

PARENTAL INFORMATION ABOUT SCOLIOSIS

SCOLIOSIS

Scoliosis is an abnormal lateral curvature of the spine which may cause a slow steady change in the back or chest with resultant compression of lungs or heart, and it may even compress the spinal cord in special severe cases. It can be deforming, painful, and even shorten life if not recognized and treated early. Most cases are idiopathic (no know cause), but there are also many conditions, such as neuromuscular disorders, congenital anomalies, etc, which secondarily cause deformity of the spine.

WHAT IS THE INCIDENCE OF SCOLIOSIS: Scoliosis occurs in approximately two percent of the adolescent population and is four times more common in girls than in boys. Evidence indicates that the tendency to develop scoliosis often runs in families. It is usually first noted at about the age of 10 or 11 years, but it can occur much earlier. It is frequently not recognized for several years after its onset.

WHAT HAPPENS: the deformity of the spine, from causes still not understood, begins as a slight bending which may continue to increase with growth and accelerate in severity during the growth spurt during puberty. If it occurs in the lower back, the waistline may become asymmetrical, giving the appearance of one hip "being too high". If it occurs in the upper spine, the ribs on one side may become more prominent, giving rise to a "rib hump" and a prominent shoulder blade.

HOW IS SCOLIOSIS RECOGNIZED: The best way to find out if a child has scoliosis is to have the back examined by someone in the family or a school nurse. If there is an unequal waistline or if the ribs in the back are higher on one side when the child bends forward, the child may have scoliosis, As soon as possible, the child should see a doctor who will examine the child and order x -rays of the spine if he or she feels it is necessary.

WHAT IS THE TREATMENT: Treatment varies with each case. Mild curves that are not getting worse (and this is the majority) should be checked at three-to six-month intervals. Examination alone is not sufficient~ new x-rays are taken periodically to compare with previous films... If these mild Curves remain unchanged, no treatment is necessary. Moderate curves will be treated with a brace, which helps to keep the spine as straight as possible during subsequent growth. This form of treatment continues until the skeleton is mature, which may mean three to five years.

Severe curves and some special forms of scoliosis do not respond to casting or bracing and require surgery. The operation involves a fusion of the curved portions of the spine after it is straightened as much as possible and held in position with an internal fixation device, a brace or cast. The fusion holds the spine permanently straighter and the patient can usually lead a normal life without pain. Although the fused segment of the spine is more rigid, bending at the hips permits relatively normal function.

WHAT HAPPENS IF THE CHILD DOES NOT HAVE TREATMENT: Scoliosis that progresses can cause severe deformity, may lead to a painful spine in middle age and can shorten the life span.

WHAT ARE OTHER TYPES OF SCOLIOSIS: Many things other than heredity can cause curvature of the spine including polio, muscular dystrophy, spinal cord tumor, and congenital defects.