

**What is Scoliosis?**

Scoliosis is a crooked spine. Its name comes from the Greek word meaning “crooked.” As the spine grows, it bends to the side. At the same time, the vertebrae in the spine may twist or rotate. Since the ribs are attached to the vertebrae, they can twist as well, protruding on one side of the back and on the opposite side of the chest.

An X-ray is needed to determine if the condition has developed. Scoliosis is defined as a curve of 11 degrees or greater. Although scoliosis can develop at any age, the majority of cases develop during the adolescent rapid growth period.

**What are the signs of scoliosis?**

* One shoulder may be higher or lower than the other.
* One shoulder blade may be higher or lower than the other.
* The waist fold may be deeper on one side.
* One hip may be higher, lower or more prominent than the other.
* When bending forward, the ribs may be higher on one side or the lower back area may have one side higher.

It is important to have your child checked during a yearly physical by his doctor.

**What happens if scoliosis is not treated?**

* As the spine twists and becomes crooked, the changes (deformity) in the body become noticeable.
* As the curve progresses, the child may experience back pain.
* The child may have difficulty breathing.
* The child may have lung and heart problems later in life.

**Are there different kinds of scoliosis?**

Scoliosis is divided into several categories:

* **Congenital**: The bones in the spine did not form correctly before the child was born.
* **Neuromuscular**: This type is related to problems with the nervous system, muscles or both, including cerebral palsy, spina bifida and muscular dystrophy.
* **Idiopathic**: This type of scoliosis develops in perfectly healthy children with otherwise healthy bones. The reason that this type develops is not known.
* **Mechanical**: This type makes it appear that the child has scoliosis when he does not and is treated differently. One leg is usually longer than the other.
* **Other**: Tumors or infections in the spine can cause twisting or pain.

**How is scoliosis treated?**

The kind of scoliosis, size of the curve and how much more the child is likely to grow will determine the treatment.

* Small curves that do not get worse as the child grows require no treatment.
* Small curves that get worse as the child grows require periodic rechecks and may require [bracing](http://www.choa.org/Childrens-Hospital-Services/Orthopaedics/Programs-Services/Orthotics-and-Prosthetics/Programs-and-Services/Spinal-Bracing).

Large curves will most likely require [surgery](http://www.choa.org/Childrens-Hospital-Services/Orthopaedics/Programs-Services/Scoliosis-and-Spine).