

If Your Child Has Scoliosis

What is scoliosis?

Scoliosis is an abnormal curve of the spine (backbone). With scoliosis, the spine isn't straight. Instead, the spine is crooked and curves to the side. If the spine is very crooked, the ribs or hips may stick out more on one side than the other side. Also, one shoulder may be lower than the other. Scoliosis may begin in childhood but often is not noticed until the teenage years. In most cases, the exact cause of scoliosis isn't known. It seems to run in some families. Scoliosis is more common in girls than in boys.

How can I tell if my child has scoliosis?

Look at your child's spine to see if it curves or if it is straight. Also check to see if one shoulder is lower than the other.

Many public schools check for scoliosis in the fifth or sixth grade. Your doctor may also examine your child for scoliosis at a regular check-up. Your doctor may be able to tell if your child has scoliosis just by looking at your child's back when it is in different positions. Your doctor may have your child stand and bend over to touch the toes. Sometimes x-rays help show the curve in the spine.

Does scoliosis cause any problems?

In most people, the curve in the spine is so small that it causes no problems. Scoliosis doesn't usually cause back pain. In severe cases, the curve may restrict the amount of space available for the lungs and heart to work.

How is scoliosis treated?

In most cases, no treatment is needed. Your doctor will check your child regularly to make sure the curve isn't getting worse. Sometimes a brace is worn to keep the spine from curving. Newer braces are light and less bulky than old braces. Most braces fit under the clothes and are not visible.

Will my child need surgery?

If a brace doesn't stop the spine from curving, surgery may be needed. During surgery, the bones in the spine may be moved and joined together to strengthen the spine, or a rod may be placed in the spine to straighten it.

This handout provides a general overview on this topic and may not apply to everyone. To find out if this handout applies to you and to get more information on this subject, talk to your family doctor.



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