

# SCOLIOSIS

(Curvature of the Spine)



## BASIC INFORMATION

### DESCRIPTION

A sideways curve (or twisting) of the spinal column. It can involve the thoracic (middle) spine, the lumbar (lower) spine, or the thoracolumbar (between the two areas). It most often affects children after age 10, and is more common in girls than in boys.

### FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

#### Early stages:

- No obvious symptoms or signs. It comes on gradually. Scoliosis can be detected by a health care provider with a simple screening test. Schools sometimes have scoliosis screening programs.

#### Later stages:

- Visible curving of the upper body. The spine becomes S-shaped or C-shaped.
- Shoulders become uneven and rounded.
- Sunken chest.
- Swayback.
- One side of the pelvis thrusts forward.
- Back pain.

### CAUSES

- Most often the cause is unknown. Scoliosis is sometimes a result of:
  - A disease of the central nervous system, such as cerebral palsy or muscular dystrophy.
  - Congenital (being born with) defects of the spine.
  - Uneven leg length.

### RISK INCREASES WITH

Family history of scoliosis.

### PREVENTIVE MEASURES

Cannot be prevented at present.

### EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Mild curves may not require treatment. If treatment is done, the outcome is usually successful.

### POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- Severe curving of the spine and ribs.
- Social embarrassment, due to wearing a brace.
- Complications such as lung and heart damage, loss of bone strength, and back pain may occur. These are more likely when scoliosis is more severe and goes untreated.



## DIAGNOSIS & TREATMENT

### GENERAL MEASURES

- Your child's health care provider can diagnose scoliosis with a physical exam. An x-ray may be done to confirm the diagnosis. The amount of curve in the spine is measured by degrees.
- Treatment will depend on the age of the child, how severe the curve is, and how much it is progressing.
- Many cases of scoliosis are minor (less than 20 degrees) and require no treatment. Follow up medical exams will be done to see if the problem is progressing.
- For children with more of a curve (usually 25 to 40 degrees), treatment often involves wearing an orthopedic back brace. Sometimes this is needed for several years. Some braces are less visible and permit the person to wear regular clothes.
- Surgery to correct scoliosis is usually advised if the curve is more than 40 to 50 degrees or bracing is not helping. Surgery helps improve posture and back function.
- For adults with scoliosis, physical therapy or exercises to strengthen back muscles are sometimes helpful. Talk to your health care provider.
- To learn more: National Scoliosis Foundation, 5 Cabot Place, Stoughton, MA 02072; (800) 673-6922; website: [www.scoliosis.org](http://www.scoliosis.org).

### MEDICATIONS

Drugs will not correct this disorder.

### ACTIVITY

Special exercises may be part of therapy. If a brace is necessary, sports participation will be restricted. Some activities, such as swimming, may help since they tone and strengthen the back.

### DIET

No special diet.



## NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF

You suspect your child is developing scoliosis.

Special notes:

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More notes on the back of this page