

# SCOLIOSIS FACT SHEET

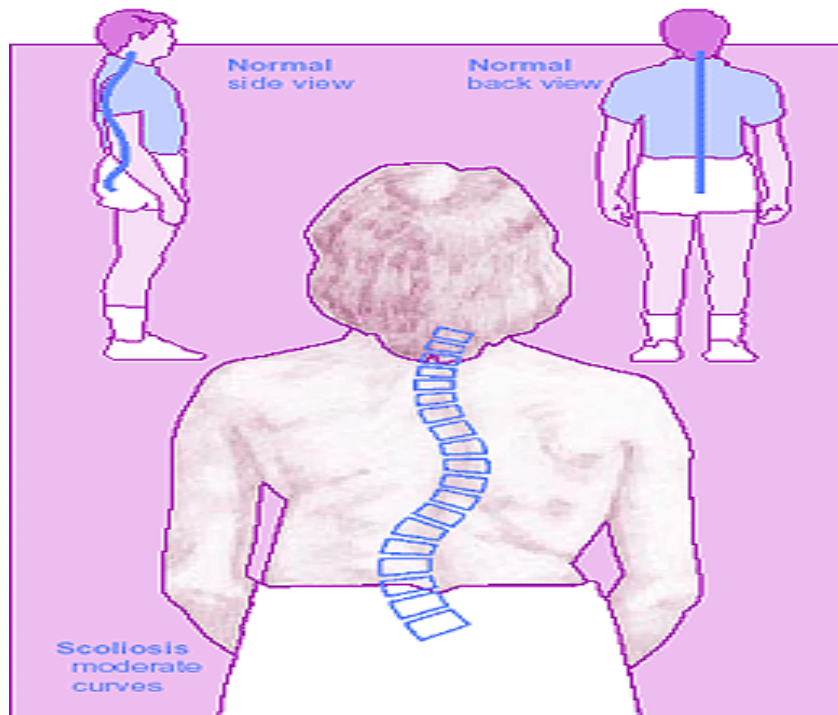
## WHAT IS SCOLIOSIS?

Scoliosis (“sco-lee-o-sis”) is somewhat of a medical mystery – no one knows what causes the most common form of scoliosis, **idiopathic scoliosis**. (Idiopathic is a medical term that means it is not known what caused the condition or disease). The condition can be hereditary, so a person who has scoliosis often has family members who have it. Girls are much more prone to developing scoliosis than boys. Girls over the age of 9 are five times more likely to be diagnosed with the condition than boys of the same age.

Many times, a person with scoliosis has been developing the condition since childhood. But because scoliosis can develop very gradually, in most cases it isn’t diagnosed until a person is between the ages of 10 to 14. In scoliosis, the spine slowly curves from side to side into an “S” shape. When the curve gets severe, it can be visible and cause discomfort. If the curve gets really severe, it can even affect a person’s breathing and heart function.

## How Is Scoliosis Diagnosed?

Some children have visible signs of scoliosis. Sometimes a curvature of the spine is obvious or one shoulder blade is noticeably higher than the other one. Other times, though, it’s not so obvious since scoliosis doesn’t hurt or happen, suddenly, it’s not always easy to diagnose. In the United States almost half of the states require public schools to test for scoliosis to help make diagnoses. If you live in one of these states, you are probably already familiar with the test that’s given called the forward bending test. *(Please turn to the back of this sheet and continue to read.)*



## How Parents Can Help

When your child is having a regular health checkup...ask your health care provider to check for scoliosis. Physical exams for school, sports, or summer camps are good times for scoliosis checks. Parents can be a big help in checking for early warning signs of scoliosis. You may observe your child wearing clothing that is uneven in pant legs or skirt hems. The earliest warning signs can be seen only with a clear look at your child's back

## Dealing With Scoliosis

With the right kind of treatment – whether it involves a brace or surgery – almost every child with scoliosis can have an active, normal life. Teens diagnosed with scoliosis can take part in sports, hold down after school jobs, and pretty much do whatever teenagers without scoliosis can do! If your teen has a friend or classmate who has scoliosis, remember that a curve in someone's spine doesn't represent their character – and that if it were up to them, they'd probably choose not to wear a brace or undergo surgery. Children with scoliosis like to be treated like all other children because they are like all other children.

## What Do Doctors Do?

If a school nurse suspects that your child may have scoliosis, he or she will refer your child to your doctor. After a close examination, the doctor will decide if further treatment is needed. If he or she determines that the curve isn't at all serious, your child may not need any treatment – just regular checkups to make sure the curve doesn't become larger. If the doctor wants to get a clearer view of your child's spine, he or she will order X-rays. If the x-rays show that there is a significant curvature, your child will be referred to an **orthopedist (or-tho-pedist—a doctor who has a lot of training and experience in making decisions about scoliosis and similar conditions)**. Like your pediatrician or family doctor, the orthopedist will examine your child and study the x-rays of their spine.

## Treating Scoliosis

Braces are worn by about 20% of children with scoliosis, and most children only need to wear them for 18 to 20 hours a day. Many of them are constructed of lightweight materials. The one that the orthopedist chooses depends on the child and the severity of the curvature.

Sources: Getting Things Straight: A Guide to Scoliosis, The Nemours Foundation  
For more information contact The National Institute of Health  
Phone: (1-877-226-4267): [www.osteoo.org](http://www.osteoo.org).  
**(Recommended by the Centers Of Disease Control and Prevention)**

The American Physical Therapy Association: 1-800-999-2782 [www.apta.org](http://www.apta.org)