

Sawbones 132: Earwax

Published April 15, 2016

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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 music plays]

Justin:

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

Sydnee:

And I'm Sydnee McElroy.

Justin:

Sydnee, uh, quite a feat we've achieved with today's episode.

Sydnee:

I'm— You mean, like, how late we are with it?

Justin:

No, it is a little bit—

Sydnee:

'Cause that is a feat that's—

Justin:

It was— It is a little bit late. Our daughter, uh, would not go to sleep for an hour and 45 minutes last night.

Sydnee:

And the night before, she...

Justin:

And the night before.

Sydnee:

... she pulled a similar—

Justin:

She did that but it was at midnight.

Sydnee:

Yeah. We've been having some sleep issues.

Justin:

We've been having a few sleep issues.

Sydnee:

It's okay though, it's just the 20 month sleep regression. In case you don't have kids yet, let me tell you this [laughs]—

Justin:

There's sleep regressions all the time. No matter what you search for, at what age, there's a sleep regression to match.

Sydnee:

There's a sleep regression, yeah, exactly. And they constantly do it, and basically what it means is at any age, your kid isn't going to sleep.

Justin:

Yeah, so hold onto your butts.

Sydnee:

So, if you decide to have kids just don't— Don't ever...

Justin:

Just don't—

Sydnee:

... sleep again.

Justin:

Don't sleep again.

Sydnee:

It's fine.

Justin:

Uh—

Sydnee:

It's fine!

Justin:

... no, the big achievement is that this is our first, uh, three combo we have chained together, daisy chained, three episodes of Sawbones.

Sydnee:

One inspired the other and inspired the other.

Justin:

Right. So we start with hemophilia.

Sydnee:

Right.

Justin:

And that led us to—

Sydnee:

And now I had an offhand comment in that episode about how hydrogen peroxide doesn't really work.

Justin:

Right.

Sydnee:

Which, of course, I had to then address in a whole episode...

Justin:

Right.

Sydnee:

... about that.

Justin:

And then in that episode.

Sydnee:

Uh— Well, since I mentioned all the things hydrogen peroxide doesn't really work for, 'cause it doesn't, uh, a lot of people have been asking the question, "But what about ears?" 'cause I didn't address can you dump it in your ears.

Justin:

You can dump anything in your ears folks.

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

I've been... I say it every time, you can dump whatever you want in your ears.

Sydnee:

I guess that—

Justin:

Any liquid will go in your ears, [laughs] if properly applied.

Sydnee:

Okay, let me reword that statement, "Should I dump it in my ears?"

Justin:

If it will remain liquid when exposed to the temperature generated by the human body, it can be dumped in your ears.

Sydnee:

Are you endorsing dumping anything in your ear that you can dump in your ear?

Justin:

Anything that's liquid, you can dump in your ears, guys.

Sydnee:

Okay. Let's rework this. Should I dump hydrogen peroxide in my ears? That's been a common question. A lot of people— That, along with a lot of people insisting that it's great for cleaning up blood, which, that's fine guys.

Justin:

That's cool.

Sydnee:

I'm a little concerned...

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

... how many people are adamantly insisting on the internet that they know the trick to cleaning up blood...

Justin:

The secret best way.

Sydnee:

... and that they wanna share that...

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

... with everybody? Good, that's fine.

Justin:

That's fine.

Sydnee:

That's fine. But, uh, a lot of people wanna know about earwax and hydrogen peroxide, and so that made me think, why don't we talk a little bit about earwax?

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

Uh, 'cause it's something I talk a lot about in my career as well.

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

I spend a lot of time discussing earwax.

Justin:

Everybody's got it, nobody knows how to sell it.

Sydnee:

So. [laughs]

Justin:

[laughs]

Sydnee:

Do— Is that something you're trying to do? Sell your earwax?

Justin:

Got to find out how to market it. It's just there, not generating profits.

Sydnee:

Do you have a spreadsheet that you've worked out?

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

Ways to sell earwax?

Justin:

It's just a big goose egg, it's a big zero.

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

'Cause it's not worth anything. Zilcho.

Sydnee:

So, thank you to people who've suggested—

Justin:

I'm a young man in my prime and my earwax should be worth something.

Sydnee:

[laughs] Thank you everybody who asked me the question on twitter, lot's of people, I'm sorry I don't have all your names. But Tamera, and Josh, and Ashley you emailed me, so I do have your names [laughs] and you're searchable easily, quickly. Thank you for suggesting this topic. First of all, can I say something that I'm gonna wanna reiterate several times, but I wanna get this out right in front? Please, everyone, stop sticking Q-tips in your ears. Please.

Justin:

Oh, now you're putting Q-tips on blast huh?

Sydnee:

Or cotton swabs, and— I mean, I shouldn't use the brand-name.

Justin:

Nobody gets spared.

Sydnee:

Any cotton-tipped swab, please stop sticking them in your ears. They're great for other things, I'm sure, but just don't stick them in your ears anymore.

Justin:

They're good for uh, putting rubbing alcohol and cleaning your Nintendo tapes. That's one thing.

Sydnee:

Is that a good thing?

Justin:

Yeah, you could do that with Q-tips.

Sydnee:

Is that a good thing you can... There are a—

Justin:

Get it right in there.

Sydnee:

There are lots of great things, I'm sure, you can do with Q-tips. Like you could— Like crafting?

Justin:

Mm-hmm.

Sydnee:

Right? You can build things out of them.

Justin:

You can build fun bridges, bad bridges.

Sydnee:

Mm-hmm.

Justin:

But just not in your ears, huh?

Sydnee:

Just don't stick them in your ears, just stop.

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

Okay, and we'll talk more about why, but—

Justin:

Can I ask you a question?

Sydnee:

Yeah.

Justin:

That nobody knows the answer to...

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

... and is kind of a scientific mystery?

Sydnee:

Good.

Justin:

What—

Sydnee:

Set me up that way on our podcast with a question no one knows the answer to.

Justin:

No one knows the answer to. What is earwax?

Sydnee:

Okay, well, actually I do know the answer to that. [laughs]

Justin:

[laughs] Okay, good. Imagine my relief.

Sydnee:

Earwax uh, or cerumen is the other name you can use for it.

Justin:

Ugh, that's worse than earwax.

Sydnee:

Cerumen is worse?

Justin:

Improbably— Cerumen, ugh.

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

Gross.

Sydnee:

Okay, earwax then. How is earwax not worse? It's, like wax from your ears?

Justin:

Earwax, I don't know, cerumen is, like, so worse.

Sydnee:

Okay, I would put forth the, uh, the theory that earwax is worse because it's not accurate. Earwax is not wax.

Justin:

Oh.

Sydnee:

No, it is a natural substance that you are supposed to have in your ears, that's an important thing to know. It is supposed to be there. It's not wax at all, it's a bunch of...

There are glands in the outer part of your ear canal that secrete different substances um, that are sort of made of a kind of a mixture of things, keratin, and fatty acids, and alcohols, and cholesterols, and it's all mixed together with dead skin and hair from inside your ear, and it collects into that, you know, thick substance that seems waxy, and so we call it earwax...

Justin:

Okay, you have—

Sydnee:

...but it's not technically wax.

Justin:

You have made earwax in 30 seconds, like, eight times grosser than it was when we started.

Sydnee:

How is that gross?

Justin:

It was wax. Like, where does earwax come from? Not— nobody knows, that's weird, probably earwax gnomes or something. Like, they're putting wax in your ear, why are they doing that?

Sydnee:

Ear bees?

Justin:

Ear bees.

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

Oh, god. Ear... Oh, yeah, maybe ear bees. And then it's— but it turns out it's like, dead skin, and alcohol, and cholesterol, and junk...

Sydnee:

Fatty acids.

Justin:

... and it's called cerumen. Ugh.

Sydnee:

It's a good thing though.

Justin:

I hate being a human.

Sydnee:

It is an important thing for your ear.

Justin:

Rather be a robot.

Sydnee:

So it's... Okay, so if somebody, you know, I look in a lot of ears, and I'll say there's a little wax. That is not a critique. I am not [laughs] I am not offering you something that you need to be concerned about. There should be some wax in your ear, that's fine.

Justin:

Mm-hmm.

Sydnee:

It's okay. So, first of all, everyone stop worrying so much about earwax. Um, it lubricates the inside of your ear canal.

Justin:

Mm-hmm.

Sydnee:

To help— It keeps it from drying out. If you didn't have earwax your ears would get really dry and itchy, so it's important to be there. Plus, it also helps to protect us somewhat from infections, as well as very practically from, you know, bugs and things—

Justin:

Sure.

Sydnee:

... that, like, might wanna crawl inside your ear. Things do that. Remember that girl on Survivor who had that worm that crawled inside her ear?

Justin:

I do remember, Sydnee.

Sydnee:

Yeah, I think that was awful to watch.

Justin:

Yeah, so this has been Survivor recap.

Sydnee:

[laughs] So wax is important and I don't think that it's gross at all. I mean, it didn't bother me.

Justin:

Yeah, and I've noticed you put that in your notes...

Sydnee:

Yeah.

Justin:

... to remind yourself...

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

... [laughs] that you don't find earwax gross. That's good.

Sydnee:

I think it's an important point to make.

Justin:

[laughs]

Sydnee:

I wanted to make that statement, that earwax is not gross.

Justin:

And in case you got stumped trying to remember...

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

... whether or not you [laughs] thought it was gross, you got it very helpfully in the notes right there.

Sydnee:

When I'm writing the notes, I kind of just think out loud. So, it's just, like, what I'm thinking. Um, it— Now, let me say this, while I have already made the case for earwax, that it's okay that it's there. Yes, of course, like anything else in the human body, too much is a bad idea.

So if you have too much earwax, if your ears are kind of crammed full of the stuff, and, uh, it starts to block off the ear canal, then it can cause some

problems. Mainly, you know, you don't hear as well if your ears are clogged with ear wax.

Justin:

Mm-hmm.

Sydnee:

So, you know, there is a situation in which you may need to get some of the wax removed, but as a general rule you don't need to just clean your ears out...

Justin:

Mm-hmm.

Sydnee:

... just because there's earwax in there. So, you got that?

Justin:

Got it.

Sydnee:

Did I make a point?

Justin:

I imagine though, that hasn't stopped people from trying to get it out.

Sydnee:

No, people have been trying to get earwax out of their ears with various substances for as long as we've, I don't know, figured out that it was in there to begin with.

Um, a lot of the stuff that people talk about today, doing— These aren't really, like, ancient treatments, they're just kind of folk remedies, home remedies...

Justin:

Mm-hmm.

Sydnee:

... that have just persisted, and who knows which culture, which country, which year they started in.

Justin:

Mm-hmm.

Sydnee:

Uh, but they're the same things that people would probably recommend to you at home today. One of them being hydrogen peroxide, that you just take a little hydrogen peroxide, dump it in your ear, and it will dissolve the wax, is the thought. And you know it's work— It's the same thing with on a cut, you know it's working 'cause it bubbles and fizzes and pops—

Justin:

Right.

Sydnee:

... and whatever. Uh, people have recommended in addition to that, vinegar. I see that a lot, dump some vinegar in your ear. Um, oil has always been, I've heard people say, like, sweet oil, vegetable oil, olive oil, any kind of cooking oil, you'll see someone saying you should dump it in your ear. Most recently coconut oil, but I think that's just 'cause coconut oil is so hot right now.

Justin:

Its very hot.

Sydnee:

You know? Anything coconut related, people are really into. Which, like, I mean, I get that— Coconut smells really good.

Justin:

Mm-hmm. Coconut oil's great for cooking.

Sydnee:

I enjoy, like, the scent of coconut, I like a pina colada.

Justin:

Yeah, that's not really coconut oil, but.

Sydnee:

No, but, like, coconut.

Justin:

Just like hot big on coconut.

Sydnee:

I think people just like coconut.

Justin:

Sure.

Sydnee:

It makes you feel beachy, you know?

Justin:

Yeah, it's got like, a very beachy oil to put in your ears.

Sydnee:

So you want— You get your coconut oil, you turn on your Jimmy Buffet music...

Justin:

Do any of these work?

Sydnee:

... you put on your Hawaiian shirt. So here's the thing.

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

Any of these... Oh, well the other two, the other things to mention are water, a lot of people just say dump water in your ear.

Justin:

No.

Sydnee:

And then some people say rubbing alcohol.

Justin:

Yes.

Sydnee:

I've heard that a lot, and, like, rubbing alcohol mixed with vinegar was one combo I saw a lot. I don't know why that.

Justin:

Rubbing alcohol seems kind of savage.

Sydnee:

The thing is about all these substances, one, you're right in the sense that if you dump anything that is somewhat irritating to the skin inside your ear canal, you run the risk of irritating the inside of the canal, because the canal is very— It's very delicate. It's delicate skin. Like, it wasn't made to be, you know, exposed to the elements.

Justin:

Right.

Sydnee:

It's in your ear canal, right? It's not like your hands. Uh, so that— So one thing, it could irritate the inside of your ear, that being said, a lot of these substances will soften wax.

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

That doesn't mean that it dissolves it, that doesn't mean that just dumping it in your ear is gonna fix the problem, but these substances will soften it,

which would make it easier to flush out with water, which is ultimately what we end up doing a lot of the time.

Justin:

Mm-hmm.

Sydnee:

So like, if you came to the doctor's office and you wanted to get your ears cleaned out, we have earwax softening drops in our office.

Justin:

Get them at Rite-Aid too.

Sydnee:

You can get them at Rite-Aid too, it's not any— We don't have anything different.

Justin:

Any drugstore really.

Sydnee:

Any— Yeah, not just Rite-Aid. [laughs] We're not— We don't— We're not endorsing Rite-Aid. But, um, but you get some ear wax softening drops, or one of these substances if you prefer, you put it in your ear and you can flush it out with some water. We use something different in the doctor's office, but at home, it's like with a bulb syringe like you use in a baby's nose?

Justin:

Right.

Sydnee:

You just squirt some water in there and flush it back out. You can do the same kind of thing if you just tilt your head to the side in the shower.

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

And kind of let the water run in and out.

Justin:

And then you just get in there with the Q-tip and—

Sydnee:

No. That's the important thing. Do not stick things in your ears. So, Q-tips and bobby pins are the most frequent things—

Justin:

Bobby pins are great. You know what I like? A nice pen cap. Pen cap...

Sydnee:

No!

Justin:

... like a Bic pen cap, it has that long prong thing at the end of it. It's just like, get in there and scrape it out.

Sydnee:

Okay, here's the thing about that, you should not stick these things in your ears, um, for a couple good reasons. One, very practically speaking, I'm assuming you're trying to get the earwax out?

Justin:

Right.

Sydnee:

You're much more likely to shove it further back in when you do that. Earwax is not supposed to be up against the eardrum.

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

That's not where it belongs.

Justin:

Right.

Sydnee:

But I find it there a lot, and it is because people have stuck things in their ears and shoved the earwax all the way against their eardrum. So that's number one, number two, you might rupture your tympanic membrane, your eardrum. You might actually— accidentally stick something through it. That's bad!

Justin:

Sounds bad.

Sydnee:

You don't want to do that.

Justin:

That sounds very bad.

Sydnee:

So that's another good reason, don't do it. Number three, again, the ear canal is very sensitive, and I have seen ear canals that have been, like, cut and scraped, and damaged from people sticking things like bobby pins, pen caps, I've seen toothpicks, I've seen all kinds of, like, just little plastic sharp things...

Justin:

Tooth—

Sydnee:

... that people find.

Justin:

Toothpicks is rough, I don't know who's doing toothpicks.

Sydnee:

I've seen lots of different plastic implements that people will say they have stuck in their ears, and they scrape the inside of their ear canal, and then they get an infection in their outer ear, and your ear gets all red and swollen, and that's a bad scene, so.

Justin:

If you had been intended to dig that stuff out of there, your finger would be smaller, or your ears holes would be bigger.

Sydnee:

I will tell my patients "Don't stick anything in your ear that is smaller than your elbow." [laughs]

Justin:

That doesn't make any sense.

Sydnee:

Well.

Justin:

There's gotta be some other remedy here Syd.

Sydnee:

The one that I wanna talk about the most, as far as, like, crazy medical things that have persisted through time, is ear candling.

Justin:

Mm-hmm.

Sydnee:

Or coning.

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

Now, Justin are you familiar at all with ear candling?

Justin:

Yeah, yeah.

Sydnee:

You are?

Justin:

Yeah, I know the basic idea.

Sydnee:

Okay, well, okay, I'm gonna explain it though. [laughs]

Justin:

That's good.

Sydnee:

I'm not gonna— Do you want to?

Justin:

No, it's fine.

Sydnee:

Do you wanna try to explain it?

Justin:

No, I don't think I actually understand it that well. I have sort of a vague idea of what it is, but I don't really.

Sydnee:

So, people will claim—

Justin:

Although I used to think it was just lighting a candle near your ear. I never really understood how that would be helpful.

Sydnee:

Well it's—

Justin:

Like, you got the wax hot, or something. I don't know.

Sydnee:

You may as well do that.

Justin:

Okay, well, good.

Sydnee:

But we'll get into that.

Justin:

All right.

Sydnee:

So proponents of ear candling will claim that it dates back to basically every ancient civilization.

Justin:

All the old folks are doing it.

Sydnee:

I mean, you'll see some people who will claim that it's— the Greeks did it, some say it started with the Egyptians, others, the Romans, uh, ancient Chinese culture, early Native Americans, the largest manufacturer of these things claims that it's a Hopi cure that...

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

...that the Hopi Native Americans, they were the ones who came up with it initially, but there is no, um, not only is there no evidence that that's true, but like, spokespeople for the Hopi Nation have come out and said like, no, this is not a thing that we— We didn't come up with—

Justin:

Don't put this on us.

Sydnee:

Please, stop [laughs] associating us with this, this is not our thing. Um.

Justin:

So, what is it?

Sydnee:

Okay, so the procedure's really simple, but this sounds totally bonkers when you describe what you're gonna do. You take either a hollow candle, so a candle with just a tube of wax, or most of the time you won't have that, so you're gonna take a piece of paper that has been coated in some sort of wax, bees wax usually, or you'll see paraffin, although that's, like, a big point of contention among the people who do this, is they'll say uh, "Paraffin causes cancer though, if you stick it in your ear."

Justin:

Right, yeah.

Sydnee:

"So don't just— so use natural beeswax." And sometimes they put things like rose oil in the beeswax and stuff like that. But you— It's paper coated with that, and then you roll it into a cone, okay? You're gonna stick one end of that cone, that tube, into your ear.

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

And then the other end you're gonna light on fire.

Justin:

Okay, got it. So just set that on fire then.

Sydnee:

Right.

Justin:

This is— This has all of a sudden become a danger situation.

Sydnee:

It is. [laughs]

Justin:

Sort of a suspense thriller.

Sydnee:

It is absolutely a dangerous situation, because the other end of that is in your ear.

Justin:

Right, let's get it all in there.

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

Whatever's happening up there, let's get it all in.

Sydnee:

So you're gonna lay down to do this. You can either lay down on like, the unaffected ear so that it's straight up in the air, sticking out of your ear, and if you're gonna lay down in that position they recommend that you take, like, a paper plate with a hole in it, or a pie tin, or something like that to put around the tube or the candle to catch bits of wax—

Justin:

Mm-hmm.

Sydnee:

... or you know, ash or cinders, or things that fall. Kind of like those, like if they give you a candle like, on holidays in church, you know?

Justin:

Sure, yeah, yeah, yeah, little paper—

Sydnee:

A little paper circle?

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

Same idea. Or they also say if you don't have something like that you could lay on your back, and then just kind of hold the ear candle out the side, over something else that'll catch the dripping stuff.

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

Um, the magic— And then, so you let it burn until it's about 4-6 inches above your ear. You'll hear some of them say it needs to be a bit closer than that, but like 4-6 inches. They— So they say, like, stop before it gets to your ear.

Justin:

All right, good.

Sydnee:

Don't let the fire burn all the way to your head.

Justin:

That's instinctually where I was going—

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

... but good to know I'm back up by [laughs] instructions.

Sydnee:

You never know with these things, really. Uh, the magic at that point is that you're done, so you've extinguished the flame, you take the tube out of your ear and you unroll it.

Justin:

Great.

Sydnee:

And then you see wax. Well, it's because the wax is in the paper now, like it came out.

Justin:

It didn't, 'cause, first off it wasn't wax, it was cerumen.

Sydnee:

[laughs] Um, the thing is that, what they'll tell you is yes, of course, because the obvious answer is, well, I mean, there was wax in the paper.

Justin:

Right.

Sydnee:

So like, if you see some melted wax on the paper.

Justin:

That's what's up.

Sydnee:

Like it was, you burned it, it was wax—

Justin:

And I've seen...

Sydnee:

... waxed paper.

Justin:

... you can light an ear candle, like, without putting it in an ear and it will still be full of gunk at the end.

Sydnee:

So what they will tell you is that your earwax is now mingled with that earwax, and you can tell this by the color change that exists in the wax.

Justin:

Mm, mm.

Sydnee:

It looks different than it did before, and it's because of the presence of all the stuff from your ear that is now there too, and it's cleaned out all these toxins. And the colors tell them different things about like, how much they got out, or how dirty your ear was.

Uh, and so the general goal, and what most people will say this does, is remove earwax from your ear. And their reasoning in it is it creates, like, a vacuum, like, negative pressure that, like, sucks the earwax out as it's burning.

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

That is the thought behind it. Um, in addition to cleaning out your ears though, there are people who claim that it does a lot more, that it will clean out residue from your lymphatic system. Uh, their statement is that your ear connects to your eustachian tube, which connects to your lymphatic system, which carries lymph fluid throughout your body.

Justin:

Yeah, a lot of systems in the body are connected. It's an organism, right?

Sydnee:

We— Well no, um, this is all wrong.

Justin:

Oh, good.

Sydnee:

But let me tell you what they're telling you is gonna happen. So, basically since it's connected to your lymphatic system, they say that your lymphatic system has all this ash, or toxins, some sort of lymphatic ash that is in it.

That's because of all the junk in our dirty, industrialized world that you're exposed to, and all the terrible things you eat, and all the terrible things you breathe, and so you can suck it all out through this connect in your ear by ear candling, and so by doing this not only will you remove the wax and improve your hearing, but you'll clean out your sinuses, you'll fix your allergies, they believe that it realigns the bones in your cranium.

Justin:

Oh, cool.

Sydnee:

That your skull bones will get back in order. Um—

Justin:

Finally. Give— Hey, you guys, you rascals, get back in order.

Sydnee:

Get back where you belong, skull bones. All your senses will be heightened afterwards, colors will look more vibrant. If you were telepathic before...

Justin:

[laughs]

Sydnee:

... you'll get more telepathic after. We're not guaranteeing, if you weren't telepathic before, we aren't guaranteeing that you'll become telepathic.

Justin:

That's why Professor X never gets ear candling.

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

It's just, like, too much.

Sydnee:

It would be too much for him.

Justin:

Too much, too overwhelming. I'm just so telepathic right now.

Sydnee:

Um, be careful though, because it— You may actually hear so well after you do ear candling that, like, sounds are too much for you.

Justin:

You'll hear neighbors talking crap about you.

Sydnee:

Exactly, so—

Justin:

"Hey, I can hear you, I'm only three houses away."

Sydnee:

[laughs] I can hear them all at once.

Justin:

[Boops rapidly] Bionic.

Sydnee:

[laughs] So then you have to, uh, take some organic cotton and put it in your ear so you don't freak out.

Justin:

Oh, cool, I'll be back for that later with more candles, I guess.

Sydnee:

[laughs] Um, you do it like, every three days or so, or maybe every week, or maybe less than that. You basically just, like, use your intuition, you know, how often.

Justin:

Yeah, whatever feels right for this fake thing.

Sydnee:

Whatever— You're right, whatever feels right for your ears. Um, to get the ear candles at home, you can buy them. They're, like, two or three bucks a piece...

Justin:

Mm-hmm.

Sydnee:

... um, to do it at home. It's not that expensive, but if you want a professional session, which you can go for, there are people who will do this as, like, their— That's their job, I guess.

Justin:

Mm-hmm, yeah.

Sydnee:

It can be up to \$120 a session.

Justin:

[laughs] Listen.

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

I get it. I do, I get it. It's relaxing, probably. I mean, would you say it's probably relaxing? If you can get back to feeling, like, a...

Sydnee:

Um, sure.

Justin:

... a little silly?

Sydnee:

Yeah. I guess.

Justin:

Maybe it might be relaxing?

Sydnee:

I don't know, there's fire awfully close to your head for it to be relaxing.

Justin:

Yeah, I mean it's, like, yeah, it's right there, but like—

Sydnee:

I don't like fire close to my head.

Justin:

Well, that makes two of us Sydnee. Uh, that's true. Okay, I don't actually have— I don't actually get it, I guess.

Sydnee:

So, Justin, you're probably wondering if this works.

Justin:

Uh, I have a suspicion, but you go first. [laughs]

Sydnee:

Before I tell you if this works, why don't we go to the billing department?

Justin:

Let's go!

[theme music plays]

[ad break]

Justin:

Uh, so Sydnee I've been waiting on pins and metaphorical pins and needles.
Uh—

Sydnee:

That I hope you weren't sticking in your ear.

Justin:

No, nothing in there.

Sydnee:

Okay, good. All right, so you probably wanna know at this point, does ear candling work? If you couldn't tell by my attitude towards it.

Justin:

Right.

Sydnee:

Okay. So it doesn't.

Justin:

[gasps]

Sydnee:

Uh, it's been studied. There is evidence. This isn't even something that we just— I mean it's not like the medical community has disregarded this offhand, it doesn't work on several levels.

Um, the science doesn't make sense. They've actually tried to measure the pressure differential to see, is it creating negative pressure inside the ear?

Justin:

Like a suction.

Sydnee:

Yes, the— Is it creating a vacuum inside the ear cone or candle? No, it's not. There is no pressure difference, so it's impossible for this to work first of all, because it's not creating any suction power.

Plus, the suction power, let's say theoretically it did, the amount of suction you'd have to create inside that ear candle that you've just lit on fire, would be so strong to actually suck earwax out of your ear, that you would probably rupture your eardrum if you did.

Justin:

Yeah, I was gonna say, that sounds terrible, yeah.

Sydnee:

Yeah, do you can't— I mean, it doesn't— The science isn't there, it doesn't work. Um, also if we go on past the earwax claims to the whole thing about your lymphatic ash and whatnot, your ear canal ends in the eardrum. It— Like, you can't go all the way into your brain, guys— You know that right?

Justin:

Yeah, I do, Syd.

Sydnee:

Okay, like it stops where your eardrum, your tympanic membrane, is.

Justin:

Got it.

Sydnee:

That's the end of it. It's like a closed system. Now there's stuff past that, yes, but there's a wall there to protect your eardrum, you need it.

Justin:

Like a curly-Q, right?

Sydnee:

What?

Justin:

Like the little curly-Q in the ear canal...

Sydnee:

The semicircular canal, yep, yeah.

Justin:

... it looks like a snail.

Sydnee:

It— Yeah! There you go. You're getting into some ear anatomy, the cochlear, and...

Justin:

I understand the human body like a toddler understands where cereal is kept in their home.

Sydnee:

That's good though.

Justin:

It's just codes and symbols.

Sydnee:

[laughs] That's— But the important thing is that—

Justin:

"Moo juice! Moo juice!"

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

"Do you mean milk?"

"Yes."

Sydnee:

You can't suck something...

Justin:

"I'm an infant."

Sydnee:

... out of your ear canal and also expect to suck something out of the space beyond it unless there's also a hole in your eardrum, in which case, well, that's not good. There shouldn't be.

I mean, it, you know, ideally. You shouldn't have one. And two, they actually recommend against it. Like, if you have a hole in your eardrum, they tell you don't do ear candling. So, this is dumb.

Justin:

This is dumb.

Sydnee:

This doesn't— [laughs] This is dumb. Um, one study— They've done studies to see if it worked, and not only does it not work, but they've all— they've all actually shown that, in one study, participants had more wax and blockage in their ears at the end of it...

Justin:

Because of the—

Sydnee:

... because of the wax that was melting and dripping into their ear from the ear candle. [laughs]

Justin:

[laughs]

Sydnee:

So it might actually make things worse, also there have been many cases of people burning themselves with ear candles and cones, and that's bad! You don't wanna burn your eardrum.

There's somebody who burned a hole in their tympanic membrane, so, you

know, it's recommended against by the FDA and basically every medical society.

Justin:

We have another podcast on the Maximum Fun Network, which we're a part of, called Oh No, Ross and Carrie, where they try things like this out. There— They do have an ear candling episode where they go and, uh, get ear candling. If you're curious what the first-hand...

Sydnee:

So there you go.

Justin:

... experience of getting ear candling is, like, check that out.

Sydnee:

So I wanted to talk a little bit about, as I was researching ways to remove earwax, like I said it kind of all boiled down to the remedies we've talked about, and there is so much information about ear candling on the internet.

Oh, my gosh, like, it's overwhelming. You look for earwax and you're just gonna have thousands of hits about ear candling. Okay, so I've already told you that I am kind of a fan of earwax.

Justin:

Mm-hmm.

Sydnee:

On the flip side, since I've already talked about the ways that I don't want you to remove the earwax, uh, some people were in my camp [laughs], and actually thought that not only was earwax a good thing, but that it could be used as medicine. So, for a while it was advised that you put earwax on cold sores [laughs]. Just dig it out of your ear and—

Justin:

God, wouldn't that be the like, best, like...

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

... most convenient, like, body thing, we were, like— God's like, oh, cold sores? No big ish, check your ears...

Sydnee:

Just dig some wax out of there.

Justin:

... that's right. I've made a dispenser for you. They're for hearing and also dispensing balm.

Sydnee:

Which I also like the idea that, you know, you have a cold sore, and let's say it is one that's on the outside of your mouth, so maybe you're a little—

Justin:

It's like if Xzibit was an angel, that's what he would do to the human bodies to pimp their rides.

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

Like, "Yo, I heard you get cold sores sometimes, [laughs] so check it out, in your ears!"

Sydnee:

But that— I like the idea that if you're a little self-conscious about it, because some people who get cold sores don't like the way they look, and so they might get a little self-conscious, like they don't— You know, they're trying to cover it up, or, you know, whatever.

Justin:

Mm-hmm.

Sydnee:

I love the idea that the way to do that would be to put [laughs] earwax on it, 'cause then, like, that's not...

Justin:

No, that's no problem.

Sydnee:

No, that's definitely more— That's something more pleasing to the eye, right?

Justin:

Yeah. Everyone wants to see that.

Sydnee:

[laughs] But if you have a cold sore, you can put earwax...

Justin:

Kind of a wax smear, yeah.

Sydnee:

... over top of it. Uh, I also found a recipe from 1832 for lip balm that used earwax.

Justin:

Kind of a home thing? Home recipe?

Sydnee:

I'm assuming.

Justin:

Use your own supply?

Sydnee:

Yeah, don't think it was sold widely. Like, here, check out my earwax, put it on your lips.

Justin:

[laughs]

Sydnee:

Um, good for cold sores and just for chapped lips.

Justin:

Perfect.

Sydnee:

So, my actual advice about earwax uh, it— Don't— I mean, I'm not telling you to put it on cold sores or use it for chapstick, that's just kind of odd. Um, for the most part, don't mess with it.

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

Earwax is gonna—

Justin:

That's gonna be hard to do, I really wanted to mess with it.

Sydnee:

So most of the time if it's not causing you a problem, if you're just aware of that it's there, you know, if you just, like, dug some out with your fingernail or whatever—

Justin:

Mm-hmm.

Sydnee:

... uh, it's probably not causing any problems, so just leave it alone. It's going to migrate out of your ear slowly, over time. Did you know that?

Justin:

No.

Sydnee:

That's what it's made to do. It's produced by those glands in your ear canal, and then it slowly makes its way out, mainly as you, like, chew and move your jaw, that's supposed to slowly help move the earwax along.

Justin:

Okay, I did not know this.

Sydnee:

And then it gets drier on the outside, and it kinds of flakes off and falls out. That's what earwax is supposed to do.

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

And that's why you don't want to remove all of it, because some of it is good or your ears will be dry and itchy if you remove all your earwax. If it is bothering you, if you do think it's interfering with your hearing, uh, or causing you, uh, some other problem, or if you think it looks weird or different and you're worried that something is going on...

Justin:

Uh-huh.

Sydnee:

... um, don't stick stuff in your ear.

Justin:

Been very clear about this, absolutely.

Sydnee:

Right. You can always— If you're concerned, if something weird or new is going on you should probably go talk to your doctor about it, and if it is just that you need some earwax removed, I mean, sometimes your primary care doctor can do it for you.

I do it. Sometimes you might need to go to a specialist like an ear, nose, and throat doctor, or an otolaryngologist, and they can do it for you. They have—

We have ways of removing your earwax [laughs]. Um, and sometimes I'll just tell patients about, there are over-the-counter kits...

Justin:

Mm-hmm.

Sydnee:

...that are safe to use...

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

...that mainly just have, like, earwax removal— You know, softening drops, and like a little bulb syringe.

Justin:

Mm-hmm.

Sydnee:

And you can use, just, like, water, room temperature water, or you can, like, you know, move your head to the side in the shower and let it rinse out.

And if you wanna use all those other things that I mentioned, like the vinegar, and the hydrogen peroxide, and all that, um, you will find... This is interesting. I found multiple ENT, um, otolaryngologists, specialists in this area, websites where they give patients advice to do that.

Justin:

Hm.

Sydnee:

Any of those substances.

Justin:

Really?

Sydnee:

Basically the idea is that they're just naming different things that might soften the earwax. Um, I would be really careful about it, just because I do worry about the irritation of the inside of the ear canal.

I'd say you're better off just with water. Um, and again, if there's any problem, just, you know, go let your doctor check it out. They may tell you to leave your earwax alone.

Justin:

They probably will. Doctors love it apparently, doctors are crazy about it.

Sydnee:

It may just be me.

Justin:

Um, thank you all so much for listening. Uh, we wanna say a big, big thank you to the Taxpayers for letting us use their song, Medicines, as the intro and outro of our program, make sure to go buy all their tunes.

And thanks again to the Maximum Fun Network for letting us be a part of their extended family. Go listen to that Oh No, Ross and Carry episode about ear candling. [distant clatter] Um, it's sure to be gross. What did you knock over?

Sydnee:

Sorry.

Justin:

What'd you do?

Sydnee:

You know, I just kicked something over.

Justin:

You're destroying my office, my home away from home inside my home.

Sydnee:

I thought this was our podcasting studio.

Justin:

It is a podcasting studio.

Sydnee:

Our private podcasting studio.

Justin:

[laughs] Um, anything else, Syd?

Sydnee:

Uh, thank you at home for listening.

Justin:

Yes. Oh, oh, oh, that's right. I have a list. We have a uh, P.O. box, P.O. box 54, Huntington West Virginia, 25706, and some folks have been kind enough to send us things, uh, thank you to uh, Penny and Lydia for the uh, old newspaper, thank you to Trillian for the notes. Uh, we got some switchel from Vermont Switchel, uh, I actually talk about that during our...

Sydnee:

During our vinegar episode.

Justin:

... during our vinegar episode.

Sydnee:

And it was actually delicious.

Justin:

It was really good.

Sydnee:

I know...

Justin:

Crazy for switchel.

Sydnee:

... we were all skeptical about vinegar-based drinks, but nah, I'm on board.

Justin:

Yeah, I don't know what— And by the way, it came from Vermont Switchel, there was no note. If you sent that to us, please let us know, because I don't know. Uh, Pat Edbury sent a huge, uh, peppermint patty, York Peppermint Patty, the size of a dinner plate as requested. We got some delicious dairy milk that we— Uh, candy bars that we just finally finished last night, from Collin, Christian, Thea, and Millie.

Sydnee:

Which we thank you for. I'm a...

Justin:

Curse you also.

Sydnee:

... a little bit angry because we ate them all, but they were delicious.

Justin:

Uh, we also got a really beautiful handmade pillow, uh, made uh, by Lauren for Charlie. Uh, she has lots of uh, pillows at PelloPello P—E—L—L—O twice dot com, and uh, we got a—

Sydnee:

And Charlie loves that pillow, by the way.

Justin:

She loves that, yeah.

Sydnee:

She carries it around and, like, she's really cute with it.

Justin:

And uh, also, finally that graduation announcement that we got from David, who sent it to several Maximum Fun, er, McElroy family-hosted shows.

Sydnee:

[laughs] McElroy Fun.

Justin:

McElroy Fun. Uh, Mac— uh, McElroy family shows, and uh, so congratulations. That's gonna do it for us. We're done. Um, so uh, for—

Sydnee:

Don't stick stuff in your ear.

Justin:

[laughs] Don't stick stuff in your ear and don't drill a hole in your head.

[theme song plays]

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