**Laughter the best medicine comes in liquid form; “Doc’s Spoonful of Medicine.”**

**#10. I would BACK Fletton-folk against any odds.**

Prior to CoVid lockdowns, back pain consultations made up 1 in 4 or 5 GP consultations. Now “stuck online” neck, arm and shoulder blade pain are providing stiff opposition to low back pain. As we are before the “watershed hour”, I will not go into too much gruesome detail about the pain of slipped discs or crushed vertebrae from osteoporosis, so as not to frighten the uninitiated. I was thinking that it might be quite nice to explain the human vertebral column (“backbone”) and give you some easy-to-follow steps about how to look after your back, so preventing or improving back pain. There are 33 bones arranged in a series of “(“curves and “)” curves. There are cushioning “discs”, between the bones down to the sacrum. If the head is facing left, the neck has 7 bones making a “(“curve; the thorax has 12 bones making a “)” curve; the lower back (lumbar spine) has 5 big bones making a “(“curve; the sacrum has 5 bones fused together and with the 4 fused bones of the coccyx makes a “)” curve. The coccyx is a vestigial tail, that tells the tale of our shared evolution with primates and were that fall on it (when your classmate pulled away that chair you were about to sit on, way back when, just to make a monkey out of you), to happen in adult life…well…you would take social media trolling instead, any day! At least the latter can be ended with one block. Coccydinia is unforgiving.

To understand the back, imagine 33 books stacked on a table with some books pushed forward and some backwards. If you rattle the table, the column is obviously unstable. This is what happens when we move. If, however you stabilise the books with a one arm on either side and your chin on the top, the column is resilient, if the table is rattled. This is what the ligaments (tough fibrous bands that connect bones) and the muscles do. You cannot directly change the ligaments, but you can strengthen the muscles with good posture (realigning the books) and exercise (positioning the stabilising arms correctly). Bending and turning at the same time is stressful for the back and relies on good muscles to prevent slippage of the bones and discs. Do your back a good turn by doing your stretches and exercises on most days. 1. Reach for the sky with both arms straight and hold for 20 seconds to align all the bones correctly. 2. Bend your arms and point your elbows skywards for 10 seconds to prevent that stooping “dowager’s hump” look. 3. Stand on tiptoe to a count of 3 or 5 to correct lower back posture, strengthen your feet, and restore the arches to those sore, flat feet. 4. If you add gentle twists to left and right, to any of the above, you recruit even more back muscles. With the back straight, turning and twisting are not destabilising for the back, unlike when the spine is bent forward with the legs straight. So many back injuries have happened in tune with checking the engine oil or changing spark plugs or unplugging the hoover or loading the dishwasher. 5. When you rise from sitting, do it in a straight line, not while attempting to turn at the same time with a bent spine. However, getting up and then sitting down from a chair is good for maintaining the power in your thigh and buttock muscles, which are integral to providing back up to the back muscles. Prefer a chair with arm rests if you are unsteady or very elderly, to do this exercise. Just 5 “get up and get downs” each day will keep your muscle hard drive safely backed up. So many people end up with a flattened lumbar spine, for want of keeping a rolled-up towel handy to place in the “small of the back” on the settee or in the car. 6. Once a day hold your head up and back, sniff the air and look in the distance to retain the curve of the neck bones. The tendency for old people to enter a room with the head, before the trunk and legs arrive in the room is one of the causes of neck-back pain. Look at a primary school child. The back of the head and the buttock are in line and all the bones of the back enter the room as one. By the late teens, that forward lean to post tweets on the mobile, instead of holding the head up to hear the twitter of real birds, starts the trend that ends in posture becoming a mere postscript. Never fear, teen Flettonian, Doc’s got your back, now!