

Understanding scoliosis

What is scoliosis and why is the pediatrician looking at my child's spine?

When you look at the back, the spinal column should run straight up and down in the middle of the back. In some cases, however, there is a sideways deviation of the spine. This is known as scoliosis. Scoliosis can cause a C-shaped curve or S-shaped curve to the spine and can sometimes cause the spine to rotate.

Noticeable signs of scoliosis may be elevation of one of the shoulders or hips in relationship to the other and winging of a shoulder blade, in which it protrudes from a person's back in an abnormal position.

Scoliosis may first be observed by a child's pediatrician, a parent of the child, or in a scoliosis screening at school. By observing the back for symmetry, the healthcare professional can detect whether the spine is straight or if there is scoliosis present.

How does scoliosis develop?

Scoliosis can be caused when the bones of the spine do not form normally during development, from an injury to the spinal column or later in life from arthritic change. Most commonly, however, scoliosis develops during the growth spurt years of adolescence, and the cause is unknown.

Who develops scoliosis?

Scoliosis usually develops in adolescence. The condition is just as common in males as in females, but the curvature is more likely to become progressive in females. There also appears to be a hereditary component to scoliosis, as it sometimes runs in families.

What are the symptoms of scoliosis?

Most cases of scoliosis are mild and cause no symptoms. Scoliosis can, however, cause back pain; children that are diagnosed with scoliosis are more likely to have back problems later in life.

More severe scoliosis curvatures can compromise the internal organs and can interfere with the functioning of the lungs and heart.

What should you do if your child has scoliosis and how is it treated?

If you or a loved one has scoliosis, you should consult a healthcare professional regarding treatment options. Depending on how pronounced the curve is, spinal x-rays may be needed to monitor the progression of the curve or a referral to a specialist may be required.

In severe cases, bracing and surgical intervention may become necessary.

Back pain and/or limited mobility associated with scoliosis can frequently be helped with chiropractic therapy, physical therapy, or massage therapy by using stretching and strengthening exercise, muscle work, and manipulation therapy.

Home stretching, exercise programs, yoga and maintaining appropriate body weight may also be helpful to minimize pain associated with scoliosis.