

# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

# SCOLIOSIS

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### **What is scoliosis?**

Scoliosis is a side-to-side curving of the spine. Scoliosis also involves a rotation of each vertebrae.

### **How can you tell if I have scoliosis?**

Rotation of the vertebrae causes the ribs to elevate on one side causing them to stick out more on that side. You may notice one shoulder or hip is higher than the other side. X-rays will show if your spine is curved and where the curve is.

### **At what age does scoliosis develop?**

Scoliosis is usually noticed between the ages of 10 -14 in girls and 12 -14 in boys, during your growth spurt.

### **Is this a rare condition?**

No. Although you may not know anyone with scoliosis, one in every ten people has curving of the spine more than 10 degrees. The vast majority of curves remain small and causes no problems.

### **What causes scoliosis? Why did I get it?**

The most common type of scoliosis is idiopathic, which means, 'cause unknown'. We do know that it runs in families, so your brothers and sisters should be checked, and, in the future, any children you might have should also be checked.

### **Will I have back pain or will scoliosis prevent me from playing sports or dancing?**

Scoliosis, even of moderate severity, usually does not cause pain in childhood or young adult life. In later years the chance of having back pain is slightly greater than for the general population without scoliosis. In general scoliosis does not cause you to limit your activities.

### **Are x-rays really necessary? Is the radiation dangerous?**

The x-ray is important in determining if there is true spinal deformity, its magnitude, and the amount of skeletal growth remaining. The risk of one x-ray or even a few x-rays during the year is very small. Nonetheless, appropriate precautions will be taken by shielding sensitive areas prior to exposure to protect these regions from radiation. To date there is no proven linkage between diagnostic x-rays and cancer. With modern equipment and high-speed films, the risk is quite low. If there is any chance you are pregnant, notify your doctor before any x-rays as the radiation can damage the unborn child.

### **Why do you have to treat scoliosis if it is hardly noticeable and I don't have any pain?**

It is treated to prevent your curve from getting worse. Without treatment, your curve could become so severe that you might have obvious physical deformity, back pain, and in certain cases, heart and lung problems.

### **What is the treatment for scoliosis?**

The need for treatment will depend primarily on how large the curve is and how much growth is remaining. The doctor will know what your treatment should be after looking at you and your x-rays. Four options will be discussed. The first option may be that no further treatment or follow-up is needed. The second most common treatment is observation, usually from smaller curves, less than 25 degrees. Your doctor will ask you to return for radiographs twice a year. A brace is used to prevent curves from becoming large enough to require surgery. Surgery is used for larger curves, over 40 degrees.