.

Justin:

Just say everything. I mean, everything.

Sydnee:

Gastritis, celiac disease, inflammatory bowel disease, rheumatoid arthritis, lupus, ankylosing spondylitis. Uh, there's a huge list of things that, in theory, it-it's good for, and you're... A-and I mention this now because you're gonna find this trend as we talk more about honey. People have advocated honey as kind of a, dare I say, cure-all.

Justin:

Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And there's one thing we know about cure-alls, Sydnee. They-

Sydnee:

Cure-alls.

Justin:

Cure.

Sydnee:

Nothing.

Justin:

Nothing.

Sydnee:

So I would be really careful when you start reading about medicine... medicinal honey because you're gonna find lists like, like, this giant list that says things like, "It's great for meningococcal meningitis," um, which no, don't take honey if you have meningitis. Go to the hospital now.

Justin:

And ask if they have honey there.

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

Because they probably have better honey than you have at home.

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

And it's free there.

Sydnee:

So you just gotta be careful about this stuff. Uh, in Ayurvedic medicine, um, it's interesting. They also talk about the use of honey, and they mention specifically that you get better honey from bees from India.

Justin:

Those lobbyists that already gotten to 'em, huh?

Sydnee:

[laughs] They're like, they're like, "Wild bees as opposed to..." They kind of present 'em as, like, domesticated European bees. [laughs]

Justin:

That sounds like something that was put across by farm reps. F-A-R-M reps.

Sydnee:

[laughs] Is that another one there? That was pretty good.

Justin:

I, I hated that I had to spell it, but it wasn't gonna fly otherwise.

Sydnee:

No, 'cause it also sounds like something that a pharm rep would say.
[laughs]

Justin:

Yeah, but, like, that's why it's like the best joke anybody's ever told. Farm reps.

Sydnee:

Ha.

Justin:

Okay. It's fine.

Sydnee:

No... I'm sorry. You got it. It's good.

Justin:

No, do your history.

Sydnee:

It's great.

Justin:

Do your history.

Sydnee:

Sorry. Um, they, they mention that there are different types-

Justin:

There's bees that come from a farm.

Sydnee:

Do they, though?

Justin:

Farm reps. And your dad's house.

Sydnee:

Okay. See, I still don't know if that's, like, a bee fa-... Is it a bee farm?

Justin:

I-I'm just saying that, like-

Sydnee:

Like, if you have a bunch of bees, do you have a bee f-

Justin:

I'm saying-

Sydnee:

Do you have a bee farm? [laughs]

Justin:

I'm saying bee cultivation-

Sydnee:

I know but wh-

Justin:

... would be a good, like, facet of your farming business.

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

You shouldn't hinge your whole... Like, don't hitch your whole wagon to bees if you're a farmer. That's crazy. Nobody just says, "I'm a bee farmer. I'm... My name is Stingy Joe and I'm a bee farmer. And I just have bees." But, like, as a supplement to the rest of your farming, I would think that that would be fine.

Sydnee:

Maybe... I don't know. Honey can be expensive. Maybe if you have, like, really great honey, you can make a whole living off your bee farm.

Justin:

Yeah, but, like, you don't wanna put... First, you gotta weigh the margins. Have you not watched *Shark Tank*?

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

You gotta check the margins on this and make sure that that's... that you got a market for it.

Sydnee:

Have, has anybody ever done a honey thing on *Shark Tank*?

Justin:

I'm offering you-

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

... 25% of my bee business. It does not extend to my rutabagas or my lettuce or any of the other growables that I have on the farm. It is just the bee business that I'm offering today.

Sydnee:

Why would I only want the bee business? Why can't I have a piece of everything? I want 25% of everything.

Justin:

Well, it was my grandpa's, so I don't wanna... I gotta call him.

Sydnee:

Okay. Should we stop doing [laughs]-

Justin:

Yes.

Sydnee:

... *Shark Tank* role play now? [laughs]

Justin:

This is our *Shark Tank* fanfi-... fan ep-... p-p-... fancast.

Sydnee:

Lets be honest. If we were gonna do that, it'd be *Dragon's Den*.

Justin:

Canadian *Dragon's Den*, specifically. Okay, go on. I feel like we've gotten off the path.

Sydnee:

I think maybe. Anyway, we're talking about, uh, wild bees from India, which are better than, like, domesticated, I don't know, uptight European bees, was the... kinda the way that it was presented, I felt like. [laughs] Um, so the-there are also different types of honey that they mention, so you wanna be careful which type of honey you get because it could be, it can be used for a different, uh, kind of ailment. And it needs to be used cold. Warm honey is dangerous, for some reason.

Justin:

'cause it will burn you?

Sydnee:

Well, I guess if it was really hot.

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

No, I, I think that it has something to do with the properties of the honey, um, 'cause of the temperature thing. And I... we've never talked... We haven't talked a lot about Ayurvedic medicine. We've mentioned it before on different episodes.

Justin:

Well, we talked about it in the oil pulling episode, I remember. Cause that was their jam.

Sydnee:

Yes, but we haven't... I don't think we've gotten into the whole, like, the, the basis, like the foundation of it. But... And I don't understand it completely, but I think that temperature is an important facet.

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

Like, the temperatures of different things. People have different temperatures. That's part of their, like, um, their persona and their m-... the m-medical conditions that they may suffer and that kinda thing.

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

Uh, so it can treat, uh, in Ayurvedic medicine diabetes, eye disease, uh, if you're vomiting blood, UTIs, cough, hepatitis, asthma, TB, hemorrhoids and leprosy.

Justin:

Oh.

Sydnee:

Among other things. Um, currently, we still... There are still people who are... consider themselves practitioners of honey medicine. It's called apitherapy. Um, and this is an, an older therapy, but it is, it is still around today. And, um, again, it depends on the type of honey and that... I guess that's based on what, you know, flowers the bee has...

Justin:

Okay. That makes seen.

Sydnee:

Been to. What, what field the bee's in, which seems like... This, this gets really complicated to me because I guess you would have to have your own bee farm and you'd have to have all of the plants that the bees were going to visit there and then know that they weren't going and, like, sneaking around with other kinds of plants. You know, if you were gonna have, like, a unifloral honey, like if you knew that this honey was the product of your bees just visiting one... You know what I mean?

Justin:

How would you keep track of 'em?

Sydnee:

I don't know. That seems, like, really hard to me. I don't know if you have to keep 'em inside.

Justin:

You could a-

Sydnee:

Like if you build, like, a big dome around your bees and the plants.

Justin:

I mean, you could ask 'em, but bees are notorious liars. They're not gonna tell you the truth.

Sydnee:

[laughs] They're gonna tell you that this is just chestnut honey?

Justin:

"Oh no, man. Just chestnuts. Love 'em."

Sydnee:

But-

Justin:

"Can't get enough."

Sydnee:

But maybe there is some dandelion honey in there. And that matters because if it's chestnut honey, it's good for your bladder. If it's dandelion honey, it's better for your GI tract. If it's clover honey, it's gonna be a sedative. And if it's buckwheat honey, it's gonna be an antioxidant. I don't know that any of that is really true.

Justin:

Mm, I... Yeah I don't know either.

Sydnee:

Um, in a lot of the cases, there are no re-... there's not really any research. And it's hard because even when we do, like, studies on honey, uh, when we've looked back at, like, retrospectively when we've done studies to see if it really helps with stuff, we don't always know what plant it was from.

Justin:

Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Sydnee:

So even if we found that, like, honey was good for this thing, what kind of honey was it? We-we're not really a hundred percent sure. So I don't know that all that lines up.

And if you really get into apitherapy, you'll find that they don't just recommend honey. It's like all the bee products, so you get into, like the royal jelly that comes from the bees and the, um, bee venom itself. Um, and that's when you get some really crazy claims, in my opinion, because, uh, you'll see that bee venom is advised for everything from shingles to multiple sclerosis to cancer.

Justin:

That's about where I, like, tap out on any sort of, like, alternative medicine. Like, the moment you're like, "And it's good for cancer," like, okay. I... We're done here. Like, you don't... Like, if you wanna say, like, it'll help your hiccups or it'll help your insomnia, whatever.

Sydnee:

Sure, sure.

Justin:

That's fine. I-insomnia's more serious than that, but you get what I'm saying, like, not a life-threatening thing, like, and you wanna try some alternative medicines for it. I firmly believe there are alternative, like, ways of treating thi-... s-some of this stuff, but like-

Sydnee:

Absolutely. There's so much we don't know yet.

Justin:

... when you're just throwing out, like, "Oh, and it's good for cancer," like I... Just stop it.

Sydnee:

You can't put that in the same list. You can't say that, like, this is-

Justin:

Right. Exactly.

Sydnee:

This is-

Justin:

It's like, "For sore throats and cancer and also an upset tummy."

Sydnee:

Yeah.

Justin:

Like, wait a minute. Back up.

Sydnee:

No.

Justin:

There was one in the middle you slid in.

Sydnee:

When, when you throw in people who are suffering from things like MS and cancer, that's... I think that's not fair, unless you've got research to back it up. And in these cases, we really don't. Um, but I will say this. A lot of the claims currently a-as far as what is honey good for, are, are one thing that we may actually have some evidence for.

Justin:

What is it?

Sydnee:

Well, Justin, I'm gonna tell you all about that-

Justin:

Ugh!

Sydnee:

... right after we visit the billing department.

Justin:

Let's go.

[ad break]

Justin:

During the break, I should warn everybody that we've added our third, uh, co-host to the show, Charlie Gail McElroy. She is, uh, playing contentedly in the back in her playpen. Uh, she's promised to let mommy and daddy finish their show. But in case you hear any gurgling noises, it's not my tummy. It's the baby.

Sydnee:

Sorry.

Justin:

Sorry. So, Sydnee, you're about to tell me the one thing that, uh, honey actually does help with.

Sydnee:

So there's one thing that we have some, some decent evidence for, and that's wound healing. Uh, before the invention of antibiotics, it was common practice to apply honey topically to a wound, uh to help it heal. Um, after penicillin, uh, in the 1940s, we got kinda cocky. We thought, "Well, we can do better than nature. We make things. We..." Well, penicillin came from nature, but then we made other things and we thought we were better at it than, than honey. And so, uh, we started using antibiotics, but then we've started having problems with resistance to antibiotics, right?

Justin:

Right.

Sydnee:

So, you know, we, we know we use antibiotics too much and that bacteria are, are learning our tricks and are getting wily, and so we're looking for old ways to use again to heal wounds. Um, and this is where honey kinda came back in fashion. Uh, there is a medical-grade honey that is sold that you can buy.

Justin:

Like made specifically for that use?

Sydnee:

Yes, exactly. So it's made and it's, it's cleaned and, you know, sterilized so there's nothing else in it. So it's not the honey you get from a bear. You wouldn't wanna use, like, the honey you have in your cabinet for this kinda thing.

Justin:

The more important question is, can I use the medicinal honey for... like, on my biscuits?

Sydnee:

You could use just the honey, but there are a lot of, like, preparations, like, ointments and, you know, gauzes infused with this that you probably don't wanna eat.

Justin:

Okay, so, um, just to judges sort of what you think of me as a human, you're clarifying for me that I shouldn't eat gauze.

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

That's what you wanted to make sure, in my, in my ravenous appetite for honey, that I didn't accidentally eat some gauze.

Sydnee:

Yeah, don't eat gauze infused with honey.

Justin:

Because I'm Slimer from *The Ghostbusters*. I'll just-

Sydnee:

Are you?

Justin:

Uh, no, not to my knowledge.

Sydnee:

So there have been many studies that have shown that wound healing is improved. Um, it, it forms a barrier. There... these are some of the thoughts as to why it forms a barrier. It promotes drainage through osmotic forces with the honey, um, sucking water and fluids out of the wound. It's antiseptic. It prevents the dressings from sticking to a wound. It's anti-inflammatory. It makes the wound smell better. Sure.

Justin:

Sure.

Sydnee:

Uh, the high sugar and the low pH can inhibit the growth of bacteria. So there's one specific honey called Manuka honey that is used in a lot of commercial products for this. Um, some other honeys can make hydrogen peroxide, which of course can kill germs, but, uh, but that's not how Manuka honey works. Um, there's MediHoney, which is a commercial preparation that you can use on wounds.

Justin:

Whoa. Meta honey?

Sydnee:

[laughs] Medi, like medi.

Justin:

Oh.

Sydnee:

MediHoney. Eczema, you can use it as a gauze. Um, there actually is therapeutic honey at the hospital where I work.

Justin:

Have you ever employed it yourself?

Sydnee:

You know, I haven't ordered it, um, because generally, like, the wound care nurses recommend it.

Justin:

Oh, okay.

Sydnee:

But, but yes it is something that we can use on wounds and do. Um, so... A- and it's a little tricky. There are some studies that have said, "Well, it probably doesn't work any better than antibiotic ointment," um, so I don't know that I can say it's better than the, than what we've been-

Justin:

Yeah, but, like, considering it's honey, like, as good or maybe even, like, a little bit worse than antibiotic? Like, that's pretty impressive.

Sydnee:

I, I think it is impressive, and especially when we're trying to be better stewards of antibiotic usage, you know, not just throw it at every wound. You know, if it's not infected, why are we using antibiotics? If we can use honey, maybe that's a good thing.

And there's been a lot of studies to look into its effectiveness on things like MRSA, the big scary bugs that we're all afraid of, um, because it, you know, in theory should work just as well, no matter what antibiotic resistance patterns the bacteria has.

Justin:

So is this something that is commercially available?

Sydnee:

Yeah.

Justin:

Like, should you be getting, like, this instead of Neosporin, for example?

Sydnee:

I wouldn't go that far because the evidence is inconsistent and because you don't just wanna use it on any ole wound. It's like one thing I found in some of the literature is that it's good for burns.

Justin:

Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Sydnee:

Using honey on a burn is good. And then I've found other people who said you don't wanna use it on a burn 'cause it hurts if you put it on a burn.

Justin:

Oh.

Sydnee:

So I don't-

Justin:

That's no good.

Sydnee:

I, I would, I wouldn't just use honey willy-nilly. I would probably wanna ask, you know, your doctor or a wound care specialist before I would just use honey. Um, and, and, and like I said, it's suggested, by people who will tell you to use honey, it's suggested now for everything. You know, gastritis and diabetes and alcohol intoxication and-

Justin:

Right.

Sydnee:

Um, one thing I found pretty consistently is that if you read that honey is good for diabetics, that they should eat that instead of sugar, I, I wouldn't believe that. Um, honey is still... You know, it's still carbohydrates and-

Justin:

Right.

Sydnee:

Uh, it's still something that counts towards, you know, raising your blood glucose if you're not, if you're not, you know, if you have insulin resistance, if you have diabetes. So, um, that's not, like, a, like, "Just eat as much honey as you want and stay away from other sugars."

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

I mean, you should still consider it like a, like a sugar and be careful with it. Um, so th-there's no truth to that.

Um, and, and you can really... Like, I found... This can go really into madness if you keep down this road. I found this one chart that, uh, there was a doctor in Russia who made of his patients that he treated in the hospital for everything with honey. Um, the most in any one group was about 60, so this is not a very big sample size. And it's one doctor, his patients, one hospital, so again, not a great, like, random study. Um, but the conditions that he mentioned that he used honey for were alopecia, inflammation of the vagina, prostatitis, impotency, and then two of the other illnesses were listed as geriatrics and pediatrics.

Justin:

Uh, ol-o-... So just old and kid.

Sydnee:

Old and kid were two of the things listed. And I don't know what honey or how or where or how much, but he had, like, numbers, like who was successful and who wasn't. So I, I mean, like, you find that kind of... And that's like a... That's supposed to be like evidence that this works. There was another table that claimed that honey could prevent cancer, and then it had, like, the physiological reason for how it prevented cancer. And it said anti-cancerogenic effects.

Justin:

[laughs]

Sydnee:

So you have to be really careful, even if something is presented as... I mean, these were presented as, like, graphs and tables and charts and, like, as a study. It was referenced. It had, you know, citations at the end. If you weren't a critical thinker, you would just look at this and go, "Hmm, okay. Great!"

Justin:

Ooh, okay. Science.

Sydnee:

"Honey cures cancer." Um, but that's not, that's not true. Now, I did find a lot of recommendations for a honey massage, which s-sounds great to me. Go for it.

Justin:

Is that just a... That wasn't for the show. That was just a hint to me, like, I should give you a honey massage.

Sydnee:

Just give me a honey massage.

Justin:

Got it.

Sydnee:

And I think that that's... I found some other evidence. There's a little bit of evidence for, like, honey for a cough, honey for acid reflux, honey as part of, like, if your kid gets diarrhea and they need an oral rehydration solution, like

something to, you know, give them their electrolytes and stuff back, using honey instead of other sugars, and they're not under one.

Justin:

Got it.

Sydnee:

That's fine. Sure. What... Try this stuff. There's some studies that say maybe it's a little better than cough medicine. Maybe it's a little better than other reflux medicines. Why not? It's honey.

Justin:

Give it a shot.

Sydnee:

It can't hurt, um, and it's probably safer than a lot of the over-the-counter cough medicines for kids anyway.

Justin:

Do you think you need, like, to get the most natural stu-... Like, obviously, like, unless you're buying, like, medicinal honey, do you need to probably get, like, the most unprocessed stuff available? I would imagine, like, raw honey.

Sydnee:

Well, I don't know. Uh, I don't know that that's necessarily better. Um, I, I haven't found any evidence to that. The only thing that's been studied as, like, a specific type of honey from a specific region... region, which I believe it's in New Zealand, is Manuka honey.

Justin:

Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Sydnee:

Past that, I, I really don't know that I have good evidence to tell you that one honey is better than another honey. Um, I'm sure that they are. I'm sure that there is variation, but I wouldn't know which one to tell you is better.

Um, a-, uh, a lot of this stuff, like I said, it... we don't have evidence that it necessarily works better. It just doesn't appear to hurt. And there have been some small studies that suggest maybe, like, maybe you're better off doing, doing just some sort of honey than cough medicine.

Justin:

So you're saying that when I had Pizza Hut's honey Sriracha drizzle on my pretzel crust pizza this weekend, that was like a medical treatment that I was applying.

Sydnee:

No, because the vehicle, uh, that delivered the honey was, you know, pizza.

Justin:

Medicinal pizza.

Sydnee:

N-no. That's... See, now that-

Justin:

Therapeutic.

Sydnee:

That is definitely not a thing.

Justin:

Therapeutic pizza.

Sydnee:

No.

Justin:

Prescribed pizza. A pizza prescription.

Sydnee:

[laughs] I would like to make one point, and we've said it a couple times, but just to reiterate because we've talked about honey now for things like diarrhea and cough and reflux, things that babies get. But Justin, do you give honey to babies?

Justin:

Nope.

Sydnee:

No.

Justin:

Easy. Dad 101.

Sydnee:

Don't give honey to babies under one. Uh, they can get botulism. The spores can live in dust and stuff that gets in the honey, uh, and their immune systems can't handle it and so they can get botulism from honey. Um, adults don't, but babies can.

So do not give your baby honey. That is a true thing. Don't, don't do it. It's not worth the risk.

Justin:

Thanks to The Taxpayers for lettin' us use their song *Medicines* as the intro and outro of our program. Uh, thanks to maximumfun.org, the podcast network of which we are a proud member. Uh, there's a lot of great shows there. I'm gonna recommend *The Flop House* 'cause I think I've recommended it before, probably, but I've been listening to it, like, obsessively. So, uh, uh, it's a great podcast about bad movies. It's been going on for like seven years, so, uh, check it totally out.

I think that's it. Are we done? Oh, our, our email address is sawbones@maximumfun.org, uh, if you want to, uh-

Sydnee:

If you wanna suggest a topic.

Justin:

... get in touch.

Sydnee:

A lot of people suggested honey. That's part of why it is, it is happening today. I hope you're all happy. So email us and tell us more topics.

Justin:

Take that!

Sydnee:

[laughs] Take that.

Justin:

Uh, and th-... that's gonna do it for us until next Wednesday. I am Justin McElroy.

Sydnee:

I'm Sydnee McElroy.

Justin:

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

[theme music plays out]

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