

# **Scoliosis**

As per Virginia law and in lieu of School Scoliosis Screening, it was decided to provide parents of students in grades five through ten with the following scoliosis educational information. Please take time to review this information and contact your family physician or school nurse with any questions.

## **What is Scoliosis?**

Scoliosis is an abnormal curve of the spine (backbone). Normally, the spine is straight. With scoliosis, the spine is crooked and curves to the side. The curve can be C-shaped or S-shaped. Scoliosis is more common in girls than boys.

## **Symptoms of Scoliosis**

Scoliosis may begin in childhood but often is not noticed until the teenage years. Key signs are having uneven shoulders and leaning to one side. If your child's spine is very crooked, her/his ribs or hips may stick out to the side as well. People who have scoliosis may have back pain and have it more often than people who don't have scoliosis.

## **What causes scoliosis?**

The exact cause of scoliosis is unknown. It can run in families. It can be caused by an injury, disease, infection, or birth defect. You cannot prevent or avoid scoliosis.

## **How is scoliosis diagnosed?**

Contact the doctor if your child has back pain or other signs of scoliosis. Your doctor will do a physical exam and review your health and family history. If your doctor is concerned about the curve, they likely will order an X-ray to get a better view of the spine.

Your family doctor or pediatrician may check for scoliosis at regular check-ups.

## **Scoliosis Treatment**

Mild cases of scoliosis do not require treatment. Your doctor may want to monitor your child's condition to see if it gets worse. The curve of the spine may be temporary or permanent. It often can improve with time, especially as children grow.

The doctor may have your child wear a brace. This keeps the spine from curving more. Newer braces are light and less bulky than old braces. Most braces fit under clothes and are not visible.

Children who have severe scoliosis may need surgery. The surgeon will move the bones in the spine, fuse them together to strengthen the spine, or place a rod in the spine to help strengthen it. Talk to your child's doctor about the benefits and risks of surgery. These will depend on age, state of health and amount of curve.

## **Living with scoliosis**

For most people, the curve in their spine is so small that it causes no problems. Treatment can improve or manage the condition. In rare cases, the curve may restrict the amount of space available for lungs and heart to work.

## **Question to ask your doctor**

- \*How severe is the curve of the spine?
- \*Is my child's scoliosis temporary or permanent?
- \*Will my child need to wear a brace or have surgery?

- \*What are the benefits and risks of surgery?
- \*Is physical therapy an option?
- \*Is it safe to exercise?
- \*Will scoliosis cause any long-term health problems?

## **Resources**

National Scoliosis Foundation

National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases: Scoliosis in Children and Teens

Adapted from [familydoctor.org](http://familydoctor.org)