

The Truth behind Adolescent Idiopathic Scoliosis

As a child you were probably lined up and your teacher had you bend over to check if your backbone was straight or not. They probably also checked your hair for lice – hopefully you weren't one of the ones that had it! Your teacher checking your spine to see if it was straight, as well as checking your head for lice, is one of the pre-screening measures that many schools took to catch adolescent issues early. The condition they were checking you for was adolescent idiopathic scoliosis.

Adolescent idiopathic scoliosis (or AIS for short, also just known as scoliosis) is when the curve of the spine actually curves *sideways*. This condition is called "idiopathic" because it just seems to happen for no good reason. You weren't dropped on your head or hit in the back as a child to get your spine curved in this manner, it just grew that way. However, scoliosis can develop from certain conditions such as Cerebral Palsy or Muscular Dystrophy. It's also important to realize that curvature of the spine is *not* caused by:

- Poor posture
- Carrying heavy things
- Sleeping in a strange position
- Athletics
- Minor leg length inequalities

It is estimated that 2-3% of the entire population has some degree of scoliosis, or curvature of the spine. However, this percentage varies when you look at the size of the curve in different people. Large curves in the spine are not as common.

There are various locations in the spine that adolescent idiopathic scoliosis can affect. The curve can be located in the lower back (lumbar curve), middle back (thoracolumbar curve) and upper back (thoracic curve). The curve can also go to the right or to the left. Finally, there are varying degrees of curves. These are measured in degrees and range from mild (10 to 30 degrees) to moderate (30 to 50 degrees) to severe (greater than 50 degrees).