

Scoliosis Information

What is Scoliosis? Scoliosis is a side-to-side curving of the spine. It is a developmental defect and not the result of poor posture habits. 80% of scoliosis cases are idiopathic (no known cause) but it is known to be more common in some families, suggesting hereditary factors.

Idiopathic scoliosis starts as a slight bend in a growing child's spine. It may remain slight and non-progressive, or it may progress over time, sometimes rapidly during the adolescent growth years, ages 10 to 15. About 10% of people have a very mild form of scoliosis that will need no treatment and many times is unnoticeable to anyone not trained to examine for it. About 1% will have a progressive condition and need some medical treatment. In the developing stage the spine stays flexible and there is no pain to indicate progression.

Curves that are unstable will continue to advance in adulthood. Left untreated, scoliosis can cause obvious physical deformity, pain, arthritic symptoms, heart and lung complications and can limit physical activity.

If detected early scoliosis can be treated before it becomes a physical or emotional disability. Frequent signs of scoliosis are: A prominent shoulder blade, uneven hip and shoulder levels, unequal distance between arms and body, uneven hemlines, and clothes that do not hang right.

Home screening tests can be done with the child having no shirt on. For girls, a bra or a swimsuit that is low enough in back to show the lumbar spine (lower back) will be OK. Children, especially in the 10 to 15 year range should be examined annually.

While your child is standing facing away from you look at the child's back and answer these questions:

1. Is one shoulder higher than the other, or is one shoulder blade more prominent?
2. When his/her arms hang loosely at her sides, does one arm swing away from the body more than the other?
3. Is one hip higher or more prominent than the other?
4. Does the child seem to tilt to one side?

THEN: ask your child to bend forward, with arms hanging down and palms together at knee level. Can you see a hump on the back at the ribs or near the waist?

If your answer to any of these questions is "yes", you should contact your doctor to verify your findings.

Ideally, these screenings should be done before their growth spurt, perhaps during the child's annual physical.

