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SCOLIOSIS: DON'T WAIT TO GET IT STRAIGHT!

By Risa Sloves, D.C.

"Stop slouching, put your shoulders back, stand up straight and pay attention!" Sound familiar? Many of us spent years listening to such badgering, and guess what? Mother was right. Posture does matter, after all.

Leading physicians and researchers have recently reported that "Posture affects and moderates every physiologic function, from breathing to hormonal production." To fully appreciate the profound effects that posture has on the entire body, we must consider the body's master control system, the brain and nervous system, which control and coordinate all other systems, organs, and tissues of the body. Alf Breig, M.D., neurosurgeon and researcher, determined that abnormal postural patterns interfere with the natural healing ability of the central nervous system, and similar findings have been reported in the medical journals *Spine* and the *Journal of Neurosurgery*

Moreover, scientific research has also shown that if these stresses are present for more than 14 days without being corrected, degenerative and arthritic changes begin to occur that can have lifelong consequences.

Our unconscious mistakes

So is it enough then to just stop slouching and stand up straight? Certainly, it is important to be conscientious of posture in our daily activities. However, the postural faults that are most harmful are those that we are unaware of and can't control, caused by irregular spinal alignment. Such damaging spinal changes may result from traumatic events such as slips and falls, athletic injuries and automobile accidents, or may develop gradually as a result of many micro-traumas and the use of inefficient body mechanics in the performance of such common daily routines as slouching at the computer or holding the phone between your shoulder and ear.

Good posture begins in utero

Believe it or not, proper posture actually starts to develop before birth. When still inside the womb, we are generally in the fetal position, curled up in such a way that there is rearward convexity to the spine when viewed from the side. After delivery, as we develop and learn to hold our heads up and sit up, this curvature changes so that there are also gentle convex forward curvatures in the neck and low back.

Proper posture requires that, when viewed from the front on an X-ray, the bones of the spine should appear as a very straight column. When viewed from the side on an X-ray, it is very important that gentle forward curvatures appear in the neck and lower back regions, while a rearward curvature is expected in the mid-back. These normal curvatures provide the body with a natural suspension system, reducing stress on muscles and bones. Most important, such posture allows the vital information that travels from our brain and spinal cord to reach the cells, tissues and organs of our body without interference.

"S" stands for scoliosis

One of the spinal conditions that often develops in childhood is scoliosis, which refers to a lateral curvature of the spine. In other words, when you look at somebody with

scoliosis from the back, there appears to be an "S" shape to the spine, rather than the bones being stacked one on top of the other.

The prevalence of scoliosis among school-age children is 3 to 5%. Most commonly it is diagnosed during adolescence, around the onset of puberty. This type of scoliosis is known as adolescent idiopathic (having no known cause) scoliosis and it is seen more commonly in females, especially if there is a family history of it. Progression of this curvature most frequently occurs between 12 to 16 years of age, and can be especially rapid during a growth spurt. In addition, it has been found that there is a significant correlation between vestibular (relating to the body's system for maintaining equilibrium) and balance problems in adolescents with idiopathic scoliosis, and that these patients are at a greater risk of developing osteoporosis, compared to the general population.

Spinal specialist needed

A detailed postural examination is critical in determining the existence of scoliosis. This should be performed by a trained physician who specializes in spinal conditions. One needs to evaluate the positioning of the skull, neck, shoulders and shoulder blades, the rib cage, the waist, the pelvis, the knees, and the feet, not only for positional symmetry from right to left sides, but also for their relationship to one another. For example, does the head appear to be tilted, so one ear looks higher than the other? Does one shoulder look higher, or one hand hang lower? Do the legs appear to be the same length when lying down?

Doctors of chiropractic specialize in the detection and correction of spinal irregularities that produce harmful involuntary postural imbalances such as scoliosis. Chiropractors who focus on postural correction typically begin with a thorough physical exam and standing spinal X-rays to identify abnormal spinal patterns. When diagnosing scoliosis, one needs to identify the exact site and the degree and flexibility of the curvature and assess for bone maturity to determine the likelihood of progression.

Never too early to correct

The goal of all scoliosis treatment is to stop the progression of the curvature, so as to avoid the possibility of bracing or spinal surgery. It is never too early to begin correcting a curvature, even if it is less than 10 degrees! Doing nothing more than "watching the curvature" to see if it progresses or to see how quickly it progresses is a completely reactive approach in dealing with scoliosis and is likely to be wasting precious time, when effective stabilization and corrective treatment could be occurring instead. If scoliosis is allowed to progress, not only will it produce a structural, cosmetic deformity that will likely promote arthritic changes as time progresses, but, in the case of advanced curvatures, will compromise the function of organs such as the heart and lungs, which may result in severe, life-altering consequences.

New global approach

There is a new and exciting treatment protocol for scoliosis that has been very effective, not only in stabilizing scoliosis in children and adults, but in improving the curvature, often with dramatic results. The treatment is a global approach based on "Scoliosis Systems" and the "SpineCor System." It involves specific chiropractic treatment procedures coupled with detailed corrective physiotherapy exercises and, at times, the possibility of using a state-of-the-art soft brace. This brace has huge advantages over the

more traditional hard braces, because it is worn under a patient's clothes, is not visible, and is easy to wear during all activities, including sports. The soft brace, therefore, doesn't promote physical limitations or self-esteem issues!

Recent research studies of this type of treatment approach have shown an overall correction/stabilization for 93% of patients. In addition, another advanced method of scoliosis diagnostic evaluation and non-invasive treatment utilizes the methods of the CLEAR Institute.

There is an old saying, "As the twig is bent, so grows the tree." It is never too early to begin scoliosis treatment. Being proactive instead of reactive is likely to pay off, so please, don't wait to get it straight!

Dr. Risa Sloves is one of seven Chiropractic Physicians in Connecticut with Board Certification in Pediatric and Maternity Care. She is also one of the only Chiropractic Physicians in Connecticut with certification in "Scoliosis Systems"— utilizing the "SpineCor Technology"— and certification from the CLEAR Institute for scoliosis treatment. She practices with her husband, Dr. Mark Joachim at their office Associates In Family Chiropractic and Natural Health Care, P.C., 156 East Avenue, Norwalk. She can be reached at 203.838.1555. For further information on scoliosis, contact The Scoliosis Care Foundation at 800.391.8837. Visit www.scoliosiscare.org or Clear-Institute.com.