Shmanners 294: Posture

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Travis: Sit your derriere on the chair-iere.

Teresa: Let's get this straight. It's *Shmanners*.

[theme music plays]

Travis: Hello, Internet. I'm your husband host, Travis McElroy.

Teresa: And I'm your wife host, Teresa McElroy.

Travis: And you're watching—

Teresa: Nope.

Travis: [laughs] And you're listening to *Shmanners*.

Teresa: It's extraordinary etiquette...

Travis: ... for ordinary occasions.

Teresa: [laughing]

Travis: So here's what, for me— There's this thing on *Happy Days* that Fonzie always said, and I'm a 38-year-old person. And until I just said it out loud to my wife that I think, "Wow, that's really raunchy."

Teresa: Yeah!

Travis: See, he would tell people like, "Hey, sit on it." And I didn't think twice about that as a child until I just said it and I'm like, "Oh, boy."

Teresa: "Oh, no."

Travis: That could be taken so wrong. Speaking of taken wrong, we're talking about posture.

Teresa: We are.

Travis: My posture is terrible. Look at me right now.

Teresa: [laughs] Talk to me about your experience with cotillion and posture.

Travis: Oh, boy, um...

Teresa: Did they make you do the whole books on your head thing?

Travis: They didn't do the books on the head thing because I'm not 300 years old.

Teresa: Okay.

Travis: But there was a lot of, like, sitting up in the chairs and all that stuff. I mean— Also, I say I'm not 300 years old. I also, though, remember, like, having school desks that had the fixed seat with the curved wood back and the curve was so it was like kind of posture enforcing. Like, you really couldn't slouch in it unless you were okay being wicked uncomfortable. And I know now... [whispers] So listen, can I tell you?

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: I bought this little device because I'm a sucker for gadgets.

Teresa: You sure are.

Travis: And it's supposed to, like, track your posture and basically what it does, it has a little sensor in it that, when you slouch forward or move, you know, lean outside of a certain range, it has you calibrated, like sitting up and looking forward. Move outside of a certain range, it buzzes to remind you, like, hey, sit back up.

The problem is that assumes that you are either sitting or standing up and not, like, crawling on the floor after a child's toy, like looking under the couch because your dog dropped its bone or whatever. And so I was trying to find a toy and she's going, [buzzes] "Get up, man! What are you doing?"

And I'm like, "No, I'm on all fours!" And it's like, "Get— I don't know what to tell you!" [buzzes] So that didn't last long. That experiment ended very quickly. Did you do the books on the head thing?

Teresa: Um, only kind of in jest. So...

Travis: Yeah, I know. You're good at that. You got a nice flat head.

Teresa: I am very good at it. And that's exactly it. The top of my head is very flat.

Travis: Mine is very pointed. Not really, it's just really round.

Teresa: So I can balance quite easily. I think at one point I was using it as, like, a high school parlor trick, and I could balance something silly, like ten science books or something that they did once. But, like, I can do that, one, again, because my head— The top of my head is very flat. And two—

Travis: You did a lot of head stands as a kid.

Teresa: I mean, I did!

Travis: Flattened it right out.

Teresa: Actually, I don't think that that is what happened, but I do think that doing headstands probably, like, prepared me for it. Headstands and I was in ballet for such a long time and posture is a big thing in ballet.

Travis: Well, how you hold yourself, of course. Yeah.

Teresa: Exactly. And so it was kind of like, one of my little like, "Oh, look at me. My posture is so good. I'm so awesome."

Travis: But would you say your posture is good now? Do you have good posture?

Teresa: I mean, I would say that the stresses of life have made me have less good posture. But also, here's the thing, right? I went to acting school and one of the things that you really have to do in order to make a character is to decide what their body is like, right? And if you—

Travis: How do they hold themselves?

Teresa: How do they hold themselves? And so one of the things that I was constantly getting notes on was like, "Well, they kind of just walk like you. They kind of just look like you." And so—

Travis: Mm. Did you think about that in terms of like, are they chest led? Are they hip lead? Are they nose led?

Teresa: I mean, now.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: That's what they were teaching me. And so—

Travis: A lot of my characters were chest led, it turns out.

Teresa: It also affects your singing. So, like, if you're trying to constantly do the ballet posture, which is your hips tucked under, but not so much that they pop out the front. So it's, like, it's not quite neutral hip. And also, you're supposed to pull up but keep your shoulders down and also not let your ribs splay in the front. It's a very precise—

Travis: Do not get ripped open, no matter what.

Teresa: No matter what. It's a very precise hold that you have to do while you're dancing ballet. And it's not good for singing. It just isn't. You need to be able to breathe into, like, your whole apparatus...

Travis: We have gone way far through. We are five minutes in and I don't even think we've explained the idea of posture. Posture is, like, how you hold yourself, right? How you hold your body when you're walking and sitting.

Teresa: Exactly. And straight posture has a whole storied past.

Travis: I'm going to bet a lot of money and classism. Just a guess.

Teresa: Absolutely.

Travis: Okay. Because there's a certain amount of privilege you have to have to worry about if you're sitting right or not.

Teresa: Okay, yeah, absolutely. I mean, if you had the time to sit, that's one thing.

Travis: You probably weren't working.

Teresa: But actually, so if you go back to when posture really starts to become a defining characteristic of the upper class, it actually has to go all the way back to the 16th century military drill formations.

Travis: Okay. Yes. Okay. I can see that.

Teresa: If you look at these paintings of military soldiers, they are, like, basically the toy soldier that we all think of where it's completely straight, up and down. They almost look like their heads are kind of pointy. And they're so straight that to be that straight, you'd have to wear high heels or whatever, right?

Travis: Right. So this is— I mean, I assume, I'm not a military historian, but I assume this is probably around the time when we start to see the kind of, like, rigidity of discipline being that transition of, like, "Oh, what we look for in the military is not like this wild, terrifying, intimidating bunch coming up over a hill. We want people who, like, follow orders and can learn to do this precision maneuver every time."

Teresa: Absolutely. And it began— So there's a Flemish engraving from the period and it was kind of, like, the idea was a pretty practical one. If you stood straighter and more evenly dispersed your weight along the spine, it'd be easier for you to handle weapons like muskets and pikes, right?

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: So that makes a lot of sense to me, but it really just gets, like, overworked to the Nth degree.

Travis: Well, I mean— Not to jump ahead, but this is where you get into a lot of discussions about the American Revolution of like, it was so— Formationed? Formated? Format-oned— then it was, like, so predictable and stuff that that was part of the way that we won. We won was like, because it was too organized.

Teresa: Um, and so while it may have started as helping out the people who were fighting for you, it became a way that you could enforce authority over the people you were training.

Travis: Yeah. That's kind of what my gut told me, right?

Teresa: Posture could mold a man into a soldier.

Travis: But it's more about, like, I mean, like I said, I'm not a historian, but it seems to me like the theory of it would be about how well can you follow my direction? If you don't, it gives me something to correct without having it be like, we were in battle and you got shot. Boo, right? It gives me something to correct off the battlefield, to see how well you follow orders.

Teresa: Certainly. And during the 1700s, it evolved into an etiquette practice for the rich and, you know, fashionable.

Travis: Well, once again, that makes complete sense to me, right? Because then you start to have that bleed over of, like, so much of the aristocracy was also like, they went and served in this war, and now they're like captains and lieutenants and everything. And also they're rich, right? So it's

not separated. The aristocracy also intended to have those kinds of military titles...

Teresa: Certainly.

Travis: ... so they would come home. You see it, man, it's one of those, like, pillars of toxic masculinity of that expectation of, especially then, they came home and would run their house like it was a military thing.

Teresa: Oh, like in *The Sound of Music*.

Travis: Exactly. In *The Sound of Music.* You said that like it's a cute thing he does in *Sound of Music*. It's a mess. He whistles for his children. I have issues.

Teresa: You know, historically, they say that he was actually a very loving father, and Maria was the one who was a real disciplinarian.

Travis: Okay. Not as good of a musical.

Teresa: No, not as good of a musical.

Travis: It wouldn't be as good if there was a moment where the dad was like, "What's her deal? She's been kind of a jerk to you, kids. Are you cool?" And they're like, "Yeah, it's fine. We actually needed this level of discipline." He's like, "Do you guys want to do, like, your singing stuff?" And they're like, "No time for that, dad, Maria has got us learning math over here."

Teresa: I mean, that's a different show.

Travis: Yeah. How do you solve a problem like Maria? She's really bossy.

Teresa: Hey, she's not bossy. She's the boss.

Travis: But not yet! I mean—

Teresa: Anyway. So for a fee, you could go and get posture training from different people who set up shop saying, like, this is the way that we do it and...

Travis: We talked about this in finishing school, too, yeah, right.

Teresa: Exactly, exactly. There was a hole in the market that people were ready to fill.

Travis: Well, once again, this makes complete sense to me, because from everything we've learned, it's another way to prove— Like, to set yourself as even more high class than high class, like something you can judge other people on, which is the bad side of etiquette and manners, of to say, like, well, we can't all be equally high class. So we need something that makes my daughter more high class than your daughter because they're both competing for rich, blah, blah, blah.

Teresa: Yeah, yeah, yeah. And of course, there were critics at the time. There were just as many people offering to, for a price, teach you how to be a straight-backed person. And other people saying, like, "This is unnatural. This is not what we should be doing."

Travis: I bet, like, corsets had to be a big part of that, too, right? Like, corsets...

Teresa: Certainly. Well, corsets generally lend themselves to a very stiffened posture. I mean, there are definitely as far as, like, fashion goes, the corset went through a couple of different kind of configurations.

Travis: Yeah. We've done an episode on corsets.

Teresa: Right. But it does really help with the, like, rigid idea of standing up straight, right?

Travis: Definitely.

Teresa: And as time went on, posture became more and more of a feature in everyday civilian life and it seemed to be more and more important to the culture to stand up straight. And it had a moral context to it by the 1800s.

Travis: That's why you think of it, they're an upright citizen, literally. They're upright.

Teresa: Right. So sickness was for poor people, right? And for people who didn't go to church. And if you had the money, you could learn how to stand straight and you could all this kind of stuff. Like, it became where the line between posture and moral position became completely blurred.

Travis: Yep. Not surprised by that at all.

Teresa: And here is one way that you could call someone out for not having good posture. This was when they started doing plumb lines.

Travis: Oh, I know those— Wait, hold on. I know those from construction.

Teresa: Exactly.

Travis: So a plumb line is like a weight on a line and you drop it down, right? And you can see— It's like a level, right? Where you can see if the thing at the top is leaning away at the bottom, right?

Teresa: Exactly.

Travis: Because in a perfect world, it drops and hangs straight down and hits the point that's directly below it. But if it's leaning, right, then you can see as it grows wider, because it's always going to hang straight down. It's how gravity works.

Teresa: Right. And so by using a plumb line, you could see exactly where their spine was not straight enough. And it—

Travis: Oh, boy. Your spine is not supposed to be straight!

Teresa: That's it. It became medicalized. So this whole thing about posture equaling morality, also equaling medical prowess, right?

Travis: Ugh, equaling health.

Teresa: Equaling health. Right. Exactly.

Travis: I want to talk so much more about this. But first, how about a thank you note for our sponsors?

[theme music plays]

Travis: We want to say thank you to Bombas. I've said it before. I say it again. I love Bombas. I'm wearing Bombas socks right now.

Teresa: Ooh.

Travis: To be fair, I'm almost always wearing Bombas socks.

Teresa: Not going to lie. I usually walk around in bare feet.

Travis: That's true, you don't— When you do wear socks.

Teresa: Actually, I really love the Bombas t-shirts.

Travis: Oh, yeah. Absolutely.

Teresa: Super soft, nice and stretchy. Love it.

Travis: Listen, I don't know if you can tell, folks, but we're a big fan of Bombas, and it's not just the clothes. Bombas' mission is simple. Make the most comfortable clothes ever. That's part one. And match every item sold with an equal item donated. So when you buy Bombs, you're also giving to someone in need. Yeah, like we said, you got comfortable t-shirts, underwear, socks. Great.

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Jordan: You're in a theater, the lights go down. You're about to get swept up by the characters and all their little details and interpersonal dramas. You look at them and think, "That person is so obviously in love with their best friend. Wait, am I in love with my best friend?"
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[music jingle plays]

Travis: Okay, we were talking about it became associated with— Did you ever see those videos, by the way? I think I only know about these through MST3K. I don't think I ever actually saw them, but where they would, like, project, like, a light and it would make a kid's shadow on the wall, and then they would, like, trace the kid's shadow so they could point to—

Like, teachers would point to it and be like, "Do you see your posture, Little Timmy?" And then they could point to, like, who had the best posture in class because of how straight their shadow was or whatever. As if kids need another reason to say, like, "Hey, your posture is not as good as mine, Timmy. I'm posture King, and you're a real posture dud." And you go home and they're like, "How was school, Little Timmy?" Like, "I got bullied about my posture, dad."

Teresa: I did get my spine checked for scoliosis a couple of times.

Travis: That's— I'm here to say I think that's a fine practice. I think that's a wildly different thing than judging kids in front of their peers.

Teresa: So to review, posture was officially medicalized. And it became a bigger deal because it's one thing if you slouch because it's comfortable, but now instead of just being lazy, everyone was worried that you actively had no interest in your health.

Travis: Oh, boy. This, this— Can I tell you? And we're going to keep talking about it. But the thing that's, like, tripping me up about this is I do think that there is a realm in which having, well, "good," quote, unquote. Having correct? I don't know, posture. Thinking about posture, right?

Teresa: Quote, unquote, "good" posture.

Travis: Well, but it's one of those things where it's just like, "Oh, you piled all this stuff onto it and made the concept bad." But I know a lot of, like, maybe it's from acting, of like, how much better you feel, like, confidence-wise, right?

That there is a certain amount of, like, standing up, you know, that this kind of feeling of, like, it can be really invigorating to stand up straight and present and have this bold thing as opposed to, like, collapsing in on yourself. Maybe it's completely mental, right?

Teresa: Well, no, because if you are constantly collapsing in on yourself, you're probably not breathing very easily. It's probably difficult for you, but to allow your chest to expand, you do need to have a certain type of openness to your shoulder cavity, to your chest cavity, all that kind of stuff. So, like, it makes sense in the way of everybody being their best self. But everybody's best self is different.

Travis: Yeah. I think that in general, the thing that I have learned in my long, long, terribly long life. I'm only 38. Don't worry. Is that when it comes to, like, human bodies, saying that there is one ideal of anything is so misinformed and harmful, right? To say, like, if you just do this, it's right. Or if it looks like this, it's right. It's like, "Oh, no, if anyone tells you that they're wrong," right?

That's the wrong way to think about it, because it's what's best for your body, what's best for you. And that idea of, like, if you just do this, then you're the healthiest. We all know that's not how that works.

Teresa: So by the 1890s, people were pretty over it.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: So before, everything was super uncomfortable. Clothes, furniture, all very straight backed, right? Because of this whole thing of upstanding citizens, ugh, right?

Travis: This makes so much sense to me, by the way, because I know that where we're heading into, it's like flapper time, where what you got was a lot of more or less shapeless, like kind of rounded, like, it wasn't, like, fitted things.

It was like loose suits and loose dresses that could move around. And it was more about, like, movement and being loose than it was that like prim and proper, hold yourself up straight, have like, the corsets and the three-piece suits that are close-fitted to you that showed— It was a lot more like comfort and flowy.

Teresa: And furniture changed as well. There's a very distinctive style—

Travis: The chaise lounge baby!

Teresa: Yeah! The idea of comfort was starting to be embraced, at least by the upper classes, who at this point could afford comfortable things.

Travis: Yes. And illegal hooch.

Teresa: I mean, in the US.

Travis: Sure.

Teresa: But this is a worldwide phenomenon, just so you know.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Okay. Um...

Travis: By the way, if you couldn't pick up on it, I don't know if I've ever even talked about it. My love for just the idea of the chaise lounge is... I think it's from working in theater so long. Is there something about being a set designer or being, like, any kind of, like, tech person and getting the chance to add a chaise lounge to a show?

Because, like, you inherently know it's going to get used, right? Because you never put a chaise lounge on stage, and then it never gets like a dramatic moment or somebody flopping onto it. Like, you put it there, it's going to get used, right? And it's such a wonderful—

I once had this conversation with who is now a friend of mine named Matt, and he was young and he just started working at CSC, and he was like, "Hey, Travis, you're pretty old. [laughs] Do you have any, like, acting tips, what do you reckon?"

I said, "Matt, let me tell you, Matt, if you were on stage and you have a chance to sit down, take it." It's like human beings love sitting down, right? Everybody loves to sit down—

Teresa: Or leaning.

Travis: Or leaning! If there's no way to sit down, lean. I said, "Especially if there is a freeze coming up and you're going to have to be frozen in a position long enough, sit down." And then the next show he was in, we were in together, and I kept making eye contact with him as we both sit down and think. And after, like, we were done, he was like, "You are absolutely right."

It feels so like human and normal and going for it to sit down because when you're on stage, sometimes you think, like, I need to be active. Like, no, everyone loves sitting.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: Sit as much as you can. And then you introduce the chaise lounge, which is as close as you can get to laying in a bed without a bed there. It's great.

Teresa: All right. So, like a lot of cultural swings, there's always going to be people who want to drag it back to the way it was or move it in a progressive manner. We've talked about there's always kind of, like, a culture and a counterculture, right?

Travis: Yeah. And I have to imagine, I mean, if we're talking about the impact that the military had on it going into World War II, which is like this, even World War I, I guess. But these two world wars, within decades of each other, another boom in soldiers coming home, and there's, like, deep respect for the military and wanting to, like, idolize that and see it in kids' toys.

And then once again, we head into the Cold War where that idea of "We're going to be better than them, so our posture has to be strong and you can duck under this desk."

Teresa: So what ended up happening is although all of those things, yes, but the swing towards, well, you don't have to stand completely up straight and nobody's spine is all straight. And why are we even worrying about all this stuff? Swung back to "It's about the children. Think about the health of your child."

Travis: Yeah. How will they grow?

Teresa: It depends on how straight their spines are? [laughs] So, okay—

Travis: By the way, cigarettes, totally cool.

Teresa: Totally fine.

Travis: Posture, though? Woo!

Teresa: So posture, it was argued good posture would make children happy, well-behaved, and healthy, right?

Travis: But it just sounds like another way— I mean, not to—

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: It's another way to just correct children, right? It gives you a thing, when we talk about... I don't know if you guys can tell, but this is apparently a sensitive issue for me, which I didn't know before we started this.

Teresa: How could you?

Travis: How could I know? But when we talk about, like, it being an excuse to correct someone in the military, and then we move that to, like, school? It's an excuse to get the kid in line, right?

And there's the thing I think about now is like a parent of like, how often when I was a kid, especially a kid with ADHD, was it just, like, looking for an excuse to tell me I was doing something wrong? To quote, unquote, "teach" me instead of just being like— One of my teachers—

Teresa: "Travis can't sit down in his chair. He won't stay sitting."

Travis: This is very true. One of my favorite teachers in high school...

Teresa: I've heard this.

Travis: My English teacher in 10th grade who let me just sit on the floor, like, when I would come in, I'd be like, "I don't like sitting." And she'd be like, "That's fine." And we'd push the desk over to the side and I would sit on the ground and just lay the papers I was working out around me on the ground, and I could pay so much better attention.

I wasn't squirming and I was, like, so much more comfortable down there. And those memories to me are, like, so much more informing than, like, the time someone told me for the 1000th time to sit up straight or whatever.

Teresa: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm. So it became a, quote, "crusade" in American public schools to assess, photograph, and correct students postures upon enrollment. Um, I mean...

Travis: "Hey, should we teach kids sex ed?"
"No, no, no. Way better idea: posture."

Teresa: [laughing] Um, and it was at this point, when it moves into schools, away from people who are medically trained, it turns more into posture could be used to dehumanize children who are acting out.

Travis: Yep, yep. Uh-huh. Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Teresa: And it became a big issue down the line as far as, like, privacy practices and things like that. There were lots of photographs found in archives of Ivy League schools under the idea of posture correcting, right? And that kind of, like, the body autonomy—

Travis: Wait, was it taking pictures of people in undress?

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: Ugh.

Teresa: There was a lot of body autonomy that was compromised in the name of health, right? Which unfortunately, still happens a lot.

Travis: And once again, man, it's like I said, I think that there is a direct connection between the bullying that everybody, like, has expected— It's just like, "Oh, bullying is part of school." When you have teachers that are calling kids out in front of their peers about this stuff about, like, you give this chance to correct someone not based on behavior or learning, but just about their bodies?

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: And, like, the chance for— When you get into— Man, when I was a kid, we had all this stuff about, like, jump rope for heart and how active are

you and how physically fit are you with the physical fitness test? It's all of these things of, like, you kids see adults, like, calling kids out for their bodies. It's like, yeah, man! You don't see how that might be leading to, like, a bully culture where, like, you are putting— Condoning, commenting on people's bodies and ability to do things?

Teresa: Mm-hmm. Um, so the association of posture and morality continued once doctors got really involved, you know, all in the sake of kids' health, right? And so they were— Suddenly, these pro-posture doctors were drawing lines from medical history to the moral code, right?

Travis: [groans]

Teresa: Based on literally no evidence.

Travis: So a complete repetition of history, right? Like—

Teresa: Well, so—

Travis: And we're back to it!

Teresa: Instead of a cultural thing where, like, the upper classes kind of poopooed the lower classes for not having good posture, saying that, "Oh, well, they are nobodies. And they're obviously beneath us," and classist—

Travis: Oh, so now it's about good and bad. Like, "Oh, he's a bad kid. Look how he slouches."

Teresa: Exactly. And it was medicalized. So a doctor was saying this to you and suddenly it had a lot more weight than that stuffy librarian or whatever, right?

Travis: And you can see this, too, just like I said it—

Teresa: Nothing against librarians.

Travis: No, librarians are great.

Teresa: Stereotypical, like the type.

Travis: Um, but that idea of, like I said, slouch, and slouch once again became like a synonymous with lazy and bad, right? Like, "Oh, that kid is a real slouch," right? "That guy's a real slouch, a real slacker."

Teresa: Right.

Travis: Because they don't stand up straight, God forbid. Oy, oy, oy.

Teresa: And so this kind of, like, weaponization of spinal curvature continued until, like, the early 60s, when all of a sudden it pretty much just stopped.

Travis: Yeah. Hippies, I guess.

Teresa: I guess. I mean, there was a virtual disappearance of posture talk from the moral, medical, and the child rearing discourse. It's kind of unclear why this idea suddenly—

Travis: Well, there was a lot more going on in the 60s, if you think about it, a lot of distracting stuff in there.

Teresa: But everybody just all at once kind of, like, dropped the idea that, quote, "good" posture made you a better person. And I mean, maybe all the old Victorian grandmothers died of old age?

Travis: Maybe.

Teresa: I mean—

Travis: I wonder also, probably there are some parents who got together and like, "Hey, have you noticed how we're, like, turning our kids into hippies by talking about their posture? We're kind of pushing kids away about this whole posture thing and maybe we should just drop it and instead say, like, hey, how are you? Are you having a good day? Do you have anything you're concerned about that you want to tell me? Maybe that's better than just yelling, stand up straight over and over again as a child."

Teresa: So it'll probably never actually go away because there will always be physiotherapy textbooks that will talk about it a little bit or...

Travis: And there is, like, a right way for your body to be stacked. Like, I can feel myself— I sit at my desk, right? And if I start to hunch over, right? And I notice, like, oh, I'm tensing up my shoulders and I'm like, hunching over, and if I just kind of roll them back and notice I'm doing it, I feel so much better. But it's not like, oh, lock it here, tighten this, straighten and you'll live 40 years longer or whatever.

Teresa: I mean, now, though, at least there are more sophisticated terms and actual real medical tests that can be done to determine whether or not a patient actually needs to have their spine examined, right?

Travis: Right.

Teresa: So it's not that people who are, quote, "lazy and doing everything wrong" have unhealthy backs.

Travis: Yeah. We don't associate it with morality anymore, which is great, or at least we shouldn't.

Teresa: But.

Travis: Oh, no.

Teresa: Like you mentioned at the beginning of the episode, there is a kind of, like, wellness craze around—

Travis: Okay, we had a question about this on one thing, right? Mark20044 said, quote, "I remember seeing a poster at a chiropractor's office or something called, I think, it's been a while, called Rolfing. Is this a thing? And is it helpful or snake oil?"

And so then I Googled Rolfing. I just Googled the word. There's a direct quote straight from Wikipedia. "Does Rolfing really work? The principles of Rolfing contradict established medical knowledge and there is no good

evidence Rolfing is effective for the treatment of any health condition. It is recognized as a pseudoscience and has been characterized as quackery." So that's what Wikipedia says.

Teresa: But what is Rolfing?

Travis: I have no idea. I hope it has to do with the puppet from *The Muppet Show*. Let me see. What is Rolfing?

Teresa: But—

Travis: At first I saw that and I thought, like, Frisbee-Golf? It's not that, though.

Teresa: Anyway, it's now generally accepted that if you don't have pain or fatigue, your posture is probably fine. Do you need some neck support when lying down flat? Probably, yeah. Is it a good idea to always sit slumped over in a stuffy chair or to spend your life in a bucket seat? No, it's probably not a good idea. But both of those things, all of those things, to take into one extreme or the other will cause discomfort and fatigue. Um, so—

Travis: By the way, I'm not stalling. I'm trying to find, like, what is it. And a lot of things are like, "Essentially it's reconstructing the blah-blah-blah," but it doesn't actually say, like, it's this, right? It's just going like, "Why it's a simple process, blah-blah-blah." And then it just goes into jargon. I'm like, that's not it.

Teresa: There are some ways that you can improve your spine health. Stretching, just stretching can really help. Using all of the different muscles around your spine in different ways every day. Keeping it rigid and straight really doesn't help at all. It's about ease of movement—

Travis: Just like it doesn't help to keep your muscles clenched all the time. Like...

Teresa: Yeah, totally. There are great yoga postures. There's a technique called the Alexander Technique, which is about releasing and allowing and kind of finding a relaxed, but it's not just about relaxing. It's about ease of

movement, right? So then listen to your body and pay attention to how your back feels.

Travis: Yeah. There you go.

Teresa: If it feels bad for what you're doing, don't do that.

Travis: There you go. We got a couple of other questions. Can we hear them real quick? Sticky Dylan— [laughs] Sticky Dylan asks, "If you have a friend with terrible posture, is there a good way to give them advice?"

Teresa: Um...

Travis: Do they want it?

Teresa: Unless they're asking for it, don't give them advice. But I think that if a friend who has a more curved spine than you think is appropriate, you can ask them how they're feeling. "Hey, man, how's your back doing today?"

Travis: I think more than posture, focus on if you notice they're like hunched a little bit more and slouching a little bit more, asking about it. This is the thing. Being in high school, I used to correct Griffin all the time because Griffin would like jut his head forward and just— Like a turtle. And sink his head down a little bit.

And I would just like put two fingers in the center of his forehead and just like— Because here's the thing that a lot of people don't know. Griffin is taller than me and you wouldn't guess it because he, like, hangs his head. And I would just go [boops] and push his head up. But I only ever did it when it was like, time for a school dance or we were doing pictures or something.

Teresa: [laughing]

Travis: And I'd be like, "Just— If you would just hold your head here for the picture. Okay, get back to it." Um...

Teresa: But I think that the real thing is ask them how they're feeling. If you say to someone, "How are you?" And they say, "Oh, man, my back hurts." You say, "Well, I mean, you are kind of hunched over. Do you want to do some stretches or something?"

Travis: Yeah, let's roll our shoulders out. If you're working like in an office with somebody and you've been sitting there with them, like, "Hey, let's roll some— Let's open up, guys!" And make it about everybody and not just about them.

Teresa: Sure.

Travis: Never give unsolicited back rubs. And I shouldn't have to say that in the year of our Lord 2022, but hey! This is, uh, we got one here. Chedva asks, "Is it more correct to sit with your derriere on the back of the seat with your spine touching the chairback or all the way forward the front, engaging your core?"

Whichever one. Now, I will say recently I have been trying to consciously sit with my core engaged, not having nothing to do with my posture, but more about the fact that I pick up two human sacks of flour every day in the form of my children.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: And I'm trying to make sure I don't let muscles that I don't normally use atrophy to the point where I go to pick them up one day and go, "Oh, no!" And collapse over. So I sit trying to engage my core so I can stay strong enough to still pick them up when they're like twelve or whatever.

Teresa: So it's more about the using of the muscles than it is about where you're sitting and where you're— what you're touching your back to or whatever.

Travis: Now here's what I will say. I will give a caveat here. There's a difference between posture and I would say body language where if I'm sitting at a table with friends, right? Being engaged and present and leaning forward and looking at everybody, versus, like, leaning back in the chair and

slouching down or staring at my plate or whatever, that has nothing to do with posture, right? So if we're talking about how you sit, there is looking engaged and being present.

Teresa: Sure.

Travis: Versus, like, I am disengaged and uninterested in this.

Teresa: But as far as engaging your core, you should use appropriate muscles to support your own body.

Travis: Right. Absolutely. Because the other side of that, too, is if I was lounging around with friends watching a movie and there were like four of us and three of us are like, lounging comfortably and one person sitting rigid, I'd be like, "They're going to kill all of us. That person is secretly a murderer this whole time. Why are they sitting like this?"

Teresa: Why are you friends with them?

Travis: Well, I'm not. Derek brought him. I don't know that guy.

Teresa: Wait a minute. Who's Derek?

Travis: I don't know Derek either. How did they get in my house?

Teresa: [laughing]

Travis: What's happening? Who are these people? Thank you, everybody, so much for joining us. And you know what? I would say that this episode, because we talked a lot about medical and how it crosses over into people judging medical and morality at the same time, if you enjoy that, make sure you check out *Sawbones*, also on Max Fun, hosted by my brother and sister-in-law, Justin and Sydnee McElroy.

It's absolutely wonderful and their show is to our show, I would say, where we do a lot of society and etiquette, there's is, like, medicine. So if that is an interest of you, make sure you check that out.

Teresa: Concept adjacent.

Travis: Yeah, I would say sister show is how I think we've referred to it in the past.

Teresa: Oh, okay, yeah.

Travis: And check out all the other amazing shows on Maximum Fun. And if you're like, "Hey, everything about this bummed me out," go check out *Wonderful!* that Griffin and Rachel do and it'll make you happy! I haven't mentioned in a while, but I have a Twitch channel if you are interested in that kind of thing. I play video games on it, but that's kind of secondary to just, like, a chill hang. It's Twitch.tv/thetravismcelroy.

Um, let's see. Go over to McElroy.family and check out all the other amazing shows there. You can go to McElroyMerch.com to check out the new January merch, including our pin of the month. You can go to... Let's see, what else do— Oh! Thank you to Alex, our researcher, without whom we wouldn't be able to make this show. And thank you to Rachel, our editor, who also helps us make this show. Indispensable, those two. What else do we normally say, Teresa?

Teresa: Well, we always thank Brent "Brentalfloss" Black for writing our theme music, which is available as a ringtone where those are found. Also thank you to Kayla M. Wasil for our Twitter thumbnail art. That's where we got all of our listener submitted questions for this episode, @SchmannersCast.

Thank you to Bruja Betty Pinup Photography for the cover picture of our fan-run Facebook group, Shmanners Fanners. If you love to get and give excellent advice to other fans of the show, go ahead and join that group today. We are listening for those idioms that we love to do—

Travis: We're also listening for a lot of things. So if you're trying to sneak up on us, we heard you coming a mile away.

Teresa: And Alex reads every single email. So say Hi to Alex at SchmannersCast@gmail.com.

Travis: And that's going to do it for us. So join us again next week.

Teresa: No RSVP required.

Travis: You've been listening to *Shmanners.*

Teresa: Manners, *Shmanners*. Get it?

[theme music plays]

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