



WATCH OUT FOR SCOLIOSIS

Scoliosis, an abnormal curve of the spine, can be corrected if detected early...

What is scoliosis?

Scoliosis is a "side to side" curve of the back. It is a deformity of the spinal column or backbone.

What causes scoliosis?

Most scoliosis is of unknown cause ("idiopathic"). Recent studies suggest that heredity does play a part in these cases. Therefore, if a person is found to have scoliosis, other family members should also be checked.

Who is affected by scoliosis?

Anyone can be affected by scoliosis. Onset usually occurs between the ages of 10 and 13, when the child begins the rapid growth spurt. Scoliosis can affect members of both sexes, but occurs more frequently in females, who account for approximately 85% of the cases.

Why is screening for scoliosis important?

It is most important to detect the condition as early as possible so that treatment can be provided. Without treatment, undetected scoliosis can get worse rapidly during the growth years and result in physical deformity, limitation of physical activity and other more serious complications.

What are the signs of scoliosis?

Frequent signs are a bump over the shoulder blade; one shoulder or hip higher than the other; unequal distance between the arms and body, and clothes that "don't hang right." These signs are not always noticed and can be easily mistaken for poor posture.

What is the treatment for scoliosis?

In many instances of mild curvature, periodic supervision by a doctor is all that is necessary. When

medical treatment becomes necessary, an orthopedic surgeon (bone specialist) may recommend a brace or surgery depending on the condition.

Regular follow-up while the child is wearing the brace is important. The doctor may prescribe a daily exercise and fitness program to maintain the muscles in good shape and promote a sense of well being, but exercise alone will not correct the problem.

When other methods have failed or the scoliosis is severe, surgery may be necessary. After the operation, the child will need to wear a cast or brace for a number of months and continue to be supervised by an orthopedic surgeon. The remaining disability may be minimal and the patient may lead a normal life after recovery.

Are schools required to provide screening?

House Bill 832 passed by the Texas Legislature in 1985 requires screening for abnormal spinal curves in grades 6 and 9 (schools may adopt programs to screen grades 5 and 8 instead of 6 and 9). If a child shows any signs of a possible deformity, the school is required to notify the parents.

What can parents do?

If notified that their child may have an abnormal spinal curve, parents should take their child to the doctor for a diagnosis. Parents can also learn to check their child for a curve of the spine. If they suspect that their child may have a problem, they may check with the school nurse, the health department, or their private doctor.