

Sawbones 567: Colonoscopy Preparation

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Clint: 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!

["Medicines" by The Taxpayers plays]

Justin: Hello, everybody, and welcome to Sawbones! A marital—oh, you just reached right across me there. Pardon my reach.

Sydnee: Sorry.

Justin: Sheesh.

Sydnee: Try that again.

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

Sydnee: And I'm Sydnee McElroy. Sorry, Justin, I was getting our timer so we were ready to go.

Justin: Yes.

Sydnee: Yes.

Justin: And you didn't—have you started it?

Sydnee: Yeah.

Justin: All right.

Sydnee: It's rolling.

Justin: It's broadcast time!

Sydnee: It's podcast time.

Justin: Time to make the donuts! The podcast donuts.

Sydnee: The podcast donuts. This podcast is not about donuts.

Justin: I wish. Ah, man, we done a medical donuts? [titters] How much of a history is there of medicinal donuts?

Sydnee: I mean, I'm gonna—I have—okay.

Justin: Prescription donuts. [chuckles]

Sydnee: Can I—can I say that if I was actually gonna do that, that is what I would start off with. Like, I'd get into a search engine and be like, "medical history of donuts." And I—

Justin: Don't tell 'em—don't give away all your secrets, Syd.

Sydnee: [chuckles] I'm guessing—well, that's what I do when I think, "I don't know if this is anything." I'm guessing that's nothing. But you know, that could be wrong. Maybe—you know what? When we're done, I'm gonna check.

Justin: Check. There might be some medical donuts.

Sydnee: I bet there—I bet there—you know what I'm gonna get? I'm gonna get ads for those little pillows you can sit on when you have hemorrhoids.

Justin: Oh, yeah?

Sydnee: Yeah.

Justin: Have you been searching for those to give us gifts?

Sydnee: No, I'm saying that if I look—[chuckles] if I look up medical donuts, because they look like donuts—

Justin: Oh, right, yeah.

Sydnee: I bet I'm gonna get an ad for those pillows.

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: That's what I think I would get.

Justin: I don't need 'em, because I have the great preparation H on my side.

Sydnee: Sure, sure.

Justin: What are we going to talk about then, Syd? If you're not gonna talk about donuts, even though, ha-ha, I tricked you into talking about donuts for like a minute.

Sydnee: [titters] My dad suggested a topic for this week. Tommy Smirl, my father.

Justin: Okay.

Sydnee: And we got an email from Kestrel, thank you, Kestrel, as well. But I had to shout out my dad, because he had actually mentioned it even before I got the email. So, he sent me a text, and he said, "Hey, Beanie—" because that's what he calls me.

Justin: Sure.

Sydnee: "Hey, Beanie, is mushroom coffee really a thing? Thanks. Love, Dad."

Justin: And that's kind of a large, ranging thesis statement, but the intent is there, you—it—I mean, you know what he means. Is that a thing? Or is it like, eh... Those are the two options, I think, the—you gotta watch Sydnee's

facial expression when someone says they've been diagnosed with something or they've started using something, because you'll either get a like "eh" or like a "yeah, yeah, hm, interesting, huh."

Sydnee: You know, it's one of those things where, especially since we've been doing Sawbones so long, I have this—I have these two people battling in my head. And it's the Sydnee that understands social interaction really well and knows that sometimes you don't need to correct people or tell them that something isn't real.

Sometimes you just need to be a pleasant person at a party and say like, "Oh, that's so interesting." And nod your head and smile, and then excuse yourself from the conversation when you get a chance. And then there's the other voice in my head that is Sawbones Sydnee that's going, "You have to tell the truth! You have to spread the word! We have to fight pseudoscience!"

Justin: Which Sydnee wins? Trick question, I win, because there's two Sydnees. Meow. So, Syd, is mushroom coffee a thing or what?

Sydnee: It's a thing in that it exists?

Justin: Okay, yes, that's true. Well, I—you know what? Can I just say? You can argue the medicine of this if you want, I am gonna get into the—I'm gonna get into the semantic trenches if we have to.

Sydnee: There is mushroom coffee.

Justin: Okay, but is there? Because I don't know! I've drank coffee a long time. I don't know if I'm gonna count this semantically as coffee by the end of the episode. I will remain to be convinced.

Sydnee: Okay. I want to walk you through how we got to mushroom coffee. [chuckles]

Justin: Okay.

Sydnee: And I will say, just to—not spoiling, but to clue you in, sometimes these things are unsatisfying. Is mushroom coffee a thing? It's like a lot of the stuff we talk about on this show... well, kind of. I don't know, maybe? Anyway, how did we get here? Why are we making coffee out of mushrooms? Why are we doing this?

Justin: Because we ran out of beans!

Sydnee: Sort of. We've had—we've done a whole episode on coffee. So, I'm not going to get into the history of coffee. Real coffee, coffee-coffee.

Justin: Coffee-coffee.

Sydnee: Because you can go back and listen, it was actually a live episode that we did.

Justin: Oh, yeah.

Sydnee: In Seattle.

Justin: Appropriately.

Sydnee: Coffee. During that live episode, by the way, I mentioned, because I was going back to see if we've already covered this, I mentioned that I'm drinking tea, because I was pregnant at the time.

Justin: Oh, wow.

Sydnee: I was drinking decaffeinated tea. Anyway. So, we've had coffee since like 1000 CE, or maybe earlier. We've had coffee for a very long time. And we talked about this in the episode, but to refresh your memory, the legend of where coffee came from, which is probably not true, but this is like the full story of where do we get coffee, is a goat herder noticed—

Justin: That's terrible! What did the goats ever do to him? Just walking, around hurting goats. What a jerk! Go on, what did this jerk do?

Sydnee: Do you feel good about this?

Justin: No, I regretted it instantly.

Sydnee: A goat herder in Ethiopia noticed that his goats ate some specific berries, and then were dancing.

Justin: Oh?

Sydnee: And he was like, "Well, I gotta try these berries. They made the goats dance." And this is where coffee comes from.

Justin: Yada-yada-yada, Starbucks. [chuckles]

Sydnee: And then coffee. [chuckles] You can listen to the whole episode, if you want to know the history of real coffee. And people love coffee! And everybody rejoiced, because now we have coffee.

Justin: Huzza! Huzzah Huizenga!

Sydnee: Initially, they like chewed it. They like mixed it with fat and made it like a chewy thing that you would eat. And then eventually, they started boiling it and turning it into a beverage, and you got coffee. And then things happen over time. The problem is, once you've had coffee, for many of us, like myself, you love it. And if it were to go away, you may be desperate to find a substitute.

Justin: You remember in the Fringe universe, Walter and others and that side of the divide didn't have coffee. I remember at some point the world's coffee supply had run out. If you remember, that was one of the main differences—

Sydnee: Oh, yeah.

Justin: They established between our dimension and theirs, is that they didn't have coffee over there.

Sydnee: Do you—I don't remember, did they have—did they just drink tea? Or was there another replacement?

Justin: I don't know, actually. You know, I remember it being a big deal when someone would bring coffee over from the other side, because it was like...

Sydnee: You know, it's interesting, because—

Justin: Fringe? Yeah, it is.

Sydnee: I love Fringe. I love—Fringe is great. But if I don't have coffee—if coffee isn't available and tea is available, that's fine for me as like a coffee substitute, because I can get caffeinated tea. Black tea is, I don't know, it's in the ballpark.

Justin: You get it.

Sydnee: You know.

Justin: Chug enough of it.

Sydnee: But throughout history, even in times where tea was plentiful and coffee was not, tea was not good enough for many people. They had to find a different substitute that was more like coffee. Almost as far back as we have like commercially produced coffee, we have commercially produced coffee substitutes. If we go back to 1733, we can find oat coffee being mentioned, where you just... boil oats and make some sort of liquid out of it.

Justin: These aren't—to me, the caffeine is not there with oat coffee.

Sydnee: No.

Justin: Right?

Sydnee: No, it's not.

Justin: You know what I'm saying? It's not. Like you could call—like, milk don't make you float. Correct?

Sydnee: Mm-hm. Yes.

Justin: So, if you grind up a bunch of almonds, mix them with water, wait, yada-yada, almond milk, that's fine. If I drink that, I'm refreshed. It's good on cereal. I don't float, wasn't expecting that. Not a milk thing. You can call it milk. Coffee, make you dance. So, if I drink like grain coffee or any kind of coffee substitute that does not make me dance, then it's not coffee. Do you understand? It has not met the minimum standard.

Sydnee: So, I think this is what is most interesting. As I was reading—because I wanted to—as I was reading about mushroom coffee, I kept finding mentions that we've had mushroom coffee for a long time. Like this is not a new idea. It feels new. It feels trendy. It's like a wellness thing. But it's old.

Justin: Feels appeal to ancient wisdom, kind of.

Sydnee: Yes. And so, why was—why were mushrooms used as a replacement? And this led me in this—that's why I'm talking about coffee substitutes first.

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: Because it seems to me that for most of history when we needed a coffee substitute, we weren't necessarily trying to replace the caffeine. We were trying to replace the flavor and essence of coffee.

Justin: We wouldn't have even necessarily understood caffeine yet, right?

Sydnee: Well, by this point, we did—

Justin: Well, I guess at this point, for sure.

Sydnee: Yeah, by this point we did. And so, a lot of the time, the reason somebody would reach for a coffee substitute was because either coffee was scarce or it was a luxury, depending on where and when you lived. Or I wanted to point to—there was one specific point where it was banned by somebody. So, Frederick the Great of Prussia wanted to get his subjects to

consume more chicory, or beer, because those were both things that were made there. And so, sort of a buy local kind of push.

[both chuckle]

Sydney: Like, "Drink this instead of this." And so, he said that he was just gonna ban coffee.

Justin: Oh?

Sydney: And then that way, you can't... you can't have coffee, so you have to drink locally produced chicory or beer. And chicory, actually, like drinks based on chicory have been a very common coffee substitute for a couple 100 years now, at least. I mean, and even to this day, we'll get into that, but chicory is still something that people use as a coffee substitute. I have never drank like a chicory beverage, but my understanding is it gives you the—I don't know, everybody talks about coffee as having that roasted flavor. Which I feel like is such a vague thing to say, "roasted." I mean, yes, I understand they're roasted, but like... what... I mean like, I've roasted vegetables, and that has a roasted flavor that is quite distinct from coffee.

Justin: I think when you're talking about roasted flavor, it's like how close do you get to burnt. And then look over the edge and be like, I didn't. You know what I mean?

Sydney: Yes.

Justin: I think that's what people want with roasted. Like, no, not burnt, but you gotta see burnt from your yard.

Sydney: Yeah.

Justin: You know what I mean? That's roasted. That's the flavor you want. Because you just want to live on the edge, I think that's what people like. They think like, "This almost burnt, and then I ate it."

Sydney: And I—you know, I guess that makes sense in the like—okay, you—smoking is not good for you. You shouldn't smoke. I wanna—I wanna—

Justin: We should have said that earlier in the show, honestly, in this production.

Sydnee: [titters] It's best not to smoke.

Justin: Yes.

Sydnee: At a point in my life, I have smoked a cigarette. I was never a smoker, but I have smoked a cigarette. This is—I'm just prefacing with you shouldn't smoke. But I'm sharing that there—you know, I'm 42 years old, I've done a lot of things. I smoked a cigarette. And I always thought that cigarettes and coffee sort of tasted similar to me. I think it's like that almost burnt. It's like the burnt—it's burning. It's like burnt.

Justin: Okay, yeah, maybe.

Sydnee: For me, I liken the two. Except—

Justin: Oh, I like—I remember college, babe! I was liking them too. [chuckles] Listen, coffee and cigarettes? Yeah! Good!

Sydnee: That's why I thought they went well together! Is because they kind of burn. [chuckles]

Justin: Hey, you want to really twist your noodle? We traded that for kids! What?!

Sydnee: Listen, the coffee stuck. Cigarettes, no.

Justin: [chuckles]

Sydnee: You shouldn't smoke.

Justin: Shouldn't smoke, but—

Sydnee: Shouldn't smoke. Don't smoke.

Justin: If you're gonna, get it out of the way in college, just treat yourself to a couple of years of pure satisfaction.

Sydnee: Don't.

Justin: And then you get the pride of overcoming it.

Sydnee: Don't. It's addictive! Don't, because it'll be hard to overcome it.

Justin: You know what's addictive? Overcoming the challenges of addiction. That's addictive, believing in yourself.

Sydnee: [titters] I just want to know, Frederick the Great went to the extent of employing 400 wounded soldiers to work as coffee sniffers, whose job was to go around trying to smell coffee and find like illegal coffee bootleggers, like people who would be making coffee.

Justin: That's a—that's a good gig. I love that.

Sydnee: A coffee sniffer?

Justin: That crack squad out there, still doing—still doing the Lord's work. [chuckles]

Sydnee: I mean—

Justin: "Hey, let me smell that cup, George!"

Sydnee: If there's—

Justin: "Yeah, I thought so." Wait, were they smelling—sorry. Were they smelling people's individual beverages to see if they had coffee? Or were they smelling for like production, like a bloodhound, like Scooby-Doo to try to sniff it out.

Sydnee: Yeah, looking for like a coffee still, except not a still, I guess. But you know, same idea is like you're looking for the secret speakeasy. You're looking for the secret—[chuckles] the secret Starbucks.

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: You're looking for the secret coffee shops. You just listen for some Nora Jones music.

Justin: Man, I tell you—

Sydnee: And then you're gonna find a Starbucks.

Justin: I get mine at the old village roaster on Fourth Avenue. And when Pete and Vicky have been in there roasting, when Pete's been in there roasting, you can smell it a block away. It's not a joke. When he's been in there making this Highlander Grog, or his, you know, Roast Master's Choice, you can smell it.

Sydnee: It's good.

Justin: It's good.

Sydnee: Yeah. So—

Justin: Now, he doesn't have the ever-present threat of the government crackdown on his coffee production, though. Maybe he is trying to get it out to the—to the streets. Maybe he could like put up some tarp or something to hide the stench.

Sydnee: I don't—I don't—well, yeah, I mean, if he had coffee sniffers, if Frederick the Great takes over.

Justin: [titters] Not so great.

Sydnee: [chuckles] So, we really see a lot of—I want to highlight some of the different things, because I'm sure there were examples like that all through history of coffee, of people kind of, "Well, this is sort of similar to coffee, so I'll boil it." But it wasn't until we had like mass-produced coffee and that it was standardized, because if you're gonna—if we're gonna have

people systematically finding a way to replace coffee, they kind of have to need coffee.

And so, people got hooked on coffee, and then if they couldn't get it because of war or whatever, they found different ways to do it. So, in the US Civil War, persimmon and watermelon seeds were roasted and boiled, and that was coffee. Sweet potatoes, peanuts was a common thing. In Nebraska, like barley, rye, corn, a lot of using what you got, right? Those are common. West Virginia specific, I found this recipe—

Justin: Okay.

Sydnee: Wheat bran, cornmeal, eggs and molasses.

Justin: Ooh! That's rough.

Sydnee: You cook that down and make... coffee.

Justin: Oh, yeah.

Sydnee: That is not coffee.

Justin: No, that's not coffee.

Sydnee: No, I'm sorry. I'm usually quick to defend Western Virginian traditions.

Justin: That reminds me of like, who—there was on one of those Worst Cooks in America shows we watched one time, where somebody tried to...

Sydnee: Make chocolate?

Justin: Make chocolate from cinnamon.

Sydnee: Yes.

Justin: And they were like, it's like just— "It's not brown enough, it's still not chocolate." [chuckles]

Sydnee: It was like, that's not what chocolate is.

Justin: That's not choc—what chocolate is.

Sydnee: That's not what chocolate—no, they had a whole conversation about like chocolate is a thing. Like, you can't just—

Justin: It's a thing! You can't just like make something into chocolate by making it browner.

Sydnee: No, you can't turn it into—it was like alchemy, they were trying to do alchemy. [chuckles]

Justin: That's what this is like, "I've brought coffee." You haven't. You stirred a bunch of groceries in a cup. [chuckles]

Sydnee: There were—in New Mexico, they use different kinds of seeds, jojoba seeds, sunflower, juniper berries. And really, again, it's the top—the thing that people were trying to mimic. And it's interesting, because coffee has caffeine, and if you drink caffeine enough, you will become physically addicted to it, right? And you will experience withdrawal symptoms if you stop drinking caffeine. We know that I am addicted to caffeine. We know this is true. It's interesting that people who were drinking coffee regularly made these things that clearly were not going to have caffeine in them, and drank them regularly. They must have all felt awful, and not known why.
[chuckles]

Justin: Hm.

Sydnee: Or knew why, but didn't know what to do about it.

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: Justin, one of the most famous coffee substitutes, before we get to mushrooms, that I want to talk about, I feel like our interests converge, because it was made by C.W. Post.

Justin: Ah! Yeah.

Sydnee: Yes. So, I—

Justin: The cereal legend.

Sydnee: So, I want to talk to you about C.W. Post, cereal legend's coffee substitute. But first, we have to go to the billing department.

Justin: All right, let's go.

[theme music plays]

[ad reads]

John: Sleep is important, but it's difficult sometimes. I'm John Moe. On Sleeping With Celebrities, famous people help conk you out by talking in soothing voices about unimportant things. Maria Bamford on parking.

Maria: I parked in a bus stop. That's just not right. I am not a bus.

John: Roxane Gay on airports.

Roxane: My favorite airport is Indianapolis. It has a really smart layout.

John: Alan Tudyk on yardsticks.

Alan: You hand somebody a yardstick, yardsticks become part of the family.

John: Granted, it's a weird idea, but it's lots of fun and it works. Listen wherever you get podcasts.

[break]

Manolo: Hey, it's Sue, the subway train.

[piano notes play]

Manolo: Hey, guess what, Sue? I just inherited a game show. And I have to continue it, because there are people out there who like to curl up into a ball and listen to it.

[piano notes play]

Manolo: Yeah, it's a podcast where listeners submit game show ideas for others to play on air.

[piano notes play]

Manolo: Well, it is. In fact, the dumber the better.

[piano notes play]

Manolo: Right, right, it's called Dr. Gameshow. Some curled up balls consider it a tradition, while others call it a train wreck.

[piano notes play]

Manolo: No, not you Sue, it's Dr. Gameshow. If you're the sort that likes to listen to people competing for refrigerator magnets, then curl up into a ball and listen to Dr. Gameshow, every other Wednesday on maximumfun.org.

[piano notes play]

[break]

Sydnee: So, Justin, how much do you know about C.W. Post?

Justin: The bitter rival of Kellogg... Perhaps best known for his raisin brand. He spun off with that, I believe. But yeah, he was a nutritionist, kind of a devotee, before he did his own thing. That's my—that's my best recollection.

Sydnee: Yeah, that's a good—so, yes. Post, he had, early in his life, he had some challenges with, I mean, at the time, he—what they were calling a nervous breakdown.

Justin: Could have been anything.

Sydnee: Yeah, modern day—obviously, he was having some mental health challenges. And a lot of it stemmed from, too, he was having trouble with the various businesses he was involved in. He wasn't getting his projects off the ground, so he wasn't having a lot of success. And then he also had some mental health issues. And eventually, he went to Dr. Kellogg's Sanitarium in Battle Creek, Michigan, looking for like, "Save me. Help me." Actually, his wife brought him there and was like, "Please, fix him."

Justin: "Can't do anything with him."

Sydnee: Yeah, "There's nothing to do." And he was fixed with food.

Justin: Of course.

Sydnee: Yes.

Justin: The miracle. [chuckles]

Sydnee: A lot of—a lot of Kellogg's patients were fixed with food. It's weird how that—

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: If all you have is a hammer...

Justin: Yeah. Well, that and restricting masturbation. So, there's the two—the two things you have. When all you have is a hammer and restricting masturbation.

Sydnee: [titters] He didn't—he didn't—I don't know if that was part of Post's story. I didn't read that specific—I'm sure that fact is out there or not—whether or not that was. But I could see that, because he definitely, like he started studying like—

Justin: Sorry, that's a Kellogg thing.

Sydney: Yes.

Justin: Yeah.

Sydney: No, I know! And so, but I don't know if Post adopted that.

Justin: Got into that specific—

Sydney: I know he got into cereal.

Justin: Yeah.

Sydney: Right?

Justin: Yeah.

Sydney: Like, he liked cereal, clearly. And the idea that like all health kind of stems from what you eat—

Justin: Sure, yeah.

Sydney: And having a clean GI tract, and that kind of thing. So, he read some medical books, he decided, of all the things he was doing, one of the worst was coffee. He thought coffee was killing him.

Justin: Mm-hm.

Sydney: And he had once had a coffee substitute when he was in Texas. He'd had a drink that was made from chicory. Like I said, chicory is a common theme here. And wheat berries.

Justin: Okay.

Sydney: So, he used bran and molasses instead, and made a breakfast drink, Postum.

Justin: Postum, yeah.

Sydney: Have you heard of Postum?

Justin: I have heard of Postum.

Sydney: Yeah. Postum is still around to this day, and the idea was, this is a coffee alternative that will break your caffeine addiction. It's going to be just like coffee, except it's—which, I mean like, you could just have decaffeinated coffee, right?

Justin: Sure, yeah. But it's almost too close.

Sydney: Yeah. [chuckles] But this is something that you can drink and you're going to overcome what he called your yellow streak.

Justin: Oh? Your...

Sydney: Your cowardly addiction to caffeine.

Justin: Ah...

Sydney: I will never overcome it.

Justin: I don't want to. It's cool. I like it.

Sydney: So, Postum became a really trendy as—and I think it's an interesting touchstone, because it was trendy, it was a coffee alternative, and it was being marketed for wellness. Now, I don't know that we were using the word "wellness" the way we use the word "wellness" now, you know?

Justin: Mm-hm.

Sydney: But this was wellness.

Justin: It was still kind of loaded. It was still pretty loaded, I think.

Sydney: Yeah.

Justin: Yeah. I think "wellness" has always had that... I think it can carry a lot more linguistic weight, because it's a lot more ephemeral, I think.
[chuckles]

Sydnee: I didn't—I had never heard of Postum. I had to look this up to see. And I mean, it's really marketed now with like this nostalgia to it. Like, "Don't you remember your first Postum?"

Justin: The old days of Postum.

Sydnee: I don't remember Postum ever. But anyway, among all of these different alternatives to coffee, it seems natural to me that if we're talking about like coffee's burnt flavor, roasty flavor, whatever you want to call it, that mushrooms having an earthy...

Justin: It's right there.

Sydnee: Umami flavor would become part of it. So, it turns out that using mushrooms as coffee replacement dates back to Finland during World War II.

Justin: Wow.

Sydnee: Because, as I said, wartime was a common time to find these coffee substitutes pop up, because you didn't have coffee, you wanted something, you made something. So, in the 1940s, in Finland, there were a lot of things you couldn't get. You know, sugar was a common shortage, and coffee was among them. And so, they started different things, you know, like a lot of different communities were doing. Rye being roasted was a common sort of base to them. And they started adding chaga mushrooms to it, like it has this blackened color on the outside of it.

Justin: Mm-hm! Trying to get a little closer to the original—

Sydnee: Yeah. And so, it would kind of look like coffee.

Justin: Oh, yeah.

Sydnee: You would just steep it overnight, and then you would press it.

Justin: That's a long... yeah, okay. It's a long prepara—go ahead.

Sydnee: Well, I mean, I imagine you make it in big batches and have it ready, right?

Justin: Yeah, I guess that's true.

Sydnee: I mean, don't you think?

Justin: Like you have to—there's a big procedure with roasting coffee beans I guess too. I shouldn't be put off by the amount of elbow grease I'm putting in up front. [chuckles]

Sydnee: Well, I mean, I think you can be put off if you're considering that you're still not going to get caffeine. [chuckles]

Justin: Yeah, that's true.

Sydnee: Like, I'm not gonna—I'm not gonna go through this process.

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: But anyway, so they would—they would soak the mushrooms overnight, press them all out. And then you could add like the, like I said, the roasted rye to it, and you would make this beverage that was a coffee substitute. So again, the idea feels really new and trendy, but this—

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: And this is just one example. That's probably the first known example we have. Certainly, there could have been other cultures using mushrooms. And since then, there have been a lot of different places where some sort of mushroom has been, you know, soaked and pressed and turned into a beverage. And this is a known thing. It's important to note that this specific mushroom that they were using can thin your blood. So, please don't try this at home unless you consult with a medical professional,

especially if you're on certain medications. This is going to be a theme.
[chuckles]

Justin: Oh, okay, gotcha.

Sydnee: Like everything else in nature, just because it might have some sort of beneficial property, doesn't mean—

Justin: That it doesn't have—

Sydnee: Some sort of negative effect or interaction or contraindication, just like medicine.

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: You know, I mean, if you think that these things are medicine, then treat them like medicine. Not everyone can take all medicine, right?

Justin: Fair.

Sydnee: So anyway, that was probably our first like, this is where mushroom coffee we know begins. Certainly, there could have been other examples. And if you look at—I think that's what's really interesting, like so we have all of this throughout history in times of shortage or whatever, or for a wellness purpose, like Postum. If you look at the sort of coffee substitute atmosphere today, it's the same stuff.

Justin: Really?

Sydnee: So, I was looking up different—they call them beanless coffee brands.

Justin: Weird.

Sydnee: [titters] Why specifically do you think it's weird? Because I think it's weird, but I wonder why you do.

Justin: Like, I feel like it sounds like a coffee that you get if you fart a lot. Like, finally, there's a coffee that won't make me fart. [chuckles] That's what it sounds like too if you say beanless, it's like... it just makes me feel like I love coffee, but I hate to fart.

Sydnee: I—[chuckles]

Justin: [chuckles] That's why I don't like it. You asked.

Sydnee: As usual, my brain doesn't first go to farts. But what was weird to me about discovering that beanless coffee is a concept, is that if something is less, I feel like you're saying there's something negative about the word you put before it, or like it's good that this isn't in it. And I don't know why bean—like, caffeine-free would be a thing.

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: And like, certainly there are products that are like dairy-free, because maybe you can't tolerate dairy. And then there's the whole non-GMO, which we have issues with, obviously, that GMOs are not inherently evil or dangerous or bad for you. But like the implication is, "This is bad for you, so we took it out." And I don't know who's out there going, "Stop beans!"

Justin: Yeah, I don't—yeah.

Sydnee: Well, no, the FDA is. They're way down there on the new upside-down food tri—food upside-down pyramid, whatever it is. Anyway. But if you look at these coffee alternatives that are out there today, they're using things like fermented chickpeas, date seeds, roasted dandelions, rice hulls, and then a lot of them contain mushrooms. I looked up like the first one that I found, this Atomo. It contains... which mushroom do we have? Lion's mane. So, a lot of these are mushroom-based coffees, and some of them, their selling point is they don't have caffeine, period.

Justin: Okay.

Sydnee: That's it.

Justin: That sucks.

Sydnee: Like if you read the thing, they're like, "Look, this is better for you because it doesn't have caffeine."

Justin: That's too bad.

Sydnee: And I understand if you're trying to avoid caffeine, okay, great. But for a lot of them, they're kind of saying, "Not only do we not have caffeine, but we're giving you some sort of health advantage." And I think that's interesting, because a lot of the coffee substitutes, other than Postum, were not trying to give you any kind of wellness advantage. They were just trying to give you the feeling of coffee without having coffee.

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: So, this isn't just that, it's like, "You don't want to drink coffee because of the caffeine, here's something that you could drink." It's, "This is going to make you better." A lot of them will tell you they're going to give you energy from some other source. That's such a popular thing in the wellness industry, "natural energy." And what they mean is no caffeine, except sometimes wellness products absolutely do contain caffeine.

Justin: Yeah, sometimes there is.

Sydnee: Yes.

Justin: And you're like, "Hey, this gives me a little bit of extra energy." No kidding?

Sydnee: Yeah. And they're like, "natural energy," and it's like, well, it's caffeine... But they're gonna try to tell you that you're gonna get energy and focus without the jitters, that's a really common—because caffeine gives you jitters, this is gonna give you all of the benefits of caffeine without the jitters.

Justin: Can we say—can we talk about jitters for a second?

Sydney: Yeah, sure.

Justin: I don't know that I've ever—I don't know what people mean when they say that. Like, I have never experienced whatever that—I mean, maybe I have experienced it, but I've never like had—maybe it's just because I've been drinking coffee steadily and effectively since I was in college. But like, what is the jitters?

Sydney: I have experienced the jitters before, at least what I think that means, from a colloquial perspective. At times, especially in residency, I would—I would just be mindlessly drinking coffee throughout the course of an entire night.

Justin: Mm-hm.

Sydney: So, we are talking a lot of coffee consumption, thoughtlessly consuming coffee, tossing it back quickly in between things to go into rooms. And so, probably drinking a much, much more, definitely drinking much, much more caffeine than I would on a regular basis. And not what I would recommend. I would not recommend just, you know, thoughtlessly chugging caffeine all day, certainly. We shouldn't—that's not good for you.

Justin: I—yeah...

Sydney: And in those moments, what I have experienced, aside from the fact that I definitely got some runs of supraventricular tachycardia, my heart rate was way too high—I don't have that anymore. But I also experienced a feeling of, it's almost like when you get the bugs crawling inside your skin. Have you ever had that sort of?

Justin: Oh, okay! Yeah, yeah, yeah, I know what you mean. Yeah.

Sydney: Yeah. Formication is the name. Form-*m*.

Justin: I have been very consistent about my coffee intake, though. I guess maybe I'm just not mixing it up enough.

Sydnee: But I've had that moment where I feel like inside I'm shaking, but I'm not shaking on the outside, but I'm shaking on the inside. And it feels like if I try to pick something up, I'm gonna drop it. And I don't know, it's a very uncomfortable—

Justin: This is a—

Sydnee: I have experienced that from—but again, that's not just from drinking coffee, it's from drinking way too much caffeine.

Justin: I think I would have just assumed that was me if I started feeling that way, you know? Just the wonders of being me. I just feel scared inside and kind of shaking inside. [chuckles] Yeah, maybe I just would have mistaken that for regular brain activity.

Sydnee: Well, I mean, I think certainly other things can give you jitters.

Justin: That's true!

Sydnee: So, here's what—

Justin: I'm also sometimes though, coffee makes me really sleepy, so I don't know.

Sydnee: Oh, man, doesn't do that... Okay, the only reason that coffee makes me sleepy is if I still haven't had enough.

Justin: There's another reason—whoa, sheesh. Don't even talk to you until you've had your coffee, right? There's another reason too, but it's if your energy is an applied kinesthesiology, if your energies are flopped, then caffeine makes you sleepy, and like NyQuil make you energized. And you have to do some sort of like energy switching to fix that bad back.

Sydnee: That is not real.

Justin: You passed my test.

Sydnee: Okay. Thank you. Okay, so mushroom coffee specifically, there are a lot of different brands out there, they use different mushrooms. What are they claiming, and is there any reason to claim that this is anything other than just, it's sort of like coffee, it's got mushrooms in it, and if you like it, you can drink it. Right?

Justin: Right.

Sydnee: Okay. So, the most common species of mushrooms, lion's mane, chaga, which we've already mentioned, reishi and cordyceps. Cordyceps is the one that people freak out about, because there's certain kinds of that fungi that can infect bugs and turn them into like zombies. And so, there's a lot of like—I think there's a lot of writing out there that sort of connects that to a zombie—like, you could use that in a fictional sense, as like a zombie apocalypse kind of thing. Anyway.

So, those are the mushrooms that most commonly are in the various wellness coffee brands you can buy. Lion's mane is—will tell you that it will be good for your brain. Make you think clearer, make you—make your brain work better, basically. Chaga is supposed to be antioxidant. Reishi is supposed to be good for your immune system. And cordyceps is just like, that's that natural energy that they talk about.

Justin: Ah, okay.

Sydnee: They'll tell you that you can get natural energy. Now, have there been studies done on these things? Yes. So, let me talk about just briefly, what do we know? Lion's mane first, when we talk about cognitive function, brain function, the all—so, a lot of the stuff that they do—that they've done is either in like a lab model or an animal model. And as we've talked about many times on the show, just because something works in a mouse doesn't mean it's going to work in a human.

Justin: Right.

Sydnee: So, they've done a lot of studies in animals and found some like, I don't know, basically, animals have better brain function after being exposed to lion's mane. So, we've seen that, like they can do a maze better.

Justin: Mm-hm.

Sydnee: There was a study that looked at humans, there was a Japanese study. And specifically individuals with some sort of cognitive decline or impairment, like dementia.

Justin: Hm, okay.

Sydnee: So, somebody who we're trying to boost them back to their baseline functioning, not take them from baseline to Limitless.

Justin: To Limitless, yeah.

Sydnee: And it did—[chuckles] it was—it was a very small sample, and it did show maybe some improvement, compared to placebo. But it was, again, just the kind of study that you would say, interesting result, not sure if it means anything. We should replicate it in a larger group to see. But in terms of like, if you don't have any cognitive decline, would this make you smarter than you already are? We don't have any evidence right now to show that, you know, if you start eating lion's mane, you're going to become Limitless. Do you want me to start talking about chaga?

Justin: Yeah, talk about chaga!

Sydnee: Again, a lot of these are pre-clinical studies when it comes to chaga, like reducing inflammation, is it an antioxidant? There's so much interest in reducing inflammation, there's so many things that in a lab will show some sort of antioxidant properties. We really don't have a lot of human—there's almost no human data. Nothing that is significant enough to mention in terms of that. So, we don't know. And cordyceps, again, there have been—there's been some small research—

Justin: Another name for that—I don't like that choice of word there, "cordyceps." It sounds like a tool. I don't think that should be—

Sydnee: It does.

Justin: What they call that. Eh, I'll come up with something better, see if I can get it going.

Sydnee: [titters] They've mainly looked at it in athletes, to look at like, do you have—do you fatigue slower. And studies are mixed. They're very small. It's inconclusive.

Justin: All right.

Sydnee: So like the point of all this is, we don't really know if it—if they do these things yet. There have been some small studies, most of them not in humans, that have suggested possibly, at this point, we can't say conclusively that these mushroom coffees are going to do anything for you, other than be an alternative to coffee. Some of them do have caffeine, I should note.

Justin: Mm-hm.

Sydnee: So just—so like, that would be an advantage. If you're trying to avoid caffeine, then I guess certainly, and you enjoy the flavor of these coffees—

Justin: Sure.

Sydnee: Then that would be an advantage. But some of them do have caffeine, so you gotta check. You need to read the packaging, because some of them have the mushroom stuff, and they talk about antioxidants and all those other things. But then also, they do have caffeine in them. So, that would be a problem. So I mean, for most people, it's probably fine. I will say that some people have—well, I mean, obviously, you can be allergic to mushrooms. Some people have some stomach discomfort with mushroom preparations. So, I wouldn't advise it if it's upsetting your stomach. Although, I mean, coffee makes a lot of people go to the bathroom.

Justin: That's true.

Sydnee: So, you know, but—

Justin: Thank goodness for that.

Sydnee: But you might have some discomfort. And then, again, some mushrooms will interact with medications you might be taking. Specifically, if you're on any kind of anticoagulant, a blood thinner, anything that has to do with your immune system, anything that has to do with diabetes management, I would talk to your healthcare provider before substituting your coffee with mushroom coffee, if you're on any of those kinds of medications.

There have been rare cases of like liver toxicity from the reishi mushrooms. That's probably a quantity issue, I would guess. However, it's just a good reminder that just because something is "natural," comes from the Earth, grows—that doesn't mean that it's completely benign and you can just eat or drink as much of it as you want.

Just like I drank so much coffee that my insides were vibrating. You could drink so much mushroom coffee that you give yourself diarrhea or it interferes with your medications, or certainly, that you harm one of your internal organs. That's true for most things, even water.

Justin: Even water.

Sydnee: Even water, there is a limit that you can drink too much. So, I think if you want to try a mushroom coffee—this is what I told my dad, because my dad really likes mushrooms. This is why he wanted to try mushroom coffee. Not for any of the wellness benefits. He likes mushrooms. He likes coffee. He thought he would like mushroom coffee. [chuckles]

Justin: So, in his sense, it is a thing.

Sydnee: It is a thing. What I would tell him—

Justin: I doubt you get that great, robust mushroom flavor from it, though, right? That can't be what they're striving for. I mean, I don't know.

Sydnee: I've never tried it! I don't know. But what I—here's what I would tell you, if you're like my dad and you like mushrooms and you like coffee,

certainly you could try it. If you need that caffeine and you don't want to cut caffeine out, I would get one that has caffeine in it. I would drink it in moderation, just like coffee should be drunk. And I would also, again, if you have any other underlying health conditions or if you're on medications, I would consult with your healthcare provider before replacing coffee with it. For most people, it's not a big deal. But also, if you're looking to become Limitless...

Justin: This may not be the only way. Is that fair to say? [chuckles]

Sydnee: I don't—I would not recommend—I mean, I don't know if it's more expensive. I'm gonna guess that it is.

Justin: Than the Limitless pill? That's tough to say.

Sydnee: I would not invest your money in this, if you're trying to cure, treat, manage—

Justin: Cure, treat, diagnose any—yeah.

Sydnee: Or elevate yourself beyond the bounds of human comprehension. [titters]

Justin: Thank you so much for listening to our show. Thanks to the Taxpayers for the use of their song of "Medicines" as the intro and outro of our program. And thanks to you for listening. That's gonna do it for us, until next time. My name is Justin McElroy!

Sydnee: I'm Sydnee McElroy.

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

["Medicines" by The Taxpayers plays]

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