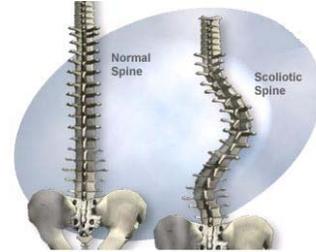


Scoliosis: Jena's Story

Jena was diagnosed with scoliosis, an abnormal curvature of the spine, in the eighth grade. At first her pediatrician decided that the curve was not severe enough for treatment and decided to check her spine every six months. Jena's spine is now much straighter, and it will stay that way, since she had spinal fusion (an operation in which the vertebrae, the individual bones that make up a person's spinal column, are joined together). In this personal story, Jena shares her experience of being treated for scoliosis.



The Learning Curve

I found out about the curve in my spine when Nurse Eitel screened me for scoliosis at the end of eighth grade at Redwater Junior High. My mom took me to see my doctor, and he decided that the curve was not severe enough to do anything at that time. My scoliosis is idiopathic, which is the most common type and the cause is unknown. Idiopathic scoliosis usually begins between 10 and 12 years old. Of every 1000 children, 3 to 5 develop spinal curves that are considered large enough for treatment. It sometimes runs in families. My mom has a mild case of scoliosis, and we assumed that my scoliosis would be like hers and not require treatment.

We were relieved and thought that there wasn't much to worry about. The only way that the curve affected me was in my appearance. My S-shaped spine made my hips and shoulders uneven. I looked like I had bad posture.

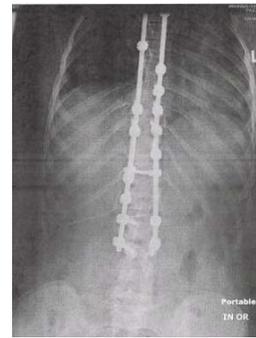
Six months after my initial diagnosis of scoliosis, I went to the doctor for breathing problems. While in the doctor's office, he decided to check my spine again. He said that my curve had worsened and that I needed to have X-rays. My curve had reached the point that it was beginning to put pressure on my lungs which was causing my breathing problems.

Surgery

My doctor sent me to Arkansas Children's Hospital where I was told that spinal fusion surgery was my only option. In June 2006, I went to another doctor in Little Rock, Dr. Richard McCarthy, a nationally recognized orthopedic surgeon, for a second opinion. He also agreed that I needed surgery since my curve was now 48 degrees (anything below 10 degrees is normal; around 50 degrees requires corrective surgery). Dr. McCarthy took the time to explain everything and answer all of my questions. He also gave me a notebook with a lot of information on scoliosis. He said that he would try to schedule my surgery in the summer so that I would not have to miss a lot of school.

About a week later, Dr. McCarthy's nurse called and said there was a cancellation on July 25 and that I could have my surgery then. I only had a few weeks to prepare. My mom and I gave blood for my surgery. I walked every day to get in shape for the surgery. The day before my surgery, I went to the hospital and met with the nurses, anesthesiologists, and other doctors that would be involved in my surgery. They explained everything and answered my questions.

I don't remember much about the day of surgery, July 25, 2006. Dr. McCarthy took bone from my hip to fuse my vertebrae and put rods along with screws and hooks on each side of my spine to keep it straight. The surgery went well. Dr. McCarthy showed my family this x-ray of my spine after my surgery. My spine is so straight that the curve is close to zero degrees and cannot be measured any more.



Recovery

The day after my surgery, I started working with physical therapists and nurses who helped me learn to get in and out of bed, sit in a chair, and walk around my room. Eventually I worked up to walking around the hallways and going up and down steps. I know that doesn't sound like much, but it was very difficult at the time. My muscles had to readjust to the new setup in my back, and my body was oriented differently.

My hospital stay was five days. I don't remember much about being in the hospital since I had a lot of pain medication. When I was discharged, I received even more medication so that I could sleep on the ride home.

My recovery period at home lasted about 4 weeks. At first, it was difficult to even sit up for more than 10 minutes at a time, and I needed help getting in and out of the chair. I started walking around the living room and walked a little farther each day. Dr. McCarthy said that I had to walk a mile by the time I went back for my six weeks follow up visit.

I missed the first two weeks of school. It was very difficult keeping up with all of my school work since it was hard for me to sit up. When I started going to school, I only went for a half day. I carried a pillow for my chair, was released from each class five minutes early to avoid the crowds in the halls, and my friends had to carry my books for me because I could not carry more than five pounds. After a couple of weeks, I worked up to going to school for the full day.

I registered for my ninth year of dance about a month after my surgery. I was not able to go to my regular dance classes in September, but my dance teacher worked with me in a special clogging class from September until November. I was able to join my regular clogging class in December 2006. In March 2007, I entered a contest to dance on stage at the Perot with Leahy, an Irish/Canadian musical group. I wrote a paragraph about dance and my scoliosis and was selected to dance with the band during their song *The Call to Dance*.



Advice for Others: Be Positive

If the school nurse recommends it, be sure to see your doctor about possible spinal problems. Hopefully, you won't need surgery like I did. I did feel scared at times during this experience, but I had support from my friends and family. I feel like I am a stronger person after going through this. You can find out more about scoliosis at www.spinekids.com.