Podcast: Imagine This

Episode: Why do tears come out of our eyes when we cry?

Duration: 7'57

[ABC Podcast sting - This is an ABC Podcast]

Bri: Hello, I'm Bri and today, on Imagine This, we're going to discover something that we all have in common. It's something that each and every one of us does from the moment that we're born. Today, we're talking about crying. Have you ever noticed that something happens to your body when you cry?

Kids: When you cry water then comes in and then it drips out.

Bri: So where does this water drip out from?

[Water dripping]

Kids: From your eyes.

Bri: Yeah, and we call this special water, tears. But have you ever stopped to wonder why these tears might happen?

Grace: I'm Grace, and my question is why do tears come out of our eyes when we cry?

[Playful sting]

Bri: What a wonderful question, Grace. Where do you think the tears might come from?

Kids: From our eyes.

When you cry, it's from your heart.

Bri: Sometimes it can feel like these tears come from our heart.

Kids: Because hearts can break easily.

Bri: But how would these tears get all the way from our heart to our eyes?

Kids: They go through your body.

Bri: Well, the tears come out of our eyes and our eyes are part of our body. So our body must make them from somewhere, but where do they actually come from? Is there a bucket of tears hiding in our body?

[Water flowing]

Kids: I don't know.

Bri: Is there a tap that we turn on and the tears come pouring out?

[Tap running]

Kids: Ooh...

Ahh...nope.

Bri: Well, this sounds like a mystery and I think the person that can help us solve it is Michelle Moskova from the University of New South Wales. Michelle is a senior lecturer in anatomy, which means she teaches people what the body is made of. I'm sure she can help us solve this one. Right, Michelle?

Michelle: Hi, Bri.

Bri: Can you give us a lesson in tears today?

Michelle: Yep.

Bri: Oh, well that was easy. We're trying to find out where the tears come from before they come out of our eyes. Where should we start looking?

Michelle: Well, our body has tiny little factories called glands.

Bri: Glands, what?

Michelle: Uh-huh.

Bri: Have you ever heard of a gland before?

Kids: No.

We don't know what glands are.

Yeah.

Bri: Glands. How do you even say that word?

Michelle: Glands. Glands with a G.

Bri: The letter G. What does the letter G sound like?

Michelle: "G" like goo.

Bri: Ah, can you make a "g" sound with your mouth?

Kids: "G""g""g""g""g""g".

Michelle: Yes glands with a "g".

Bri: So what do these glands with a G do?

Michelle: There are lots of little glands inside our body. Glands make stuff our body needs.

Bri: Ooh, stuff like cake. I need cake.

Michelle: No, not the cake. Glands can make us sweat. Glands can make our mouth water when we see the cake.

Kids: Mm yummy in my tummy.

Michelle: And when we want the cake, but can't get it. Glands can make tears.

[Child crying]

Bri: So glands makes stuff inside our body.

Michelle: Yes.

Bri: Glands can make tears and we can make songs.

[Bri and kids sing ‘glands, glands, glands. Glands make stuff, glands make stuff, glands make stuff’]

Michelle: Okay, enough Bri. Let's focus on the eye glands.

Bri: Okay. Where were we again?

Michelle: Glands can make tears.

Bri: Right. So what are tears?

[Water flowing]

Kids: Water.

Bri: Anything else do you think?

Kids: Salt.

Bri: Is that what the Glands make tears from Michelle?

[Water flowing]

Kids: Yes. If we want to make tears, we need lots of salty water. Then when we add that tiny drop of oil and a tiny bit of goo.

Kids: Eww

Bri: Goo? What kind of goo?

Michelle: Sticky, slippery, jelly-like goo. It's a special goo our body makes.

Bri: So why do we need these salty, watery, drippy, gooey tears in our eyes?

[Playful strings, tap dripping]

Michelle: We make tears, little bits of tears all the time, all day long, the little tears help our eye work properly. When we have a bit of dust going in our eye, or when we chop up an onion, we cry too. Those are the kinds of things that hurt our eye. Tears can wash out the dust.

Bri: But what about the other kind of tears, the ones that feel like they come from our heart?

[Emotional piano]

Michelle: If we're really happy or really sad, or sometimes when we can't get our own way, we cry.

[Child crying]

Bri: But why does our body make those tears happen?

Michelle: Well, that's still a big mystery. There are some things even scientists don't know.

Bri: Do other animals cry like people?

[Birds squawking]

Michelle: Not when they're sad or happy. Animals cry when something gets in their eye, they can make tears, but they don't cry the same way as us.

Bri: Do boys cry like girls?

Michelle: For sure they cry.

Bri: Do mums cry?

Michelle: Mums cry.

Bri: What about dads? Do dads cry?

Michelle: They won't tell you but they do cry.

Bri: Does every single person on this planet cry?

Michelle: Yes. That's what makes us human.

[Sad classical music, crying baby]

Bri: So Grace, these special glands with a G help us make tears in our body to wash away dirt and keep our eyes healthy and clean. But the reason we cry, emotional tears that feel like they come from our heart. Well, that's still one of the mysteries of being human. We don't quite know yet.

[Tap drips]

[Music concludes]

Bri: Imagine This is produced by me, Brianna Peterson, and is a co-production between the Conversation and the Australian Broadcasting Corporation. And remember, if you see someone crying, give them, a-

Kids: Tissue!

Bri: It'll help make them feel better. For more episodes of Imagine This plus a range of music and stories for young children, download the ABC Kids Listen app.