“Doc’s Spoonful of Medicine”

#17a. Fletton folk should SHOULDER the responsibility for their mobility.

The human shoulder sacrifices stability for a wider range of movement, enabling it to do complex things. It relies heavily on the strength and suppleness of its muscles because, unlike most other joints, its ligaments are weak. Muscles can be trained at any age. I implore you Meresiders to take a few moments each day to do some simple exercises to retain this range of movement and versatility. If you are already restricted by age or previous injury, then at least maintain what you have, maybe even improve it. There are three bones at the shoulder arranged in an intricate manner. They are the arm bone (Humerus), the collar bone (Clavicle) and shoulder blade (Scapula). The main joint is a shallow ball and socket joint (the official “shoulder joint”) between the shoulder blade and the arm bone. The cup is slightly deepened by a rim of cartilage and fibrous tissue, but it does not have the stability of the ball and gripping deep socket arrangement of the hip joint. However, most people, even in their youth cannot raise their leg sideways much above 90 degrees whereas most people can raise their arm sideways through a full 180 degrees for most of their lives. The muscles that pull the arm into the shoulder blade are called the “rotator cuff muscles” because they rotate the arm in its socket. They initiate movement of the arm away from the side and the big muscle called the Deltoid where your “jabs into arms” go, carries on the movement. While this is happening the lower end of the shoulder blade rotates on its axis behind you. The collar bone stabilises the shoulder blade at the shoulder end.

One of the most debilitating and frustrating things that can happen is the limitation of movement known a “frozen shoulder”, which prevents you from reaching that treat you hid in the top cupboard away from the children, then forgot about, while they shot up with teenage growths spurts that uncovered your hidden treasure. “Frozen shoulder” is caused by inflammation and abnormal fibrous adhesions in the capsule (housing) of the shoulder joint and the muscles of the joint. Because of the shallow socket, the shoulder joint is liable to dislocate when the arm hits a wall (e.g.: in squash), or a fall occurs with the arm outstretched behind you. The collar bone is susceptible to break (fracture) in a heavy fall on an outstretched arm in front of you.

To protect these bones and maintain a good range of shoulder movements, here are some simple quick things to do at some point each day, and not necessarily all at the same time. Holding a book or light weights adds more strength to the muscles. The exercises should be done slowly and rhythmically, not in the fast jerky way that our P.E. Teacher, Miss De Meena used to make us do, to warm up in the playground. Infant school shoulders have more elasticity and can do that without tearing or indeed tears, but with age, tears in the shoulder, and tendon problems known a tendinitis or tendinopathy, can result from sudden movements, especially if force is applied or heavy weights are being carried.

These exercises should be done with arms straight, and separately with elbows bent. Start with lifting the arms away from the side as high as you can. With elbows bent, this will be about 90 degrees, but with straight arms you can touch hands above your head, whether palm to palm, or back of hand to back of hand. With elbows bent and thumbs up, swing both hands outwards keeping the elbows against your sides. Bring the palms back into your tummy. Next, bring the hands with fingertips touching to rest on your head, then back down, separating them to meet again behind your back. With arms straight, rotate the palms clockwise and anticlockwise. Shrug your shoulders up and then lower them. Raise both arms in front of you as if about to do an impression of sleep walking, then lower your arms and relax. You can now congratulate yourself on the excellent work done to maintain your shoulder strength and mobility by actually reaching (pain-free) that treat you hid in the top cupboard, dear Fletton folk. Result!