

Scoliosis

What is scoliosis?

Scoliosis is a sideways curve of the spine. As it curves, the spine also rotates. It usually develops in children between 10 and 13 years of age and affects girls more than boys.

Minor curves are common and one in 10 adolescent girls has scoliosis. However, only three per 1000 will need treatment. Minor curves may only need watching during the growth period.

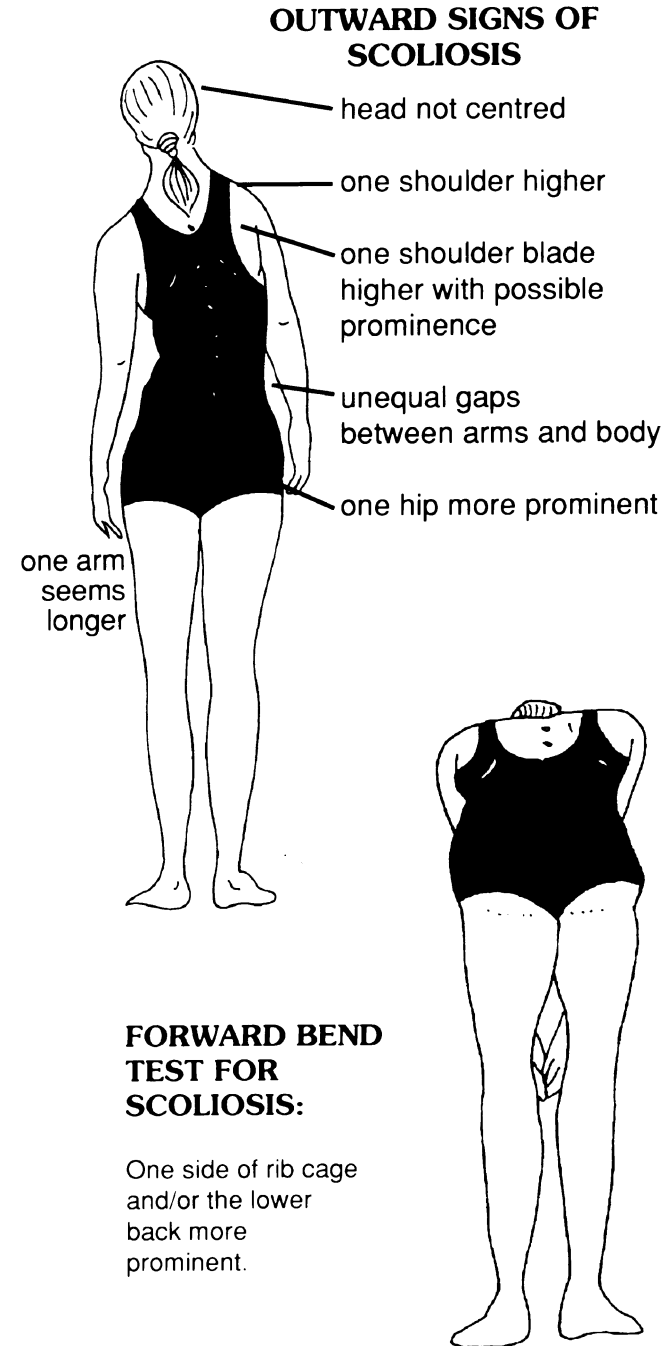
With today's fashion for baggy, loose clothes, many cases of scoliosis that were picked up in school sports classes are now being missed. In the early stages of scoliosis, there is no pain and a visual examination is the only way to detect a curve. You can do this yourself (see illustrations), but you should also ask your GP to check your child.

If you suspect a spinal curve, make an appointment to see your GP as soon as possible. Serious scoliosis that is not treated can lead to significant health problems in later life, including severe pain, heart and lung problems, as well as physical deformity and arthritis.

Types of scoliosis

Adolescent scoliosis shows up in otherwise healthy teenagers, and accounts for 80-90% of spinal curves found in young girls. There tends to be a strong familial incidence in this type of curve. Its cause is not known.

Scoliosis that starts before a child is two years old is far less common than adolescent scoliosis. Nine out of



ten curves will spontaneously disappear. Uncommon also is scoliosis that occurs in children between the ages of two and 10 years.

If a child becomes paralysed, a curvature of the spine will develop over the years. This

causes the person to lean to one side and may lead to complications such as pressure sores. Surgery is needed in these instances.

Congenital abnormalities of the spine or disorders of the nerves and muscles can also

cause scoliosis. Some of the outward signs of scoliosis

Rib prominence

When the spine curves sideways, it will also rotate. If in the chest region, it will pull the ribs to one side causing a prominence.

Prominent hip

One hip bone may appear slightly more prominent than the other and also slightly higher. This is the result of the spine bending to one side.

Uneven shoulders

One shoulder may be slightly higher than the other. Mothers will often notice that their daughter's clothes do not sit quite straight.

Treatment

The only treatments of scoliosis that have proven effective are either the use of a brace to hold the curve, or surgical correction.

Surgery

Generally surgery is needed to correct severe curves. It is needed in one out of three cases of scoliosis that require treatment.

If you suspect that your child may have scoliosis, make an appointment to see your GP. Scoliosis that is treated early is rarely a problem.

With thanks to the SpineCare Foundation for providing the illustrations and some of the information used in this article.