

Scoliosis: A Simple Solution to a Common Problem



Coping with the normal physical changes that come with adolescence is trying enough. When out-of-the-ordinary physical changes occur, the problem is doubly discouraging. Such is the case with scoliosis. It generally shows up between the ages of 10 and 15, and affects girls seven to nine times more often than boys. In most cases, no one knows the cause.

At first, scoliosis isn't painful. But it slowly twists the upper portion of the spine. One shoulder may curve one way while the lower back twists another, so that the chest and back are distorted. The spine begins to rotate, and one side of the rib cage becomes more prominent. This is more obvious if the person bends forward at the waist, with the arms hanging freely. In fact, a doctor can detect scoliosis by asking the patient to assume that position during a routine physical or screening for scoliosis.

Adults with scoliosis should watch for signs of it in their children.

Scoliosis doesn't always need treatment. In some cases, though, treatment is necessary to prevent heart and lung problems or back pain later in life.

There are several treatment options.

- Wearing a molded body brace, hidden by clothing, is the most conservative approach. This brace is typically worn most of the day and night for several years. Because the spine grows rapidly during adolescence, wearing a brace at this time can arrest further abnormal curving.
- A special form of mild electrical stimulation to the spine.
- Surgery to straighten the spine. A thin steel rod is implanted alongside the spine.

In most instances, scoliosis can be sufficiently treated so that the adolescent doesn't suffer any complications as an adult.