The vertebral column (also called the backbone, spine, or spinal column) consists of a series of 33 irregularly shaped bones, called vertebrae. These 33 bones are divided into five categories depending on where they are located in the backbone.

The first seven vertebrae are called the cervical vertebrae. Located at the top of the spinal column, these bones form a flexible framework for the neck and support the head. The first cervical vertebrae is called the atlas and the second is called the axis. The atlas' shape allows the head to nod "yes" and the axis' shape allows the head to shake "no".

The next twelve vertebrae are called the thoracic vertebrae. These bones move with the ribs to form the rear anchor of the rib cage. Thoracic vertebrae are larger than cervical vertebrae and increase in size from top to bottom.

After the thoracic vertebrae, come the lumbar vertebrae. These five bones are the largest vertebrae in the spinal column. These vertebrae support most of the body's weight and are attached to many of the back muscles.

The sacrum is a triangular bone located just below the lumbar vertebrae. It consists of four or five sacral vertebrae in a child, which become fused into

Fun Fact
Between the ages of 50 and 55, humans experience a distinct loss in height as discs between the vertebrae compress and shrink.
a single bone after age 26. The sacrum forms the back wall of the pelvic girdle and moves with it.

The bottom of the spinal column is called the coccyx or tailbone. It consists of 3-5 bones that are fused together in an adult. Many muscles connect to the coccyx.

These bones compose the vertebral column, resulting in a total of 26 movable parts in an adult. In between the vertebrae are intervertebral discs made of fibrous cartilage that act as shock absorbers and allow the back to move. As a person ages, these discs compress and shrink, resulting in a distinct loss of height (generally between 0.5 and 2.0cm) between the ages of 50 and 55.

When looked at from the side, the spine forms four curves. These curves are called the cervical, thoracic, lumbar, and pelvic curves. The cervical curve is located at the top of the spine and is composed of cervical vertebrae. Next come the thoracic and lumbar curves composed of thoracic and lumbar vertebrae respectively. The final curve called the pelvic or sacral curve is formed by the sacrum and coccyx. These curves allow human beings to stand upright and help to maintain the balance of the upper body. The cervical and lumbar curves are not present in an infant. The cervical curves forms around the age of 3 months when an infant begins to hold its head up and the lumbar curve develops when a child begins to walk.

In addition to allowing humans to stand upright and maintain their balance, the vertebral column serves several other important functions. It helps to support the head and arms, while permitting freedom of movement. It also provides attachment for many muscles, the ribs, and some of the organs and protects the spinal cord, which controls most bodily functions.

References:
