

Sawbones 133: Earaches

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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 plays]

Justin:

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

Sydnee:

And I'm Sydnee McElroy.

Justin:

Sydnee, the combo of— The great combination of 2016, the combo of 2016 continues.

Sydnee:

The combo of 2016. That sounds like a new flavor of Combos.

Justin:

They're gonna have, like, eight Combos' flavors in 2016 though. Like, there's no way we could just pick one. Buffalo Blasted Ranch Buddies, I'm sure will be one.

Sydnee:

You think they're gonna have all these this year? Like, they don't... they don't exist yet?

Justin:

No, I think, like in 2016...

Sydnee:

There are Buffalo Blasted Ranch Buddies?

Justin:

No, Buffalo Blasted Ranch Buddies came from my mind's eye. Um, no, the combo of 2016 is that we have managed to swing, Tarzan-like, from show theme to show theme, finding connective tissue through each of them and if you— There's clues in each one to find out who the real killer is. But, um, you, uh...

Sydnee:

Oh no, who got killed?

Justin:

Dun dun dun! Uh, so okay, started with—

Sydnee:

So far we haven't dropped from the vines...

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

... stone-like into the jungle.

Justin:

It started with hemophilia.

Sydnee:

Yup.

Justin:

And on hemophilia we mentioned hydrogen peroxide.

Sydnee:

Yes.

Justin:

Hydrogen peroxide we mentioned...

Sydnee:

Um, ear— How'd we get to earwax from there? 'Cause I said it...

Justin:

Oh, it was good for— People told us—

Sydnee:

Oh, because people kept asking. "But what about hydrogen peroxide? Isn't that good for ears?"

Justin:

So, now here we are.

Sydnee:

Talking about ears some more.

Justin:

Ears some more.

Sydnee:

I— Apparently ears gross people out.

Justin:

Yeah, some people had some problems with that, huh?

Sydnee:

Are ears gross?

Justin:

I don't know. That's hard for me to say. I— They don't—

Sydnee:

Sometimes I feel like a space alien asking you these questions.

Justin:

Mm-hmm.

Sydnee:

Because I don't— Like, I don't think ears are gross and I know what ears are and I know what gross is so I feel weird having to ask the question, are ears gross but are... like, am I missing that?

Justin:

I don't think ears— They don't particularly gross me out.

Sydnee:

[overlapping] Is that just something I'm not... Okay.

Justin:

No, I mean, I don't have a problem with it.

Sydnee:

Okay. Well, we're gonna talk more about them, then.

Justin:

Okay, you're the boss.

Sydnee:

Uh, I thought maybe we could talk about earaches.

Justin:

Yeah, uh, that's fine by me. I'll allow it.

Sydnee:

You'll... Okay, well thank goodness 'cause I don't have anything else prepared.

Justin:

Good.

Sydnee:

So, I mean, unless you just want to hear about, like, my day 'cause you know you didn't ask.

Justin:

Oh, wow.

Sydnee:

So here it is.

Justin:

So, how was your day?

Sydnee:

[laughs] I mean, it was fine. It was okay.

Justin:

Glad I asked. Uh, so what's the deal with earaches, Syd?

Sydnee:

Well, first of all, thank you to Jennifer and Emily for both mentioning this topic and when I say earaches, let me just clarify. I'm talking about anything that can cause ear pain.

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

Because as with a lot of medical conditions, before we understood the anatomy of the ear and, uh, the different causes of ear pain, you know, what germ theory of disease and what infections are and why it matters if there are different bugs in your body and all that stuff. Before we figured all that out, all we knew is that our ears hurt.

Justin:

Right.

Sydnee:

Right?

Justin:

Ear— When you're talking about ear pain, even I, uh, know that ear pain is really a symptom less than it is a disorder, right?

Sydnee:

Well, yes. Obviously yes, that is a... [laughs] It is a symptom of a problem. Typically pain is a symptom of a problem. Um, and so when we say earache, we're talking about otalgia which is just ear pain.

Justin:

Mm-hmm.

Sydnee:

And it can be...

Justin:

Hey, did anybody recommend this by the way?

Sydnee:

I already said that.

Justin:

Oh, did you say... I missed it.

Sydnee:

Yeah.

Justin:

Sorry.

Sydnee:

Jennifer and Emily.

Justin:

Thank you, Jennifer and Emily.

Sydnee:

They get a double thank.

Justin:

Double thanks.

Sydnee:

Because of Justin's forgetfulness or probably not paying attention.

Justin:

I'm paying attention.

Sydnee:

So there are some different things that can cause ear pain. One is an infection of the middle ear, which is also call otitis media which is what you think of with, like, little kids getting ear infections. When you think about that, that's probably what you're talking about.

Justin:

Mm-hmm.

Sydnee:

Okay? So it's behind the eardrum, and the eardrum gets all red and bulgy and you see puss back there and, um, you see that a lot, like I said, in kids. Uh, we could also be talking about an ear infection of the external ear, like the ear canal and beyond. That's called otitis externa.

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

And that's also what we're kind of talking about when you hear the term swimmer's ear.

Justin:

See, I always thought swimmer's ear was, like, when your ears got water logged after you went swimming.

Sydnee:

Well, yes, getting the water in your ear is kind of the precipitating event for the problem, but it's really, like, an infection and then inflammation and irritation of the ear canal that results from that. So it's not just the presence of the water.

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

That's just water in your ear.

Justin:

Got it.

Sydnee:

I don't have, like, a fancy name for that really.

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

I could probably make one up and use Latin and you'd think I was impressive though.

Justin:

I already think you're impressive.

Sydnee:

Thanks, hun.

Justin:

No problem.

Sydnee:

And then there are lots of other things that may have caused ear pain at any given time that we would have treated in the same way... I'm gonna tell you about a lot of weird treatments for earaches and probably all this stuff was

lumped in together while these two that I've already named are the most common causes, you could also...

Again, you could have fluid in your ear that could be causing some ear pain or pressure. You could have, uh, referred tooth pain.

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

So if you have a problem with specific teeth...

Justin:

Kind of radiating up?

Sydnee:

It— So, yes, exactly. It's like referred through different nerve branches to your ears...

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

... so it feels like your ear is the problem...

Justin:

But it's really not.

Sydnee:

But it's actually your teeth.

Justin:

Like how a heart attack can sometimes radiate to your, like, arms.

Sydnee:

Sure. Yeah, like that. Yeah, absolutely.

Justin:

I'm killing it today.

Sydnee:

You're all over this.

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

Uh, and also like TMJ problems with the joint that helps you...

Justin:

Celebrity gossip.

Sydnee:

... operate your jaw. [laughs] I don't think they're TMJ.

Justin:

TM— Okay. Uh, yeah, you're right.

Sydnee:

They're something else.

Justin:

TMZ. My mistake.

Sydnee:

That's the one they are.

Justin:

Yeah, that's the one.

Sydnee:

I didn't know.

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

I was hoping you would fill it in.

Justin:

[laughs]

Sydnee:

I knew it was something else.

Justin:

I mean, I guess that's my fault.

Sydnee:

I don't get my news there. I get my news from Justin.

Justin:

[laughs] That is true.

Sydnee:

Uh, and so, like, TMJ could, for instance, cause some ear pain too. So anyway, nobody ever knew why these things were happening, why your ears hurt from time to time.

When it took us a long time to, you know, create smaller devices to look inside the ear and figure out what was going on, uh, so basically instead of that, we would just try to pour things in our ear and fix that...

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

... that way. Um, there were a few theories. Um, when we talk about, like, the four humors and that theory of disease that you have four humors in your body that need to be kept in perfect balance in order for your to have perfect health, there was a thought that an earache or really any ear

condition, ringing in your ears, problems hearing, anything... could be caused by too much of your humors kind of pressing against your ear.

Justin:

Mm-hmm.

Sydnee:

So if you just had a lot of humors up there...

Justin:

Yeah, makes sense.

Sydnee:

... that that would cause an earache. Um, there was some other theories that I actually found, more current ideas that ear infections are caused by not breast feeding which probably...

Justin:

Like the mom's ear infections or the baby's?

Sydnee:

Like a baby's...`

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

... gonna get an ear infection if you don't breastfeed the baby.

Justin:

Makes more sense.

Sydnee:

And that's probably linked to a misunderstanding of studies that have shown a decrease in certain kinds of infections in infants who are breastfed, including ear infections. So I— But that reverse logic doesn't work. You know, if breastfeeding correlates with a decrease in ear infections, that

doesn't mean that formula feeding causes ear infections. Do you follow my drift?

Justin:

It's a correlation not causation.

Sydnee:

Exactly. So that's false logic. U1m, the prescription of antibiotics. I saw that a lot of places. If you took too many antibiotics, you'd get an ear infection.

Justin:

Is that legit?

Sydnee:

Well, no. I think again...

Justin:

Does it make it harder to treat maybe? Does that make sense?

Sydnee:

Well, I think they're— I think that's what they're trying to use stuff that's real to create false conclusions. The idea that you're treated with a lot of antibiotics and so you can have more resistant infections certainly is a concern, but the idea that I would take an antibiotic and then get an infection in my ear from—

That's a— I don't understand what they're—That's— No.

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

Just no.

Justin:

No?

Sydnee:

And then I saw a lot of people claiming that it's an inflammatory reaction to cow's milk.

Justin:

Mm, no. That... Now, I can tell you that one doesn't make sense.

Sydnee:

No, that doesn't make sense. Um, whatever the causes people believed or didn't believe, uh, there were a lot of weird ideas for treatments throughout the years so...

Justin:

Weird to us modern folk, not to them. It probably seemed pretty normal to them, right?

Sydnee:

Yeah, well... Okay, let's start with the first one. This is an example from ancient Egypt. This was a commonly used treatment for ear infections, actually several different, like, infectious processes so not...

I mean, I say ear infections, they didn't know they were ear infections. For ear pain and that you could use this for a lot of different painful conditions. You take a mouse...

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

Uh, if it's already dead, good, you're halfway there. If it's not, make it dead.

Justin:

Somehow.

Sydnee:

Somehow, that's up to you really. Mash it up.

Justin:

Ew.

Sydnee:

You want it to be a little decayed. Uh, it's better if it's a decaying, dead mouse.

Justin:

Nope, can't. Can't.

Sydnee:

Not so much like a fresh dead mouse.

Justin:

I took my headphones off but it didn't help because you're right in front of me.

Sydnee:

And then you're gonna mash that into a paste of dead, decaying mouse.

Justin:

Nope, nope, nope!

Sydnee:

And then you're gonna put it in your ear.

Justin:

Absolutely not. I'm not doing that at all.

Sydnee:

I thought you didn't have a problem with ears. [laughs]

Justin:

You monster.

Sydnee:

Justin has a problem with mice. Justin has a big problem with mice.

Justin:

None of the stuff on the show bothers me expect for the times when it super, super has. Uh, this one, woof. Woof's a daisy. Okay. Got it.

Sydnee:

That was a really— That was a really popular treatment for a lot of different pain complaints but it's specifically used...

Justin:

How bad.

Sydnee:

... to put that mash, that paste into your ear.

Justin:

Sydnee, how bad does your ear hurt? Like the worst, right? Like the worst hurting.

Sydnee:

It must hurt a lot.

Justin:

A lot.

Sydnee:

Yeah.

Justin:

For a long time because you're definitely not waiting for it to pass. Oh, that's so grody though. That's so grody.

Sydnee:

I've never had ear pain to that extent personally. Personally.

Justin:

I've never had any pain to that extent. I'd amputate my leg and I still wouldn't put a dead mouse paste on it. Ugh.

Sydnee:

So, see what I'm saying when I—

Justin:

[crosstalk] That's what pesto is though. Did you know that? A lot of people don't. That's pesto.

Sydnee:

Is dead mouse paste?

Justin:

[laughs] That's where pesto comes from. A lot of people don't know that.

Sydnee:

No, it doesn't.

Justin:

Yup. Pesto. Yeah, that's what pesto is.

Sydnee:

No, you know what, though, you can use to make pesto is basil...

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

... and garlic...

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

... and strangely...

Justin:

Pine nuts?

Sydnee:

... the oil of basil and garlic can both... were both used as treatments for earaches...

Justin:

Sure, why not.

Sydnee:

... throughout history. Put some garlic oil in your ear, put some basil oil in your ear, then put some pine nuts in your ear and...

Justin:

You got to—

Sydnee:

... shake your head up. [laughs]

Justin:

You got a penne going.

Sydnee:

A really popular treatment, especially as we look to, like, early American treatments like, you know, in the 1800s, the 1700 and 1800s, you see, um, warm urine...

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

... being used for ears and actually that is something I have heard in my practice today as, like, a folk remedy. Like just get some fresh pee and put it in your ear. Preferably your own, I guess.

Justin:

Sure.

Sydnee:

Just because, like, it's yours.

Justin:

It's easier to get fresh too.

Sydnee:

[laughs] Well, I mean, I think everybody has...

Justin:

So it's like farm to table. It's like toilet to ear, you know, like you know... You know where it's been.

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

You don't want to get this, like, GMO stuff.

Sydnee:

Hey, this is Sawbones, Justin and Sydnee here. We're launching the, uh... the toilet to ear revolution.

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

Uh, we'd like you to start, you know, using local urine...

Justin:

Local.

Sydnee:

... for your ear.

Justin:

Locally sourced, shade grown urine. By shade grown, we mean remember... Please remember to leave the toilet cover down.

Sydnee:

[laughs] Free range urine...

Justin:

Free range.

Sydnee:

... for people who pee outside.

Justin:

Yeah, pee outside the bowl I guess.

Sydnee:

Uh, so urine was a really popular treatment. Um, another thing again, this is something I've still heard, is blowing tobacco smoke in your ear so like take a couple cigarettes...

Justin:

You know what? I feel like maybe we talked about that in our tobacco episode, right?

Sydnee:

We did.

Justin:

It sounds vaguely familiar.

Sydnee:

We did mention it. You could also just, if you didn't want to do the tobacco smoke, you wanted something more concentrated, you could stuff a wad of...

Justin:

Vape. You could just vape right in your ear.

Sydnee:

Vape in your ear. That was the healthier option.

Justin:

The healthier option? Smells like strawberries.

Sydnee:

[laughs] That you could stuff a wad of chewing tobacco in there.

Justin:

[laughs] What if Pliny is like, "Mm, the old ear pain, eh? Well, just get... blow some cotton in there, Vape Lord."

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

[laughs] Like, what are you talking...? He's lost it. Get the hemlock, we're putting him down.

Sydnee:

Hold on, wait. Is Vape Lord a term for people who vape a lot?

Justin:

It's kind of a... It's something of a derogatory term for people who...

Sydnee:

Oh.

Justin:

...who love to vape.

Sydnee:

Okay. Not just something you made up?

Justin:

No, no, no.

Sydnee:

I've never heard this term before.

Justin:

I might have... it's probably somebody I know.

Sydnee:

Can I call you Vape Lord now?

Justin:

I'd rather you didn't.

Sydnee:

Okay. Um, so yeah, you could also just stuff a wad of chewing tobacco in there. Again, preferably I guess that you were chewing on and not someone else was chewing on.

Justin:

Yeah, ideally.

Sydnee:

I don't know. Either way. Although if you think about, these treatments were probably mainly enforced on children.

Justin:

Mm-hmm.

Sydnee:

It probably was something that, like, mom or dad or grandma or grandpa was gnawing on and then was like, "Here, stuff this in their ear." [laughs]

Justin:

Why not? I need a place to put it.

Sydnee:

Um, I think we mentioned this on our episode about breastfeeding but breast milk has been a popular treatment for ear infections, which again, like that's kind of weird logic. Like, we know that babies who are breastfed maybe have slightly lower rates of ear infections but that doesn't necessarily mean you could squirt some breast milk in their ear.

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

And that it would fix things.

Justin:

These are all, like, topically applied, right?

Sydnee:

Yeah, these are just things that you're squirting or blowing or stuffing in your ear. Um, again like the next one, lightly toasted salt pork.

Justin:

Yum.

Sydnee:

Just take a wedge of it and shove it in there.

Justin:

Just get it in there I guess. How big is your ear, dog?

Sydnee:

Well, I mean you cut it.

Justin:

Sure.

Sydnee:

Like you could cut the...

Justin:

More like a pork rind at that point.

Sydnee:

[laughs] Stuff a pork rind in your ear.

Justin:

Shove a pork rind in your ear. It'll... At least it will be there later and you can enjoy it.

Sydnee:

I'd rather do that than eat a pork rind frankly.

Justin:

Chicharrons. That's Mexican and Spanish is chicharrons. I like that term better than pork rinds. It sounds more appetizing so when I was on Atkins, I would refer to them as chicharrons 'cause it sounds better.

Sydnee:

It does sound fancier than pork rinds.

Justin:

It sounds fancier, yeah for sure.

Sydnee:

Either way, I don't want 'em.

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

Uh, vitamin C, of course, has been proposed. This is actually something you can just, you know, take vitamin C, like, by mouth. You don't have to stuff it in your ear. Um, which is— It's used as a treatment for everything, right? Cedar tar was one strange treatment I found that you would put inside your ear.

Justin:

That seems destructive.

Sydnee:

Yes, uh, hemp juice. Uh, likewise, cannabis in general I found on one of the... now, granted, while this was something that people have done throughout history, there were a lot of people on, um, like, cannabis websites...

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

... who were promoting, like, buy our cannabis lotion or our cannabis ointment and put it in your ear.

Justin:

If you want.

Sydnee:

If you want, I guess, or whatever. If you want. Uh, dove's blood was one particularly gruesome...

Justin:

Yeah, like...

Sydnee:

I mean, you've got to obtain that.

Justin:

Sure, they're not gonna... you're not gonna put a little needle in there and get a pint. No sir.

Sydnee:

No. No, I mean, I guess that would be the nicer way if you could find a dove and, like, get it to agree to donate blood for your ear.

Justin:

Give it a little Little Debbie afterwards to get his sugar back up.

Sydnee:

[laughs] Some orange juice and cookies.

Justin:

A little thimble of orange juice.

Sydnee:

Um, you could also try— This is something strange that I found. Take some warm— Take some salt, warm it up, like in the microwave or whatever, uh, wrap it in a washcloth and then just hold it near your ear for five minutes.

Justin:

Come on. That one's not even worth put— I want that to be lost to history. I'm editing that out 'cause I want it to be... I want history to forget about that stupid cure.

Sydnee:

It... I saw the same thing though with, like, an onion. Like you could take an onion, wrap it in a cloth...

Justin:

You saw it on The Onion, that's what happened.

Sydnee:

Yeah, I saw it... [laughs] You could wrap the onion in a cloth. You could put that, uh, in your ear or near your ear. Um, same thing or like a bottle of warm water that you could hold near your ear and it's gonna absorb. All these ideas are that they'll absorb the pain. The salt, the onion, the water... that it's going to somehow like suck the pain out of your ear and absorb it...

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

... is the thought process.

Justin:

Sure.

Sydnee:

Of course vinegar. Of course.

Justin:

Snatch.

Sydnee:

And of course olive oil. Of course.

Justin:

Of course.

Sydnee:

Or vinegar and olive oil. I never under these places where you'll see, like, "Use some vinegar or use some olive oil or use vinegar and olive oil." Why would you use both if one works?

Justin:

If you're not making a salad, I don't know.

Sydnee:

[laughs] This will go great with the garlic and the basil...

Justin:

Sure.

Sydnee:

... that you already have in there. Do you want a... Does a tomato work? Why not?

Justin:

Why not?

Sydnee:

Let's say it does.

Justin:

Let's have some crouts.

Sydnee:

How about some cheese?

Justin:

Cheese, that'd be nice.

Sydnee:

And then, uh... and then, like I said, um, tea tree oil is recommended for a lot of different things. Uh, mustard oil and then finally, uh, crushed mango leaves...

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

... were a remedy that I found.

Justin:

This is wild, man. We're trying everything, huh?

Sydnee:

Yes.

Justin:

You know, I think we tend to get a little bit, uh, a bit more wooly and wild when the, um... When the things we're trying to treat is external or, like, basically external. I think we tend to be a little bit braver when it's not, like, your stomach. You know what I mean?

Sydnee:

Right.

Justin:

Where, like, you're going to have to eat it, like, you're gonna have to swallow it. Like, I think we'll get— We're a little bit more experimental with stuff that's, like, you know, exterior.

Sydnee:

That you just kind of rub on you. Yeah, you really....

Justin:

Like baldness, there was, like, a 100,000 things for that, you know.

Sydnee:

I think you're right. You really see a lot more kind of caution thrown to the wind when it's something you're just gonna put on the outside of you 'cause we think, like, "Well, our skin will protect us if it's dangerous."

Justin:

Sure.

Sydnee:

I've seen that actually people use, like, um, aspirin pastes that they put all over them for various complaints.

Justin:

Yup.

Sydnee:

This is unrelated to ears, but I've just seen that as if it's, like, well, it won't be dangerous if you just make a paste out of aspirin and kind of smear it all over you.

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

That is dangerous. Do not do that. You do absorb that and you can get quite sick.

Justin:

Oh, good to know.

Sydnee:

But I think people don't know that because it's, like, "Well, it's external."

Justin:

Sure.

Sydnee:

Well, Justin, I want to tell you about some more crazy treatments for ear pain.

Justin:

I'm ready, Sydnee.

Sydnee:

But before I do that, why don't you come with me to the billing department?

Justin:

Let's go!

[theme song plays]

[ad break]

Justin:

Now, Syd, don't keep me in suspense. I know we got some other, uh, cures for...

Sydnee:

Yes.

Justin:

"Cures." Those are my audio quotes.

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

That's how those work.

Sydnee:

"Cures." So...

Justin:

"Cures."

Sydnee:

So, one thing that I thought was particularly disturbing, again, this kind of dates back to, um, early American days, the early days of our country. One thing that people would try to do for an earache is find what was called a Bessie bug, also called a Betsy bug...

Justin:

I've never heard of this.

Sydnee:

It's a kind of beetle. It's basically one of those real big, black beetles that have the pinchers, like the little things on the end that can like bite and they can fly.

Justin:

Mm-hmm.

Sydnee:

And they're unpleasant looking. So, if you can get over that, you just need to grab one when you see it. If you have an earache, I'm assuming. Don't do this for fun. This is just obviously for medical reasons.

Justin:

No, not for kicks.

Sydnee:

[laughs] Uh, you pull it apart, and that there is a... some sort of yellow sack inside that— Or there is a sack inside that contains, like, a yellow fluid. I don't know if this is, like, a bladder or... I have no idea. I don't know anything about bug anatomy, so...

Justin:

If this was a role playing game, it would be, like, create a salve that you used to rub on your blade to give it lightning powers or something like that.

Sydnee:

[laughs] Well, it's similar, you just squeeze that fluid into your ear.

Justin:

Same thing, basically. Same principle.

Sydnee:

Uh, I don't think you get a lightning blade out of it.

Justin:

No.

Sydnee:

But your earache is supposed to go away.

Justin:

Sure.

Sydnee:

I would say it probably doesn't. Um, I saw a lot of, uh, advertisements for chiropractic readjustment to cure your ear infections. I don't know that I have evidence necessarily for that. Um, I'm not necessarily saying that chiropractic readjustment would be bad for you in that case but I don't think it would help with your ear infection.

Justin:

Fair enough.

Sydnee:

And then, of course, homeopathy has to weigh in on this.

Justin:

Sure.

Sydnee:

Why not? So if you have an ear infection or an earache and you go to a homeopathic practitioner, they might suggest that you take some potassium chloride except they won't tell you that, they'll tell you it's Kali muriaticum, muriaticum, muriaticum.

Justin:

Okay, sure.

Sydnee:

And, uh, you can use that if you've got, like, um, not only a stuffy ear, like a stuffed up— Like your ear feels like it's full of fluid or something and some hearing loss but also if you've got like a runny nose and some big tonsils, they'll tell you like, "Don't worry. We have some Kali muriaticum for you." Which really means we put a drop of potassium chloride in some water which we put then in some water which was then in some water and blah, blah, blah, blah until we have, like, basically some water.

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

Or you could use Mercurius dulcis which is just mercury chloride. Again, same kind of process and that's if you have, um, retracted eardrums. So if the eardrum is, like, pulled in tight, as opposed to bulging out at you. It's, like, pushed back.

Justin:

Sure.

Sydnee:

And both of these really are just water.

Justin:

Yeah, they're just water.

Sydnee:

Yeah. Um, one of our favorite friends of the show... Well, one of our recurring characters if you will...

Justin:

Sure.

Sydnee:

... is Pliny the Elder.

Justin:

Sure, I know old Pliny.

Sydnee:

Now, Pliny always delivers when he shows up on Sawbones.

Justin:

[laughs]

Sydnee:

He always brings the goods with some sort of... I don't want to say crazy medical cure.

Justin:

I'll just say made up.

Sydnee:

Yes. Uh, definitely, definitely made up. When it comes to ears, Pliny cannot stop talking. Pliny the Elder does not have enough to say about ear pain and ear infections and ear problems.

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

He has like a cure for all of them so let's just... let's really get into this and this isn't even all of them by the way. I got to a point where I was like, "Okay, this is enough." I could do an entire episode of Pliny the Elder and your ear.

Justin:

Yeah. He can't wait to get in there.

Sydnee:

[laughs] So, one of the things for just ear pain in general that Pliny would recommend is— And should I clarify, like, Pliny was a naturalist from ancient

Rome that we talk about a lot on the show because he wrote about like the natural history of everything, like, all plants and animals and life on earth plus like a...

Justin:

He's the only one who thought... He probably has more notoriety because he's the only one who thought to, like, write all this stuff down.

Sydnee:

Yeah.

Justin:

Everybody else was just spouting it off their butts.

Sydnee:

That's true. And he wrote it all down. It's all out there and he had a cure for everything, every condition and, uh, multiple cures for many and the only reason... People keep asking, like, "Do a whole episode on him." I don't think that... It would be endless episodes. It would be episode after episode because he wrote about everything.

Justin:

Plus we don't want to burn all our Pliny material.

Sydnee:

Yeah, 'cause it's some good stuff. For instance, for your earache, you could take some mice ash...

Justin:

Can we not?

Sydnee:

... which again would involve you first, you know, burning a mouse...

Justin:

Sure, right.

Sydnee:

... to make the ash.

Justin:

Yeah, yeah. Got it. Yeah, got it. How's your day, mouse? Pretty bad, huh? Sorry buddy.

Sydnee:

[laughs] I know, I feel really bad for... I am not, by the way, endorsing murdering any mice. Please don't.

Justin:

I'm into it.

Sydnee:

Well, Justin doesn't like mice. I am telling you don't kill any mice. These are just funny, like, ha-ha laugh about it and then move on. Don't kill mice. Uh, mice ash with honey or rose oil, either. Whatever you prefer. I mean, there's already mice ash there so that's the important part. Uh, you could also use a centipede that's pounded into a pomegranate rind.

Justin:

Okay. Sure. I mean, sure. Fine, Pliny. Fine.

Sydnee:

You've got to find the centipede and capture it first though and that would freak me out.

Justin:

I think some of this is just, like, people were so bored. They just needed something to do.

Sydnee:

Catch a centipede and pound it into a pomegranate rind is what they came up with?

Justin:

That's like, "Listen, uh, Darryl, yes? Darryl yes?"

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

"I'd love to come over but I've got a full day booked. I am hunting down, get this, hunting down a centipede to grind it into a pomegranate rind. Yeah, I read about it. It's a new treatment I read about in that hot magazine, Stone Tablets, and I'm just really excited to get out there and get on the hunt so [crosstalk] unfortunately I can't come to your daughter's rock throwing recital."

Sydnee:

[laughs] But it's endorsed by Pliny so you know it's got to be good.

Justin:

Yeah, it comes from Pliny.

Sydnee:

He's like the Doctor Oz of our time.

Justin:

Yes, the—

Sydnee:

The time before Doctor Oz. [laughs]

Justin:

Actually, a soothsayer named Draws was the Doctor Oz of their time but they— Close. Pliny is close.

Sydnee:

He's the Doctor Phil of their time?

Justin:

Maybe, I don't know. I think that's probably So-crates.

Sydnee:

Oh, okay. We'll figure it out.

Justin:

We'll figure it out.

Sydnee:

Oh, so let's say you've got some water in your ear.

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

Okay?

Justin:

That's happened to me before.

Sydnee:

Just put some goose grease and onion juice in there.

Justin:

Great.

Sydnee:

Then you won't care so much about the water...

Justin:

'Cause of the smell.

Sydnee:

... 'cause now you got the goose grease and the onion juice in your ear.

Justin:

Yup.

Sydnee:

If you get a, uh, creature in your ear as we mentioned last week, uh, that poor, unfortunate woman on Survivor got that worm in her ear, you could, um, put some vinegar and mouse gall in there.

Justin:

Ugh, again with the mice.

Sydnee:

Uh, for... Yeah. Mice are popular ear treatments. I don't know what that association is.

Justin:

Apparently.

Sydnee:

Maybe because of Mickey Mouse and the big ears?

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

No, probably not.

Justin:

No. [laughs]

Sydnee:

For ulcers in your ear, you could mash some earthworms or some red worms into some grease...

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

... and put it in there. If your ear is bruised, you put some salt into the mouth of a preserved lizard... So you like take a lizard, tie it by it's tail from a like clothesline and hang it there to dry and then put salt in its mouth and then put that on your ear.

Justin:

Sure.

Sydnee:

Uh, if your ear is broken, you need some snails with some frankincense or myrrh or honey.

Justin:

Okay, deal.

Sydnee:

If your ear is smelly...

Justin:

And it is.

Sydnee:

Sure. Serpent skin with rose oil. Pus in your ear? Saffron or a dirty cricket, not a clean one. A dirty one.

Justin:

Not one of those prim and proper crickets.

Sydnee:

And in general, it's a good idea to keep a concoction of dormouse that you have skinned and disemboweled and boiled in honey, um, on hand for any ear complaints.

Justin:

These mice.

Sydnee:

These are all of Pliny's recommendations for your ear.

Justin:

These mice just can't catch a break this week.

Sydnee:

Uh, one interesting... before I tell you what you actually need to do about your ears, one kind of interesting side note is something that you may come across called Tektite solution or actually there is some, like, over the counter products that are based on this Tektite solution.

So where does this come from? This is something that you could put in your ear for swimmer's ear is what you'll see it marketed for. Tektite was an underwater habitat that was built off the coast of the Virgin Islands in 1969. It was like the first federally funded underwater, um...

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

... like place where, you know, people... divers could go stay to study, obviously, like, the ecology of coral reefs but also to study, like, the effects of being underwater for a really long time on humans, so, like, physiology and the decompression sickness and that kind of stuff.

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

Um, which by the way, this whole thing, this underwater habitat, was built in a place called King of Prussia, Pennsylvania.

Justin:

Oh, okay.

Sydnee:

Which is one of my favorite named places.

Justin:

There's a mall there, King of Prussia Mall.

Sydnee:

Yes, it's like one of the largest malls.

Justin:

It's a big mall.

Sydnee:

I don't know if it's still the largest mall but it is one of the largest malls.

Justin:

I think Mall of America is probably the biggest.

Sydnee:

Well, I don't know.

Justin:

I don't know. I'm not a— I don't have the stats on hand.

Sydnee:

The Bloodhound Gang is from King of Prussia.

Justin:

Okay, sure.

Sydnee:

So is Joe Brieth. There you go.

Justin:

Wow, that's true. Yeah.

Sydnee:

Those are all the facts I know about King of Prussia.

Justin:

Thank you.

Sydnee:

And also, the underwater habitat was built by GE, uh, there. Anyway, the point is a lot of these divers got, uh, swimmer's ear and so they had to come up with something to do for all this external ear infection and they created this solution of acetic acid, tannic acid and alcohol, uh, and what we've actually found is that acetic acid...

I don't know if it's necessarily as good at treating, um, an outer ear infection as an antibiotic. When I started looking into some of the studies, it might take a little longer and if it's a really serious infection, you're not gonna want to mess around with acetic acid but if you put that in your ear, it might actually help prevent...

Justin:

Hmm.

Sydnee:

Like, if you are gonna be a diver, somebody who would be at higher risk to get swimmer's ear, it actually might help to prevent ear infections and there are a lot of products that you can buy that help to keep your ear canals dry, um, to try to prevent that and they're based on this, uh, Tektite solution.

Justin:

Interesting. So what's the— What do you actually do, Syd? Uh, this... That sounds kind of real but what's the— What do you recommend?

Sydnee:

So first of all, if you think that you or your child, 'cause you see this a lot in kids, have a middle ear infection, otitis media, uh, go see a doctor. You might need antibiotics. Not necessarily though, about 70% of children get better on their own in about two or three days and about 80% are better within a week to ten days.

So you don't always need an antibiotic but you should get checked out, um, because sometimes you do. If you think you have the external ear infection or swimmer's ear, again, it's a good idea to get checked out 'cause a lot of people do need ear drops.

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

So that's when we would use those ear drops.

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

Antibiotic ear drops, sometimes steroid. Keep your ears dry, you can keep the water from collecting in there, like, blow them out with a hair dryer after you get out of the pool and that kind of stuff. Keeping your ears dry helps to prevent it. Um, and maybe, maybe acetic acid.

Um, either way, you want to talk to a doctor about this stuff and others— All that other stuff, if I haven't said it enough, just go see a doctor, like, if your ear hurts 'cause they can look in there. Like, we have special tools, they're called otoscopes and we look in your ear and we tell you why it hurts and it's great.

Justin:

Go for it. Doctors, check it out.

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

Thank you to, uh, Sydnee McElroy for co-hosting this program with me.

Sydnee:

Thank you Justin.

Justin:

And thanks to Taxpayers.

Sydnee:

Our daughter, Charlie, is awake so I'm gonna go get her in a second.

Justin:

Oh, okay. Well, then let me wrap this up by saying thanks to you for listening. There's a lot more great shows at MaximumFun.org. My name's Justin McElroy.

Sydnee:

I'm Sydnee McElroy.

Justin:

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

[theme song plays]

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