

## **SPINE & SPORTS: Idiopathic scoliosis and back pain**

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Scoliosis is defined as an abnormal curvature of the spine, more specifically as a lateral curvature to either side of what should be a straight or vertically aligned spine. Idiopathic means that it has no known cause. Idiopathic scoliosis is a condition observed in childhood which may progress to varying degrees of severity and pain during adolescence, with genetic factors influencing its development and risk of progression, and affecting females about 10-to-1 over males.

Scoliosis screenings are typically performed by the school nurse or pediatrician by having the child bend forward at the waist, checking for abnormal humping of the ribs on one side and when standing, measuring the altered height of a hip or shoulder. This method is a valid screening tool, but to accurately measure curvature, a spine X-ray must be utilized. Mild scoliosis causes no physical impairment, and many children are unaware they have it.

However, scoliosis with greater curvature can be a source of back pain and create cosmetic concerns. In early adolescence, the curvature can rapidly progress, causing severe deformity which can be crippling. Unlike very mild scoliosis that does not require X-ray and raises no cause for concern, severe scoliosis requires surgical rod implantation to straighten and stabilize the spine.

With moderate scoliosis, curvature is not bad enough to need surgical correction, but pain is very common, presumably deriving from the stress that the curve places on the spinal joints and interconnecting soft tissue structures

such as muscles and tendons. The vertebral bones impact one another at the curves' apex, causing bone irritation as well as a tugging at or pinching of the soft tissues. The pain of scoliosis can affect people of all ages, though the pain children may experience is often underreported or underestimated by parents and providers alike.

There is no known cure for idiopathic scoliosis. Conservative management may include custom molded rigid braces for adolescents whose curves are progressing. Braces such as the Milwaukee Brace are worn daily by children with the aim of slowing down or preventing scoliosis progression, potentially reducing the need for surgical treatment.

It is common in chiropractic clinical practice for parents to bring in their children who have been complaining of back pain, many not realizing that their child in fact has scoliosis. Taut, tender bands in muscles and tendons that course along the spine are typically found in these children. It is hypothesized that the strain that the scoliotic curves place on the spine cause the muscles and tendons to develop scar tissue, fibrous adhesions and chemically noxious points that drive the nagging back symptoms.

Chiropractic doctors, notably those with advanced training in soft tissue therapy such as FAKTR, can be helpful in diagnosing and treating scoliosis related pain, working out taut, tender connective tissue knots with a metal instrument while the patient performs balance, stretch or resistance exercise. In combination with highly skilled joint manipulation and home exercises, this system of care can be very alleviating for patients of all ages with scoliosis and back pain. If your child complains of chronic back symptoms, don't assume that these are growing pains or athletic-induced problems. Seek out a reputable doctor of chiropractic for proper diagnosis and care.