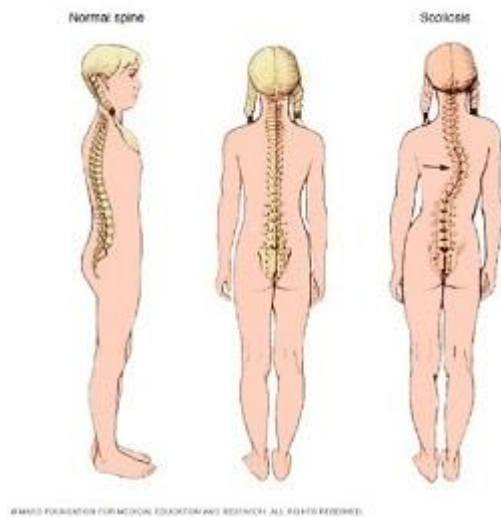


52 Weeks of Public Health: Scoliosis Awareness



June is Scoliosis Awareness Month

Scoliosis is a musculoskeletal disorder in which there is a sideways curvature of the spine, or back. People of all ages can have scoliosis, but adolescent idiopathic scoliosis (scoliosis of unknown cause) is the most common type and typically occurs after the age of 10. Girls are more likely than boys to have this type of scoliosis. Because scoliosis can run in families, a child who has a parent, brother, or sister with idiopathic scoliosis should be checked regularly for scoliosis by the family doctor. An xray of the spine can confirm the diagnosis of scoliosis.

Many children who are sent to the doctor by a school scoliosis screening program have very mild spinal curves that do not need treatment. When treatment is needed, the doctor may send the child to an orthopedic spine specialist.

The doctor will suggest the best treatment for each patient based on the patient's age, how much more he or she is likely to grow, the degree and pattern of the curve, and the type of scoliosis. The doctor may recommend observation, bracing, or surgery.

- **Observation.** Doctors typically follow patients without treatment and re-examine them every few months when the patient is still growing (is skeletally immature) and the curve is mild.
- **Bracing.** Doctors may advise patients to wear a brace to stop a curve from getting any worse in patients who are still growing with moderate spinal curvature.
- **Surgery.** Doctors may advise patients to have surgery to correct a curve or stop it from worsening when the patient is still growing, has a curve that is severe, and has a curve that is getting worse.

Although exercise programs have not been shown to affect the natural history of scoliosis, exercise is encouraged in patients with scoliosis to minimize any potential decrease in functional ability over time. It is very important for all people, including those with scoliosis, to exercise and remain physically fit. Girls have a higher risk than boys of developing osteoporosis (a disorder that results in weak bones that can break easily) later in life. The risk of osteoporosis can be reduced in women who exercise regularly all their lives. For both boys and girls, exercising and participating in sports can also improve their general sense of well-being.