

Scoliosis

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What Is Scoliosis?

Scoliosis is a condition where the spine curves sideways and may also twist or rotate. Instead of being straight when viewed from the back, the spine may form a “C” or “S” shape. Scoliosis can range from mild to severe and may affect posture, movement, and in some cases, overall health.

Common Symptoms

Many people with scoliosis have little or no pain, especially with mild curves. When symptoms do occur, they may include:

- Uneven shoulders or hips
- Noticeable curve in the back or ribs
- Back pain or stiffness
- Muscle fatigue or tightness along the spine
- One shoulder blade sticking out more than the other
- In more severe cases, difficulty with breathing (due to rib cage involvement)

Types of Scoliosis

Scoliosis can develop for different reasons:

- **Idiopathic scoliosis:** Most common type; cause is unknown, often seen in adolescents
- **Degenerative scoliosis:** Develops with age due to wear-and-tear changes in the spine
- **Neuromuscular scoliosis:** Related to conditions affecting nerves or muscles (such as cerebral palsy)
- **Congenital scoliosis:** Present at birth due to abnormal spinal development

How Is It Diagnosed?

Diagnosis includes a physical exam and imaging studies.

Your provider may:

- Look for uneven shoulders, hips, or waist
- Perform a forward bending test to check for spinal rotation
- Assess posture and movement patterns

X-rays are used to confirm the diagnosis and measure the amount of spinal curve.

Treatment Options

Treatment depends on age, curve severity, symptoms, and whether the curve is changing over time.

Conservative Care

For many patients, non-surgical care is recommended:

- Exercise and strengthening programs
- Stretching and mobility work
- Manual therapy and soft tissue treatment
- Posture training and ergonomic improvements
- Heat, ice, or other symptom relief methods
- Scoliosis-specific exercise programs (such as Schroth-based exercises)

Bracing and Surgery

- **Bracing:** Often used in growing adolescents to help slow curve progression
- **Surgery:** Reserved for more severe cases or when scoliosis significantly affects function or health

What Is the Outlook?

The outlook varies depending on the type and severity of scoliosis.

- Mild scoliosis often remains stable and may not cause major problems
- Some curves may slowly progress, especially during growth spurts
- Severe scoliosis can affect posture, movement, and in rare cases, breathing

Early detection and regular monitoring are important for the best outcomes.

Typical Treatment Schedule

Many patients are seen:

- **2–3 visits per week for 2–4 weeks** as an initial treatment period
- Progress is reassessed and care is adjusted based on response
- Long-term care often focuses on exercise, posture correction, and periodic check-ups

Key Takeaway

While scoliosis cannot always be “straightened” with conservative care, many patients improve function, reduce pain, and slow progression through targeted exercise and consistent management.