

Could Adult Scoliosis Be Causing Your Back or Spine Problem?

by Max W. Cohen, MD, FAAOS



SPINE & SCOLIOSIS SPECIALISTS
ADVANCED TREATMENT & SURGERY

Chances are, you have heard of scoliosis, but did you know it occurs in adults as well as children?

If you're like many people, you may think it is a disorder that occurs mostly in girls. However, scoliosis – which curves the spine into a sideways S or C shape – also occurs in adults and can cause significant problems. It is involved in many cases of back or spine pain in middle-aged and older women, but often goes undiagnosed and untreated.



When scoliosis is not treated – but other back problems associated with it are repaired in surgery – the patient's back problem may actually grow worse. Here's what you need to know about scoliosis in adults.

Types of adult scoliosis

There are two primary types of adult scoliosis, and both occur most often in women.

~ **IDIOPATHIC SCOLIOSIS** occurs when childhood scoliosis progresses in adulthood, often leading to other disorders, such as spinal stenosis.

~ **DEGENERATIVE SCOLIOSIS** occurs when a previously normal spine undergoes degenerative changes that actually cause scoliosis in midlife or old age.

What can be done for it

In most cases, we treat adult scoliosis without surgery through use of anti-inflammatory drugs and physical therapy. We do not prescribe the type of brace used in children with scoliosis because it does not stop progression of the curve on a mature spine. However, a corset-type brace sometimes helps with pain in patients with degenerative scoliosis.

In about 10-20 percent of cases, patients opt to have surgery, usually because their spinal problems are causing intense pain and/or deformity.

Why it should be treated

Adult scoliosis almost always occurs in conjunction with other spinal disorders.

In idiopathic scoliosis, the curve of the spine – which dates to childhood but has gotten worse over time – can cause problems such as a narrowing of the spinal column (spinal stenosis), leading to a pinched nerve and pain down a leg, for example.

In degenerative scoliosis, it's a degeneration of discs in the spine, due to arthritis or degenerative disc disease, that causes the scoliosis. As discs degenerate, their movement causes the spine to curve.

Many surgeons have not undergone extensive training in scoliosis surgery, so their typical mode of treatment for the conditions described above is to address only the spinal stenosis or the disc problem. However, ignoring the scoliosis can lead to early failure of the surgery. The curve of the spine is still present, leading to recurrences of the same problem. Surgery that ignores scoliosis can even cause the spinal column to collapse.

What we do differently is to look at the spinal alignment, not just each individual segment, but the whole global alignment and how it affects the patient. We assess the degree of scoliosis and its interrelationship with the patient's other spinal disorders. Then, in surgery, we use leading-edge technology and advanced techniques to straighten the spine, correcting both the abnormal alignment and the secondary spine problem. Patients are usually gotten out of bed the same day or the next day and leave the hospital in 2-3 days. Patients typically tell us that the surgery greatly improves their quality of life.

What you need to know

If you are a middle-aged or older woman experiencing continuing pain from a back or spine disorder, it is possible that scoliosis is the root of your problem. With proper diagnosis and treatment, adult scoliosis can usually be corrected – greatly reducing or eliminating pain. To make an appointment for a consultation, call **333-6306**.

Max W. Cohen, MD, FAAOS, the founding physician of Spine & Scoliosis Specialists, is the only doctor in the Triad with double fellowship training in spine and scoliosis surgery. He completed his training at Cornell University's prestigious Hospital for Special Surgery, the top-ranked orthopaedics hospital in the U.S., according to U.S. News & World Report.



'I tell everyone Dr. Cohen is a miracle worker'

Nine years ago, Joyce Cantrell couldn't get around without a cane or, occasionally, a walker. The surgeon she saw said she had degenerative disc disease with arthritis, but advised against an operation. She cut back to part-time work and finally had to quit the teaching job she loved. She lived in constant pain.

Then she was referred to Max Cohen, MD, FAAOS, the only Triad physician with double fellowship training in spine and scoliosis treatment. Dr. Cohen found the root of her problem – undiagnosed adult scoliosis, which had curved her spine into an S. Using innovative, state-of-the-art techniques, he straightened her spine and performed spinal fusion surgery.

Today, Joyce is pain-free. She enjoys water aerobics, exercises on a treadmill and walks twice a week with her husband.

"To be out of pain is just fantastic," she says. "I tell everyone Dr. Cohen is a miracle worker."

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