

Sawbones 143: Salt

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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 am your co-host, Justin McElroy.

Sydnee:

And I'm Sydnee McElroy.

Justin:

Sydnee, we are in the dregs of TV, uh, right now. And things are hard out there.

Sydnee:

That's true. That's true, Justin. I— you know I wasn't much of a TV watcher until we got married?

Justin:

Yeah. And I—

Sydnee:

And now I know that summer's a rough time for the J-Man.

Justin:

Summer's a rough time for us out here. You know, it's ironic, I think. The only three shows that we really like that are on right, *UnREAL*, *Bachelorette*, and, uh, *Are You The One?* Just, like, different permutations of the same formula.

Sydnee:

And there, that's— we just admitted that, and put that out there.

Justin:

There. That's all we like right now.

Sydnee:

Yeah, you thought I was smart.

Justin:

Sorry.

Sydnee:

Guess what? [laughs]

Justin:

Listen, smart—

Sydnee:

It's a trick.

Justin:

... smart people need a break, too, all right? And I'm really smart-ish.

Sydnee:

I feel... It's a little guilty pleasure, though, right?

Justin:

It's a little bit, yeah.

Sydnee:

All of it is, kind of, a guilty pleasure.

Justin:

Yeah, for sure.

Sydnee:

I think. That's fair to say.

Justin:

Uh, you know what I miss? I wanna watch... Since we got downtime. Um, I was thinking about this. I wanna watch *The O.C.*

Sydnee:

We've already watched *The O.C.*

Justin:

I wanna watch *The O.C.* again. Go back from the beginning. [singing]

Sydnee:

I don't— I... I mean, I feel ya, but I don't think we have time for that right now.

Justin:

Um, why not do it right now?

Sydnee:

No.

Justin:

I... Why?

Sydnee:

No. I hate to salt your game, but we kinda got a podcast to do.

Justin:

Uh, salt... Okay. Salt my... You are throwing *O.C.* lingo at me, a— as you're telling me that I'm not allowed to watch *The O.C.*? You can't just say—

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

... "You're not allowed to watch *The O.C.*, and now, also, I'm gonna say salt my— uh, salt my game." The— the number one thing that would make me wanna watch *O.C.*

Sydnee:

Can I ask? Is there anywhere else in the world where salt my game exists, other than in the— in *The O.C.* universe?

Justin:

I mean—

Sydnee:

Is that a thing?

Justin:

It is.

Sydnee:

Like, I had never heard that before *The O.C.* I've never heard it outside of *The O.C.*, except for us and our family referencing *The O.C.*

Justin:

Yes. When you and me, and Griffin and Rachel talk about salting each other's games.

Sydnee:

That's it.

Justin:

That's it. That's pretty much it. I don't know. But, uh, I'm— I don't wanna salt the game of whoever started saying salt my game. [laughs]

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

Man, it's a very good phrase though. Very vocative, too.

Sydnee:

It's—

Justin:

Very vocative.

Sydnee:

It's also appropriate. Speaking of salt. [laughs]

Justin:

Speaking of salt.

Sydnee:

I thought we should talk about salt.

Justin:

Yeah. Uh, I'm a big fan of salt. The cool thing about being married to a doctor, a lot of times she'll tell me about things that aren't healthy for me. And then I was like, "Everybody seems really up in arms in salt." And Sydnee's always just like, "Go hog wild, J-Man."

Sydnee:

No. Well, no. I... Hold on.

Justin:

Basically.

Sydnee:

I didn't say that. No, but, like, I think everybody's always been aware that there's an aspect of salt that has something to do with medicine, that some people eat too much, or that you shouldn't eat this, or... That's always one of the first things people tell me, like, "Well, I don't salt my food." Uh, but there's also this new concept of salt I see more frequently, where, like, salt, especially certain kinds of salt, is this healthy secret cure—

Justin:

Minerals. A lot of minerals in it, maybe.

Sydnee:

Yeah.

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

... that people— that we've been keeping from people. So I thought we could kind of trace the medical roots of salt. And, uh, there a lot of people who have suggested, uh, salt or the salt cousins, the salt family. [laughs] The pantheon of salts. Uh, Cinica, Robert, Rachael, Lauren, Janine, Jennifer, Brandon, and Erica all suggested this topic.

So, first of all, uh, the use of salt for medicine dates back to Ancient times.

Justin:

Now, what's salt? I'm just kidding.

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

'Cause normally we start that way. So we don't need to do that, I guess.

Sydnee:

Salt is sodium chloride.

Justin:

Got it.

Sydnee:

NA—

Justin:

NACL. Got it.

Sydnee:

... CL. That's how it's abbreviated. Sodium chloride. That's it. That's salt. Now, there are lots of, uh, permutations of that. There are lots of different places you can get salt, or, like, process salt. But that's salt. And, now, let me say this. There are also salts of different things. Potassium salts or magnesium salts. That's not usually what we're talking about when we just use the word salt.

Justin:

When we talk about—

Sydnee:

You know, somebody says, "Pass the salt," they don't mean pass me the potassium salt.

Justin:

[laughs]

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

Usually.

Sydnee:

They...

Justin:

Usually.

Sydnee:

It usually just means, like, table salt. Uh—

Justin:

If you— if you had a weird uncle, uh, Mr. Wizard, who's over for Thanksgiving, if your uncle's just a wizard and he's over for Thanksgiving, he might do that, but that's about it.

Sydnee:

Uh, or he might say like, "Pass me the NACL." We'll say that sometimes at work.

Justin:

Do you say that sometimes?

Sydnee:

The NACL.

Justin:

You—

Sydnee:

Well, I don't say, "Pass me the NACL." Like—

Justin:

You got a very—

Sydnee:

... I'll say like, "Let's give them some NACL. Some sodium chloride."

Justin:

You got a very puckish look on your face, as if that's very bad.

Sydnee:

[laughs] No, it's just funny.

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

It's a joke— it's a joke about sodium chloride. [laughs]

Justin:

Okay. Well, we'll talk about what jokes are later. But, first, let's talk about salt.

Sydnee:

In Ancient Egyptian medicine, salt was advised, uh, for disinfection. There was a thought— a thought that salt could kill... Well, I was gonna say that salt could kill bacteria, but we didn't— we didn't know that; although, we do think that eventually. Uh, we didn't know anything about bacteria, we just thought that salt cleaned wounds.

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

So— so it was used for disinfection. Uh, you could use it as an ointment or a suppository or a liquid. There were recipes, so to speak, for all of these things. Uh, there's one papyrus that advises using it for a chest wound, specifically, uh, that you could put a bunch of salt on a chest wound—

Justin:

That sounds—

Sydnee:

... and it would dry it out.

Justin:

That sounds very, very unpleasant.

Sydnee:

[laughs] I think if you already have a chest wound, I don't know how much worse it could get.

Justin:

Mm-hmm.

Sydnee:

Um, in the Ebers Papyrus, specifically, they advised that it's a way to, again, fight infection, as well as, uh, used as a laxative.

Justin:

Is it a laxative?

Sydnee:

I mean, if you eat Epsom salts, it will work.

Justin:

It's going down.

Sydnee:

Yeah. I am not telling you to eat Epsom salts, there are other ways to make you poop. But—

Justin:

Less salty ways.

Sydnee:

But, I mean, there— there are, um... There is an aspect to it where you can use it that way.

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

Yeah, so that's not entirely off base. Um, if you wanted to use it as a laxative, one recommendation, one recipe that you could use, uh, was for a suppository that was made of honey, vegetable seeds, and sea salt. And you just shove that on up there.

Justin:

It sounds like a, uh, Kashi brand snack.

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

And it sounds like something I'd find in the aisle of the grocery store that's not meant for me.

Sydnee:

[laughs] Is there, like, a recipe, one of those bars where they're just made of, like, three... Like Larabars? Is that what they are? They're just made of, like, three ingredients.

Justin:

Yeah. Uh, I'm not sure if that's—

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

Yeah. I know what you're talking about, though.

Sydnee:

Um, uh, there's another in the Ebers Papyrus, a mention for anal infections.

Justin:

Ew.

Sydnee:

Ew. Anal infections, you can make a suppository out of incense, vegetable seeds, fat oil, and ocean salt. I'm assuming the incense is just 'cause location.

Justin:

Hey, listen.

Sydnee:

Location, location, location. [laughs]

Justin:

As long as you're... If you're getting in there anyway, why not freshen things up a bit?

Sydnee:

[laughs] Um, other uses, uh, that are mentioned, uh, callous skin, uh, epidemic diseases. [laughs]

Justin:

Ugh.

Sydnee:

So, you know, all— all of those diseases—

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

.. uh, to stop bleeding. Um, an ointment for your eyes, if you're having any eye ailments. And you could make a suppository out of salt, and— and, uh, insert it into your vagina to make childbirth go faster.

Justin:

"Hey, welcome to earth, baby. Here's some salt." [laughs]

Sydnee:

Also, as long as we're talking about things that can be painful and ways to make them worse, how about, I'm in labor and then you just stuck a salt suppository—

Justin:

Right.

Sydnee:

... in my vagina.

Justin:

Yeah. Um—

Sydnee:

No, thanks.

Justin:

I thought suppositories... Pardon my ignorance. But, uh, I thought suppositories were just for the butt.

Sydnee:

Generally, when we use the word suppository, we mean up the butt.

Justin:

Mm-hmm.

Sydnee:

You know, medically speaking, up the butt.

Justin:

Medically speaking, we're gonna put this up the butt.

Sydnee:

[laughs] But, uh... I mean, you could... I guess, a suppository, being something that is inserted.

Justin:

But not a pill?

Sydnee:

I mean, if you're saying a vaginal suppository.

Justin:

Okay. Got it. All right.

Sydnee:

Yeah.

Justin:

That makes sense.

Sydnee:

I— but you're right. I would never say suppository, and think anyone would assume anything other than up the butt.

Justin:

Up the butt.

Sydnee:

Yes. Exactly. Um, in Greek medicine, salt was thought to be a— first of all, a necessary part of the diet. So, in— you know, a lot of Greek medicine revolved around eating a healthy diet, and exercising, and, like, lifestyle kind of things, as part of, like, your health and well—being.

Justin:

Mm-hmm.

Sydnee:

Salt was a necessary part of that. So, in that sense, it was already medicinal.

Justin:

Oh.

Sydnee:

Like, you have to eat enough salt because you won't be healthy if you don't.

Justin:

Mm-hmm.

Sydnee:

Uh, Hippocrates specially advised it as an expectorant.

Justin:

Yeah. That would work.

Sydnee:

You know, to break up and bring up mucus and stuff. Um, it was also used as an emetic. You remember what that means?

Justin:

Uh, throw up—

Sydnee:

Yep.

Justin:

... medicine?

Sydnee:

Make you puke.

Justin:

I mean, that's— that's one-to-one. Either that bad boy works or it don't. Like, you would know that pretty quick, right?

Sydnee:

That's true. I think if you... One recipe was, if you mixed together salt water and vinegar and drank it, you're gonna puke.

Justin:

Yeah. I mean, yeah.

Sydnee:

So, there you go.

Justin:

That's the only thing you can trust old time people on, is emetics. That's the one thing—

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

... where it's like, "Okay, you guys, you're right about that."

Sydnee:

Well—

Justin:

Now, like, that's not a particularly narrow category—

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

... I— I think. There's a lot of stuff, where it's like, "Hey, swallow this. Let's see. This is for science. Come on—

Sydnee:

"Let's see if you puke."

Justin:

... uh, Gregorius. Come over here and swallow this."

Sydnee:

[laughs] "Let's see if you hurl."

Justin:

"Stevonius, drink this."

Sydnee:

"Ah, that— that's a plus two on the blow chunks scale."

Justin:

Yep, definitely.

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

"Good— good emetic, everybody. We found another great medicine."

Sydnee:

Um, for your spleen, uh, salt could also be helpful. You would wanna take one—third seawater, two—thirds cow milk, mix that together, drink it in the morning on an empty stomach. You got no splenic problems. No spleeny problems after that. Uh, for skin ulcers, uh, recipe of salt and honey was recommended. Um, if you have freckles, which I would not consider a medical condition.

Justin:

No. No.

Sydnee:

No. Uh, but, if you do and you want to treat them, and you're in Ancient Greece, they may tell you to rub salt water all over your freckles.

Justin:

Um—

Sydnee:

It's just to exfoliate. You're not gonna get rid of those—

Justin:

It— that's not gonna do anything.

Sydnee:

... those lovely freckles.

Justin:

Right?

Sydnee:

That... No.

Justin:

No.

Sydnee:

No.

Justin:

No.

Sydnee:

Why would you want to anyway?

Justin:

Well, in— in—

Sydnee:

They're adorable.

Justin:

In—

Sydnee:

That lovely little splash of cinnamon across your cheeks. [laughs]

Justin:

In ancient times, they were called God's paint— paint splatters. God's tiny mistakes, they were called.

Sydnee:

No, they weren't.

Justin:

That— that— that's... Well, agree to disagree.

Sydnee:

No, they weren't. Don't get rid of your freckles. I've always been envious.

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

If I could have freckles, I would.

Justin:

All right. Well—

Sydnee:

But I don't think that's something you could wish for.

Justin:

I'll keep mine. It's a deal.

Sydnee:

Uh, you could also... It was also recommended that you could vaporize, like, inhale salt water.

Justin:

Heck yeah.

Sydnee:

Breathe in salt water.

Justin:

Vape it.

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

Cotton. Cotton. "Hey, guys, what's up? It's G mod. Got a new one in. This is just salt."

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

"Just salt mixed with water. Here we go. Blaze it. Cotton."

Sydnee:

[laughs] What? I don't remember the... It doesn't matter. You're saying the cotton thing again.

Justin:

Yeah. This is vape—

Sydnee:

That's a vape thing.

Justin:

... slang. 'Cause you—

Sydnee:

I remember that, and I— I've instantly forgotten why it was a vape slang.

Justin:

It— it's... Honestly, I'm not even sure it's vape slang. It's vape slang that, uh, Griffin and I use, because there's this 12-year-old kid that vapes huge mods on Vine. [laughs]

Sydnee:

Ah. Okay, gotcha.

Justin:

And blows big clouds—

Sydnee:

Gotcha.

Justin:

... that look like cotton. So—

Sydnee:

Gotcha. Okay. I— right, I understand this.

Justin:

Yeah. There we go.

Sydnee:

Okay. All right.

Justin:

Cotton.

Sydnee:

[laughs] The Romans used it for puking, as well. Uh, it— they— especially salty vinegar. It was also helpful against, um, calluses. So, especially if you have a rotting callus. If you have a rotting callus, that's a bad— that's a bad scene there.

Justin:

Get some salt on there.

Sydnee:

Yeah. Um, if you have a dog bite or any other poisonous animal, we just pour some salt on it. If you are bleeding, pour some salt in it. If you, uh, need a gargle, you that do that, uh, just kill some leeches with it. Sure.

Justin:

Okay. Here's the— here's the thing, though.

Sydnee:

If you need to get rid of a scab, or a crust, salt.

Justin:

I have used it as a gargle. Am I, like, an old timey idiot now?

Sydnee:

Uh, no.

Justin:

For, like, throat thing If I have, like, throat blisters.

Sydnee:

We're kinda gonna get to that.

Justin:

Okay. Good.

Sydnee:

Okay. Yeah.

Justin:

Oh, no. You look disappointed in me.

Sydnee:

I'm not.

Justin:

More than usual.

Sydnee:

You're not— you are not alone in that. And do you know how many doctors... Do you know how... I don't— I don't wanna blow up any— any spots too much with this one.

Justin:

You don't wanna salt anyone's game.

Sydnee:

I don't wanna salt anyone's game. [laughs] Um, it's interesting, you see. We've talked about Avicenna, uh, before. The physician who— who got a lot more things right than his contemporaries. He wrote about the importance of salt, specially iodine content of salt, uh, for the human body and for healthy, without understanding exactly why. He was completely right. Again, we'll talk a little bit more about salt and iodine.

In the Middle Ages, um, in addition to the cont—I mean, that's the thing. We, at some point, figured out that salt was good for puking. And that is a theme. Also, salt is good for making you poop in certain—

Justin:

Great.

Sydnee:

... forms. So it continues to be like, "And, also, everybody's got salt. And if you haven't pooped in a while, or if you haven't puked in a while..."

Justin:

"Let's just put some... Let's try some salt first, 'cause you got that already."

Sydnee:

Yeah. Um, you could try powdering and roasting your salt. And that was said to have a painkilling effect.

Justin:

Like, you... I mean, I guess. I'm not sure—

Sydnee:

You'd eat it—

Justin:

... that would—

Sydnee:

... and it makes your pain go away.

Justin:

I'd be interested to see if that actually changes the c— like how much cooking you'd have to do to change the chemical makeup of salt, because I— I don't f— I don't feel like I've ever seen salt toasted.

Sydnee:

I have— yeah, I have a hard time seeing— thinking that that actually does anything.

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

But, that's... I don't know. And, I mean, if you're talking about, like, flaked salt, I don't know if it would change the look of it or something. But when you're talking about, like, salt granules. You know how like some—

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

... some of the big clumps of salt is more like a flake of salt.

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

I don't know if that would change it more. Um, uh, rock salt was thought to be a good remedy against fever. Uh, but, in general, while we still thought that salt was a good way to, um, fight off toxins, uh, and, you know, infections, and make puke, and all that stuff, there was already this beginning, like, emerging thought that maybe there is so much as— so much thing as too much salt.

Justin:

People of this time period, and, like, uh, most ancient time periods, and you can argue today, uh, seem, um, sometimes suspicious of anything you can indulge in. Anything you can indulge or— or overindulge in.

Sydnee:

Exactly. Yes. Uh, moderation—

Justin:

Mm-hmm.

Sydnee:

... gets to be a theme. And that's why, uh, you find... There was this school of Salerno, which was a medical school that we've talked about before. One of the first, kind of, like, centers of Ivory Towers of academic medicine.

Justin:

Mm-hmm.

Sydnee:

Um, and they created this book called The Art of Staying Healthy, that they actually gave to the crusaders to read, to help them stay healthy. Um, and in it, is a note that too salty food diminishes semen and eyesight, salt burns, makes one fretful, shabby, scabby, and wrinkly. Fretful, shabby, scabby, and wrinkly.

Justin:

Well, that's the last thing I want.

Sydnee:

That's what little boys are made of.

Justin:

Not... [laughs]

Sydnee:

I don't know. How does that go? [laughs]

Justin:

Not when I'm out there crusading.

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

I wanna stay on my— on my, uh, you know, top peak performance.

Sydnee:

There you go. So we already had this kinda idea that maybe too much salt is bad for you. We've talked about Paracelsus before. Par— well, Paracelsus Bombastus.

Justin:

Mm-hmm.

Sydnee:

Bombastus is what I— that's what I like to call them.

Justin:

It's a better name.

Sydnee:

Yeah, 'cause we're close. Um, he—

Justin:

[laughs]

Sydnee:

... talked about important salt was, saying, "The human being must have salt. He cannot be without salt."

Justin:

He was right.

Sydnee:

Yeah. It's— I feel like my cousin Joe wrote that.

Justin:

Why?

Sydnee:

[laughs] He just loved salt.

Justin:

Just loved salt?

Sydnee:

He dumped salt all over everything.

Justin:

Sounds like something you'd read in, like, uh, uh, like, a cross stitch sampler in the—

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

... home of someone who likes salt just a little bit too much. Like, they have it hanged up in their kitchen. It's like— like, some people have that about coffee. It's like, okay, I'm glad you like salt, but, like—

Sydnee:

I—

Justin:

... a cross stitch sampler? Really?

Sydnee:

I had this neighbor who did that. Um, Mr. Morton.

Justin:

[laughs]

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

Did you like that one?

Justin:

Yeah. That's two great jokes already.

Sydnee:

[laughs] Thanks.

Justin:

The NACL thing, and now this. What am I even doing here?

Sydnee:

Uh, for those who don't know, Morton is a kind of salt.

Justin:

Oh, man. Now you're explaining the jokes?

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

This just keeps getting funnier.

Sydnee:

[laughs] I'm so good at this comedy thing now.

Justin:

Yeah. You're killing it right now.

Sydnee:

So, he—

Justin:

It's like I'm married to Carrot Top.

Sydnee:

He advised it for constipation, used as a diuretic against skin wounds, and also worms. Uh, there's another book. As long as we're talking about different books. Uh, opposed to *The Art of Staying Healthy*, there was *The Dirty Pharmacy*—

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

... which was written by Pollini, in 1734, which I think we've referenced before. It had a lot of super gross treatments for things.

Justin:

I'm pretty sure it's— it's a Macklemore album, too.

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

It's maybe riffraff.

Sydnee:

The Dirty Pharmacy. They have one, um, treatment, cure, recipe, I don't know, dare, maybe.

Justin:

[laughs]

Sydnee:

Uh, where you mix, uh, fresh, not old, fresh black cow manure, beer, vinegar, and half a knife's tip of salt. That's how you measure that. Half a knife's tip.

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

And then you put that on your eyes, if they're red and watery.

Justin:

For w— w... Wait a minute.

Sydnee:

If your eyes are red and watery.

Justin:

If your eyes are red and water, and you get so bothered by that, that— wh— how red, how watery, before I'm like, "Mm. I know what I need. Fresh cow dookie, beer, vinegar, and knife— I measure a knife of something into my eyes, 'cause these are so red and watery"? What?

Sydnee:

You are desperate.

Justin:

That's really red, huh?

Sydnee:

Tomorrow's picture day—

Justin:

So that's what it is, right? I gotta get my employee ID shot tomorrow. I'm not gonna be stuck with this picture for five years.

Sydnee:

No. You're on your way home, you don't want your parents to know what you've been doing.

Justin:

Yeah. Okay.

Sydnee:

You don't know you've been, you know...

Justin:

All right. Well, blaze insurance.

Sydnee:

... smoking a doobie. [laughs]

Justin:

I'm with— I'm with you.

Sydnee:

Uh, in the 19th century that we expand, like, the uses of salt. You see it used for all kinds of, again, the same kinds of things, worms and— and pooping and whatnot, but also for, um, goiters and, uh, dysentery, and dropsy, and epilepsy, and syphilis. Uh, there were— you could— there were

all kinds of recipes for ways to put it on rashes and swellings. Um, in ophthalmology, like, in— for eye diseases. They had all kinds of concoctions you could put on your cornea. Um, and there was, uh, one specific recipe for an enema of salt that was supposed to work for patients who were seemingly dead and apoplectic. [laughs]

Justin:

[laughs]

Sydnee:

Which, I guess, if you stuck enough salt up there, you might wake up somebody if—

Justin:

They seem dead? Okay.

Sydnee:

... they are waking up-able. Mm-hmm. Um, warts were treated with snail juice and salt.

Justin:

Ugh.

Sydnee:

And, if you had a headache, you can just bathe your feet in salt and ash—

Justin:

That won't—

Sydnee:

... to make that go away.

Justin:

... won't do anything.

Sydnee:

Um, I wanna get into some of the— some of the specific kinds of salt and what we use salt for.

Justin:

Good. Me, too.

Sydnee:

Justin.

Justin:

Yes.

Sydnee:

Um, but before I do that, I'm really gonna need you to follow me to the billing department.

Justin:

Oh, let's go.

[theme music plays]

Justin:

Okay. So, Sydnee, you were gonna tell us about some medicinal, uh, uses of salt.

Sydnee:

That's right. So—

Justin:

Or medicinal salt, more specifically.

Sydnee:

Right. So you may have heard, uh, more recently, [laughs] that there are all kinds of special salts that can—

Justin:

Sure.

Sydnee:

... help you with all kinds of medical problems. Um—

Justin:

Pink salt. Pink Himalayan salt.

Sydnee:

Exactly.

Justin:

It's good for you.

Sydnee:

So the idea is that, and you may know this, table salt is processed, right?

Justin:

Right.

Sydnee:

It's, like, harvested, there's, like, the big blocks of salt. And then you grind it down to, like, the little granules of salt. And then you clean it, and, uh, there's— there's anti-caking agents added to it, which keep it from, like, clumping together in your shaker. Um, and they add the iodine back into it. Uh, so. And iodine is important, by the way. Why do they add iodine to you salt? Do you know this, Justin?

Justin:

I don't.

Sydnee:

Because it prevents thyroid disease.

Justin:

But why in the salt?

Sydnee:

So that you get enough in your diet. A lot of us don't eat enough of the foods that contain iodine.

Justin:

Hmm.

Sydnee:

And salt was a great way— when they— they figured that out, it was a great way just to put the iodine back in the salt that we eat. We eat plenty of salt, so we'll get plenty of iodine. And it prevents thyroid dis... Well, I mean, you need enough to prevent thyroid disease.

Justin:

Huh.

Sydnee:

So, uh, so that's where that comes from. So that's actually a really helpful thing, because it's just— iodine is not in a lot of foods, and we don't eat a lot of the food's iodine occurs in, so, there you go.

Justin:

Perfect.

Sydnee:

That's a— that's a helpful thing. It's a good thing. Iodine isn't in there for, like, some nefarious purpose. It's to keep you from getting sick. Um, as with all things, the idea that some salts are more natural or less processed, is assumed to be better.

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

And I think that's—

Justin:

It's a popular fallacy, the nature fallacy.

Sydnee:

Exactly. I think that's where that comes from. Um, to be fair, even these— some of these salts I'm gonna mention, like, they are processed. You know they're processed if they're coming in a shaker—

Justin:

[laughs]

Sydnee:

... or, like, a [laughs] bottle, or something other than a giant block that isn't connected to a cave.

Justin:

[laughs]

Sydnee:

[laughs] It has been processed. It has been ground in some fashion. Uh, just, I don't know, if it— if we say that it was hand—ground, or stone—ground, I don't know if that gives us, like, this better image of it.

Justin:

Give me some examples of, uh, uh, what you're talking about.

Sydnee:

So tell— let me tell you about a few, before we get to the— the biggie that you've already mentioned. So, first of all, dead sea salt is something that you will see available for purchase. Uh, the idea of dead sea salt is, first of all, that it comes from the dead sea.

Justin:

Sure.

Sydnee:

And that sounds very—

Justin:

Very famous— very famous salt.

Sydnee:

Very spooky, very mysterious. [laughs] Uh, it has... You'll see that it's listed, it has 21 minerals.

Justin:

Hmm.

Sydnee:

The idea is that table salt has been so processed that it's just got, like, the NaCl. It's just sodium chloride. And that you get these more natural salts that are, like, basically almost like... You know, you get the salt out of the ocean and dry it out and then you get the salt. And so you've got all these other kind of minerals stuck to it.

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

Um, there are 21 in dead sea salt. So that it— you know, that number is supposed to make you think, "Well, now, I'm in business."

Justin:

"Now I'm getting the minerals I crave."

Sydnee:

"I got 21 minerals." It's very popular for skin conditions. They'll tell you that you need to use it for stress, for, um, any kind of, like, uh, Rheumatoid Arthritis, or other painful conditions for your joints—

Justin:

Mm-hmm.

Sydnee:

... that soaking in tubs of dead sea salt is gonna make that all go away. It's also said that it will slow the aging process.

Justin:

Hmm. Oh. Hmm. Hmm. Hmm. I'm— I'm not very, very suspicious of anything that claims that.

Sydnee:

Uh, you may— you may not have heard of using dead sea salt in these ways, but you've probably heard of Epsom salts.

Justin:

Sure. Yeah.

Sydnee:

Um, Epsom salts, uh, named for spring in Epsom Surrey, in England, uh, and it— originally, it was, again, taking the water from the spring and actually drying it out until you just have the condensed salt, you know. Again, the idea there are more minerals in it. Um, and it is, in fact, like, more of a magnesium salt.

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

You know, than a— it's magnesium salt, as opposed to table salt. Um, it is touted to reduce the risk of strokes, and heart attacks, and diabetes, and hypertension, as well as detoxify your body. And then you'll also hear people just told to, like, soak in it for pain, right?

Justin:

Yeah. Yeah.

Sydnee:

Soak in an Epsom salts bath.

Justin:

Yeah. That's a thing.

Sydnee:

Unfortunately...

Justin:

Aww.

Sydnee:

Unfortunately, other than the fact that, as I mentioned before, if you eat it, it will make you poop, uh, there's not really evidence that I can find for this. Um, if studies are—

Justin:

Anything with Epsom salts?

Sydnee:

... being done, they're not being published in peer reviewed journals.

Justin:

Nothing?

Sydnee:

Let me say that. So, again, and that does not mean that somebody somewhere didn't do, like, a study amongst their friends and neighbors, and published it in their, like, you know, hand—printed newspaper that they make out of their garage. I don't know. What I'm saying is that, in Peer Reviewed Journals, nice studies about the, you know, efficacy of Epsom salts, nope.

Justin:

Aww, man.

Sydnee:

Nope, nope, nope, nope, nope. That doesn't stop, though. Um, it's not just you, Justin. Doctors tell people to do this frequently. And let me say this, I don't think soaking in an Epsom— in an Epsom salt bath will hurt you in any way.

Justin:

Mm-hmm.

Sydnee:

I don't think there's anything wrong with it. But the idea that, like, your body's gonna osmose all of these minerals, it doesn't make a lot of sense.

Justin:

Just water, huh?

Sydnee:

No. It doesn't make a lot of sense, or at least not enough to affect your body in the ways that they're saying it's going to. But if it feels nice, you know—

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

... go for it. Um, there's Aztec artisanal sea salt.

Justin:

Whoa. That sounds really good.

Sydnee:

Doesn't that sound so fancy?

Justin:

And very healthy.

Sydnee:

It's harvested over this very specific 45-day period. And it's very flavorful. It has 80 minerals, much higher moisture content.

Justin:

Way, way more minerals than dead sea salt.

Sydnee:

And it is touted to improve [laughs] athletic performance.

Justin:

Great. Great. They should make Gatorade with that.

Sydnee:

Uh, there is Dendritic sea salt.

Justin:

Whoa.

Sydnee:

Which, the main way you see this used, is with essential oils. So, as long as you're, you know, going all in—

Justin:

Yeah. In for penny, in for pound, I guess.

Sydnee:

... get some— you need to get some Dendritic sea salt. [laughs] Uh, but what everybody wants to know about is Himalayan pink sea salt.

Justin:

Right.

Sydnee:

Because Himalayan pink sea salt is, I think, the newest, coolest, uh, of the salts.

Justin:

It is very strong. I will say that, first of all. It's very hard to use in cooking 'cause I have no idea how much to use.

Sydnee:

It is. It is a stronger flavor, and that is one of the things that I will say, I will give them, is you need less, you know?

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

So you're getting less sodium per serving of Himalayan sea salt, or any of the flake to rock salts, than you are with table salt. You know what I'm saying?

Justin:

Right.

Sydnee:

So, if you're trying to watch your sodium intake, you can use less, get flavor... Same idea. Um, beyond that, though, it gets a little rocky. So Himalayan pink sea salt is said to have all 84 minerals that your body needs. So it tops out the mineral chart.

Justin:

That's so many minerals—

Sydnee:

That's so many minerals.

Justin:

... and I'm already so excited about it.

Sydnee:

Um, it is mined specifically from the Khewra Salt Mine in Pakistan. There's actually an asthma clinic in the salt mine. And let me tell you this. All of this other stuff aside, please look at some pictures of this salt mine. It is beautiful.

Justin:

Yep.

Sydnee:

It is amazing, and now I wanna go there and visit it. [laughs]

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

Not because I think I'm gonna be healthier, but just because it's really beautiful. Um, now, on— on a side note, there was some very concerning things that I read about the condition for miners in these Himalayan salt mines.

Justin:

That is not surprising.

Sydnee:

Or in these— in these Pakistan salt mines where they get the Himalayan pink sea salt. So, uh, I would think about that before you get all excited about your fancy salt. Um, but it is touted for skin, sleep, weight loss, that's why so many people are into it, asthma, concentration. It's pink, by the way, because of iron oxide. It gives it its color.

Justin:

I— oh, okay.

Sydnee:

That's why it's pink, in case you wondered.

Justin:

Rust.

Sydnee:

Um, again, the idea is that it's more—

Justin:

Is that rust, right?

Sydnee:

Yeah. Same idea. Uh, the idea is that it's more natural. You will read, um, all kinds of benefits from it; that it increases your hydration, that it creates an electrolyte balance, and regulates the inside and outside of your cells, and balances your pH, and it's good for acid reflux, and your bones, and your blood pressure, and it prevents goiters, and improves circulation, and helps the intestines, and detoxifies, and on, and on, and on. You will read countless claims.

Justin:

All true.

Sydnee:

And they say—

Justin:

Twist.

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

Sawbones twist.

Sydnee:

Nope.

Justin:

Himalayan sea salt does all of it.

Sydnee:

And, in addition to that, all the way, also, it will increase your sex drive, reduce the signs of aging, and detoxify your body from heavy metals. So the thing is, a lot of these sites that I read about Himalayan pink sea salt say that there are double blind studies to support this.

Again, if they are in peer reviewed journals, I cannot find them. So I do not know where these studies exist. Um, I do not think there's any support for these claims, as far as I can tell. If there are, again, I am saying if there are studies, they're not in peer reviewed journals.

Um, it— there are also those, uh, Himalayan pink sea salt lamps. You've probably seen those. Like a big block of salt and then there's a light inside it.

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

Uh, those have a ton of health claims, as well. The idea is that they release these, like, negative ions into the room—

Justin:

Oh, negative ions. Yeah.

Sydnee:

... and that they're gonna give you more energy, and improve your— your attitude, and help you with all kinds of chronic health conditions, and pain or

whatever. Um, so, if you didn't wanna, like, eat salt or bathe in the salt, you could just put a salt lamp in your room—

Justin:

[laughs]

Sydnee:

... and get all the benefits.

Justin:

It— I think it's a pretty good rule that, if something says it... Once you read the word detoxify, like, if something detoxes you or detoxifies your body, like, that's probably the time to walk away.

Sydnee:

Exactly.

Justin:

You have... I mean, you got a liver. It's— it's doing fine.

Sydnee:

Our bodies are really good at detoxifying us, otherwise, we'd all be dead. Um, I would say the practical up shoot is this, salt is salt. Uh, there are other minerals in those salts. Like, they've done gas, you know, spectrometry to look, like, how— how much, you know... What— what min— what minerals are in there and how much. They're in there. But they're in such trace amounts that they're not gonna do anything.

And that's probably a good thing, because there are things like uranium, and polonium, and thallium, like, radioactive things, and things that are known poisonous, that are in there. Like, if you analyze all the minerals that are in Himalayan pink sea salt, there are some bad ones that you don't want in your body.

Justin:

That makes me feel so cool and tough now.

Sydnee:

[laughs] But the thing is, that's okay. And this is not me saying, "So don't use it." No, because there's so little of it, it doesn't matter. So none of those minerals are really gonna affect you one way or another. And you get plenty of the trace minerals you need. They're called the trace minerals for a

reason. You need traces, we get plenty. You don't need to eat Himalayan pink sea salt to get them. If you like the flavor, go for it. But if you're doing it for health benefits, salt is salt is salt.

Justin:

Mm-hmm.

Sydnee:

Um, you need... Just for your info, a lot of people wanna know, like, how much salt do you need, is there such thing as too much salt, there is. There have been a lot of big, giant studies to try to figure out the exact amount of salt we need. Um, over five grams a day is— is not a good idea, we think, in general. Under three grams a day, we also have concerns about negative effects from that. So probably somewhere between three and five grams a day, for most people, is the right target amount.

Now, that being said, if you have certain health conditions, cardiovascular diseases, and— and, uh, congestive heart failure, cirrhosis, or hypertension, your doctor may limit you much more than that. So, if you do have health conditions, you really need to talk to your doctor about that.

Again, you need iodine for your thyroid. And there are lots of other places where we use salt in medicine. You know, we use a sodium chloride in IV fluids. We use it to irrigate, like, our noses, and our eyes, um, you know, with saline. I don't know that you need to use it to gargle. I don't know that you need to use it, um—

Justin:

Man.

Sydnee:

... any of those other... I— I think that those are kinda, like, folk wisdom things. And, again, if your throat feels better after you gargle with salt water, then you gargle with salt water, 'cause that's not gonna hurt you. But you can use table salt. That's fine.

Justin:

Okay. But not pink Himalayan sea salt?

Sydnee:

If it really... If you really love that flavor, and it's worth it to you to pay that much for it, um, I think that's fine. But, again, if you're doing it for the health benefits, then you're not better off than any other salt. Except for

Epsom salt, which, of course, will make you poop if you eat it, [laughs] so be careful.

Justin:

Just really just— just handle with care, okay? Uh, folks, that's gonna do it for us. Thank you so much for listening to our program again. If you aren't aware, we have a, uh, P.O. box here. Uh, P.O. Box 54, Huntington, West Virginia 25706, if you wanna send us some stuff.

Just wanna say a few quick thank yous. Thanks for the book, to Julian and Alex. Uh, thanks for the medical leaflets, very cool, from Eddie. Elizabeth gave us Ebola. Oops. No, it's just a stuffed one.

Sydnee:

No, a cute stuffed Ebola.

Justin:

Yeah. We met Elizabeth in, uh, Cincinnati, at the Night Vale show. It was really fun, uh, and she was nice. Uh, Abby sent us some calligraphy for Charlie, thank you. Erica sent us candles, themed around a bunch of different McElroy shows, uh, that are— that smell amazing. Uh, the Sawbones one is honey, of course, which is perfect.

Sydnee:

The Still Buffering one smells like leather, and it is delicious.

Justin:

It's choice. It's so choice.

Sydnee:

Yeah.

Justin:

Uh, Matt sent us some delicious chocolates. And Jess sent us a bunch of Australian treats. So, thank you so much to everybody for, uh, for sending that stuff along. Again, if you wanna send us some, P.O. Box 54, Huntington, West Virginia 25706. 25706. Don't feel like you, uh, you know, completely have to. It's not, like, a big deal. But, you know, if you want to. Postcards, wedding invites, whatever, uh, we'd love to hear from you.

Uh, you can also get in touch with us at, uh, Sawbones@maximumfun.org, if you wanna suggest a show, uh, that is the best way to do it. We're on Twitter, too. I'm @JustinMcElroy. And she's @SydneeMcElroy. S-Y-D-N-E-E.

We're on the Maximum Fun Network, and there's a ton of other, uh, great shows that you can go enjoy. And, in fact, I dare say, should enjoy. I'd like to recommend one, Shmanners, it's a show my brother Travis hosts with, uh, his wife Teresa, who is sort of an etiquette expert. And, uh, they tell you how to, like, navigate a bunch of different life situations. They have episodes on— on funerals, on theater, on, uh, uh—

Sydnee:

On weddings.

Justin:

... on weddings. It— it's great. And you can find that on iTunes, or at maximumfun.org, where you can find all of our different programs.

Sydnee:

It's— if you like our show, I think you'd really like that show.

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

It's a nice— it's a nice kinda fit.

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

For... Yeah.

Justin:

Uh, it... Yeah. It's very complimentary.

Sydnee:

Mm-hmm.

Justin:

Um, and, uh, uh, uh, thanks to the Taxpayers for letting us use their song Medicines as the intro and outro of our program. And, uh, I think... Is that it?

Sydnee:

And if you really like our show, and you feel, uh, compelled to review us on iTunes, we always appreciate that, too.

Justin:

That would be fantastic. Thank you so much for doing that, uh, in advance. And thank you so much, of course, for listening. Uh, but until next week, my name is Justin McElroy.

Sydnee:

I'm Sydnee McElroy.

Justin:

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

[theme music plays]

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