

What is scoliosis and do I need to do anything about it?

(By Jeff Hartwell Doctor of Chiropractic)

Scoliosis is an abnormal, sideways curvature of the spine. It comes in varying degrees ranging from very subtle to obviously disfiguring. It is more common in females and often shows up during adolescence. If scoliosis is severe, it can cause cardiopulmonary (heart and lung) failure, but more commonly it creates back stiffness, soreness and cosmetic distortion of the shoulders. The Scoliosis Research Society currently recommends annual screening for this abnormal curve in children ages 10-14. If caught early, scoliosis is much more effectively treated.

It is important to determine the type of scoliosis if present. Idiopathic scoliosis is a permanent ridged structural curve that progresses until spinal maturity. Functional scoliosis is much easier to treat and often can be corrected with a shoe insert or muscle stretching and strengthening. It is important for parents to note, that certain one sided activities such as repetitive baseball pitching, or wearing a backpack over one shoulder can actually cause functional scoliosis.

Some things to look for in your adolescent are: uneven hemlines, one shoulder or hip higher than the other or one shoe wearing more than the other. As the child gets older, typically stiffness and or soreness will develop. X-rays are not required to diagnose scoliosis, but they may be recommended if the examining Doctor finds a pronounced curve. This allows an angular degree to be assigned, and determination made as to the possible need for bracing or surgery. A large majority of scoliosis cases are managed conservatively. Doctors of chiropractic, osteopaths, or orthopedists can provide the most help in determining the proper treatment plan for this condition.

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