



PATIENT EDUCATION HANDOUTS

Scoliosis

Topic Overview

What is scoliosis?

Scoliosis is a problem with the curve in your [spine](#) . Some curves in your spine are normal. But a few people have spines that make a [large curve](#) from side to side in the shape of the letter “S” or the letter “C.” If this curve is severe, it can cause pain and make breathing difficult.

The good news is that most cases of scoliosis are mild. If found early, they can usually be prevented from getting worse.

What causes scoliosis?

In most cases, the cause of scoliosis is not known. Scoliosis usually starts between the ages of 8 and 10.¹ Scoliosis that is severe enough to need treatment is most common in girls.²

A curve in the spine may get worse as your child grows, so it is important to find any problem early.

What are the symptoms?

Scoliosis most often causes no symptoms in your child until the spinal curve becomes large. You might notice these early signs:

- Your child has one shoulder or hip that looks higher than the other.
- Your child’s head does not look centered over the body.
- Your child has one shoulder blade that sticks out more than the other.
- Your child’s waistline is flat on one side, or the ribs look higher on one side when your child bends forward at the waist.

In adults, scoliosis may cause back pain and trouble breathing.

How is scoliosis diagnosed?

The doctor will check to see if your child’s back or ribs are even. If the doctor finds that one side is higher than the other, your child may need an X-ray so the spinal curve can be measured.

Scoliosis is most serious in young children who are still growing. A curve in the spine may get worse as your child grows. So screening your child for scoliosis is important so that any curve in the spine can be found early and watched closely.

How is it treated?

Mild cases of scoliosis usually do not need treatment. Your doctor will check the curve of your child's spine every 4 to 6 months. If the curve gets worse, your child may need to wear a brace until he or she has finished growing. In severe cases, or if bracing doesn't help, your child may need to have surgery.

Scoliosis and its treatment can be a severe strain on your child. Wearing a brace can feel and look odd. It also limits your child's activity. Your child needs your support and understanding to get through treatments successfully.

What increases the risk of scoliosis?

Your child may be more likely to have scoliosis if someone in your family has had it and if your child is a girl. Other things that increase the chance of scoliosis include:

- One of the bones in your child's spine has moved forward out of place compared to the rest of the spine.
- Your child's arms or legs are missing or are abnormally short.
- Your child has other problems with tissue growth that happened before birth.

Frequently Asked Questions

- Learning about scoliosis:**
- [What is scoliosis?](#)
 - [What causes scoliosis?](#)
 - [What are the symptoms of scoliosis?](#)
 - [What increases the risk of scoliosis?](#)
 - [Can scoliosis be prevented?](#)
 - [How common is scoliosis?](#)
- Being diagnosed:**
- [How is scoliosis diagnosed?](#)
 - [Are there tests that can detect scoliosis?](#)
- Getting treatment:**
- [How is scoliosis treated?](#)
 - [Is treatment always necessary?](#)
 - [Are there medications that can treat scoliosis?](#)
 - [Is surgery necessary?](#)
 -  [Should I \(or my child\) have surgery for scoliosis?](#)
- Ongoing concerns:**
- [Will scoliosis continue to get worse?](#)
- Living with scoliosis:**
- [How can I make living with scoliosis easier?](#)

