



The Spinal Column

What is Scoliosis?

By Dawn Rockall, R.M.T.

Scoliosis is a medical condition in which a person's spine is curved from side to side, and sometimes accompanied with rotation. On an x-ray, the spine of an individual with a typical scoliosis may look more like an "S" or a "C" than a straight line.

Causes of scoliosis:

In most cases the cause of scoliosis is unknown (idiopathic). This type of scoliosis is described based on the age when scoliosis develops. If the person is less than three years old it is called infantile idiopathic scoliosis. Scoliosis that develops between three and 10 years of age is called juvenile idiopathic scoliosis, and people that are over 10 years old have adolescent idiopathic scoliosis.

There are three other main types of scoliosis:

Functional: In this type of scoliosis the spine is normal but an abnormal curve develops because of a problem somewhere else in the body. This could be caused by one leg being shorter than the other or by muscle spasms in the back.

Neuromuscular: In this type of scoliosis there is a problem when the bones of the spine are formed. Either the bones of the spine fail to form completely or they fail to separate from each other. This type of scoliosis develops in people with other disorders including birth defects, muscular dystrophy, cerebral palsy, or Marfan's disease. If the curve is present at birth it is called congenital. This type of scoliosis is often much more severe and needs more aggressive treatment than other forms of scoliosis.

Degenerative: Unlike the other forms of scoliosis that are found in children and teens, degenerative scoliosis occurs in older adults. It is caused by changes in the spine due to arthritis. Weakening of the normal ligaments and other soft tissues of the spine combined with abnormal bone spurs can lead to an abnormal curvature of the spine.

Other: There are other potential causes of scoliosis. This includes spinal tumors such as osteoid osteoma. This is a benign tumor that can occur in the spine and cause pain. The pain causes people to lean to the opposite side to

reduce the amount of pressure applied to the tumor. This can lead to a spinal deformity.

Signs & Symptom Picture of Scoliosis:

- One or more lateral and rotational curves in the low, mid and/or upper spine.
- One side of the torso may have a hump formed by the ribs
- There is a pelvic tilt with one leg shorter than the other
- Possible back pain

Treatment options:

Treatment of scoliosis is based on the severity of the curve and the chances of the curve getting worse. Certain types of scoliosis have a greater chance of getting worse therefore the type of scoliosis also helps to determine the proper treatment. If the curve stays below 40 degrees until the person is finished growing it is not likely to get worse later in life. However, if the curve is greater than 40 degrees it is likely to continue to get worse by 1 – 2 degrees each year for the rest of the person's life. If this is not prevented the person will eventually be at risk for heart or lung problems.



There are three main medical categories of treatment: Observation, bracing and surgery.

Alternatively, less invasive therapies are an excellent choice for the treatment and prevention of progression for scoliosis. **Massage Therapy** can help reduce muscle imbalances, reduce the curvature in the spine, soothe back pain and prevent the condition from progressing.

Remedial Exercise: can strengthen the weaker muscles along the spine and stretch the hypertonic muscles to enhance local circulation. Exercise can reduce the spinal curve and can bring relief from muscular pain.

Chiropractic Care can address restricted tissue patterns surrounding and within the spinal column, reduce pain and help minimize the spine's curve.

Naturopathic Medicine can treat a number of contributing factors associated with scoliosis. It can also treat the back pain in a number of different ways such as taking vitamins, minerals, nutrition and homeopathy.

Chiropractors can fit the patient with orthotics or heel lifts to treat leg length discrepancies that may be a functional contributing factor to the condition.

About the Author:



Dawn Rockall is a local resident of Brampton and has been practicing as a Registered Massage Therapist since graduating from Sir Sandford Fleming College in Peterborough in 2002. Upon graduation, Dawn moved back to work in Brampton and had opened her own clinic here in Bramalea called Rockall Therapeutics.

Dawn continued her schooling, taking courses in Hot Stone Massage, Sport Massage, and Reiki. Furthermore, she studied Vichy Body Treatments & Vichy Massage in New York City and plans to expand her education in the near future to include Acupuncture, Cranial Sacral Therapy and Roling.

As a sport massage therapist, Dawn enjoyed being involved with sporting events such as marathons and triathlons where she prepared the athletes for their races as well as treating them thereafter.

Dawn also worked previously at a spa where she was given a lot of training in relaxation and its benefits. She also has experience working in hospitals with palliative care patients and the terminally ill.

Some of her personal hobbies and interests include exercising, running and spending time outdoors. Dawn does a lot of volunteer and charity work with the Cancer Society and Princess Margaret Hospital in Toronto.

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