Scoliosis Diagnosis, What Now?

Recently I was diagnosed with moderate scoliosis. The weird thing is that I was being checked out for something else when my curved spine was noted on my chest x-ray. At least I thought it was weird. Apparently, this is common in the otherwise healthy, aging population. The other weird part? I only read about the scoliosis when checking out my new online health file. The doctor never mentioned it until I asked, a year later, when I was perusing the new online health portal.

The Spine, Explained

Let me explain the spine, in case you forgot or never learned anatomy. Your spine is made up of 33 bones, including the pelvis. These bones or vertebrae are normally stacked one on top of the other, with only the top 24 able to move. These moveable vertebrae can be divided into thoracic, lumbar, and cervical regions, based on where they are in the stack. The lower 9 vertebrae are fixed in place, and consist of 5 bones in the sacrum of the pelvis, and 4 that make up the tailbone.

A normal, healthy spine naturally curves slightly in three spots, looking like an S only if you were to look at it from the side. From the front or back it looks straight. This shape permits a spring-like function allowing the spine to move and absorb shocks. At the neck (cervical) and the lower back (lumbar) the spine naturally curves inward (concave) and at the middle of the back (thoracic) it curves outward. (convex) To visualize the “S”, keep in mind the inward curve that would continue at the top of this picture as the spine goes into the neck area.

wikiRadiography

What is Scoliosis?

Scoliosis is defined as a medical condition involving an exaggerated or abnormal lateral (left or right) curvature of the spine, usually in a C or S shape. The diagnosis is categorized into a mild, moderate, or severe state, depending on the angle of the curve. The greater the angle, the more severe the condition.

A curved spine is also categorized into where exactly the spine is curved:

- lumbar, in the lower back region. Often presents with one leg longer and one hip higher than the other
- thoracic, in the mid-back region, is the most common. Sometimes involves ribcage and shoulder deformity and/or

lung and heart impairment.
- thoracolumbar, involving both the lumbar and thoracic spine, often detected in utero or at birth. Also often associated with neuromuscular disorders such as cerebral palsy or spina bifida.

Who can Develop Scoliosis and Why does it Happen?

The condition is divided into three categories based on the age at which it is diagnosed or becomes symptomatic:

- childhood: diagnosed in infants or toddlers with congenital deformities, it is termed infantile scoliosis, while developing (usually neuromuscular) symptoms between the ages of 3 to 10 is called juvenile scoliosis
- adolescent: between 10 and 18 years of age where growth spurts are most common
- adult: symptoms or diagnosis past the age of 18. This category is further divided into 2 groups, idiopathic (unknown reason) and degenerative (our bones do deteriorate with age)

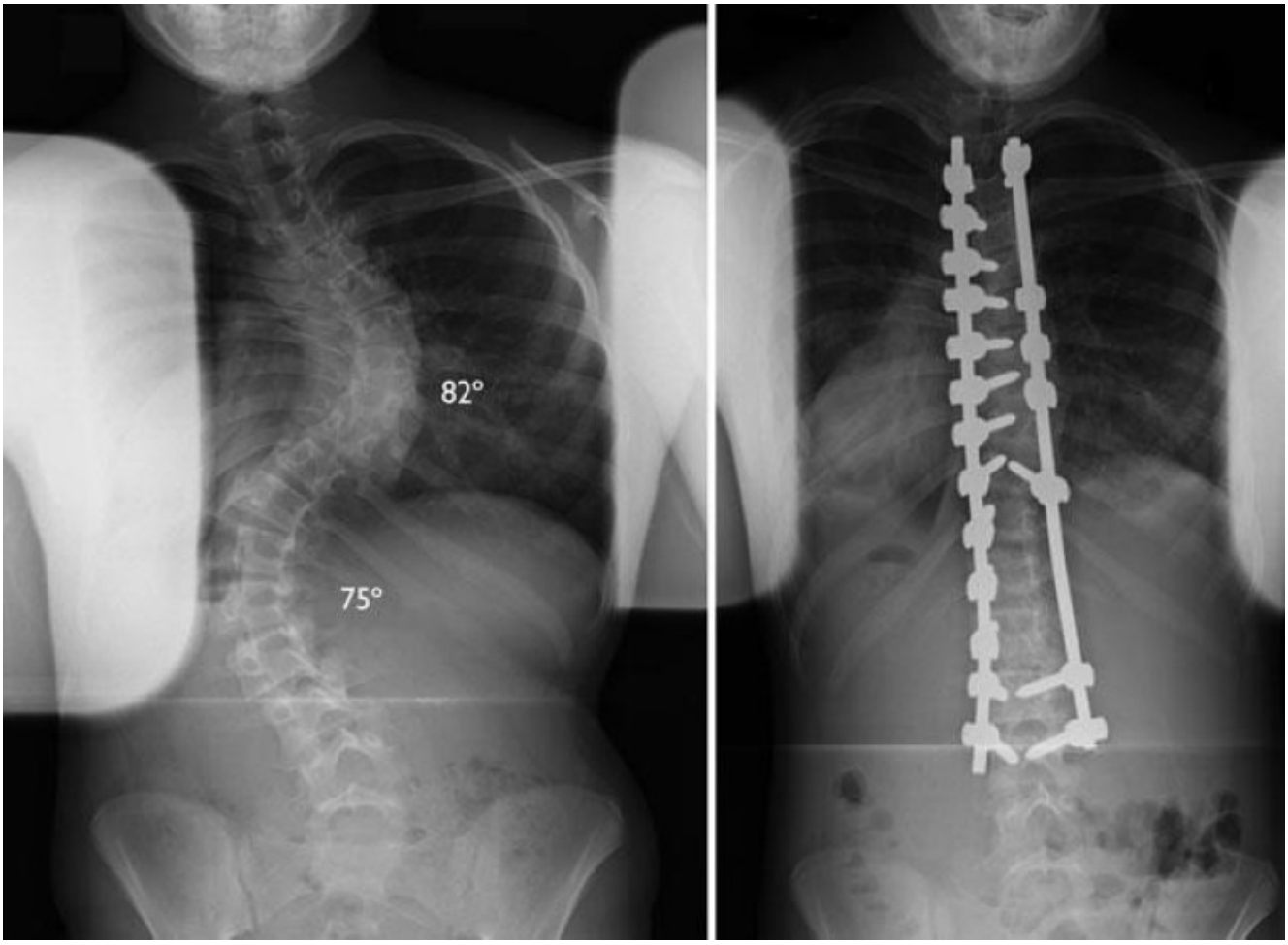
The adult age group is quite large, so a more precise category of “elderly” is also often used. Scoliosis in the elderly is quite common, caused by aging bone structure, injury, or the progression of an (untreated) adolescent category.

For reasons (yet) unknown, female patients tend to be diagnosed with more severe curvatures, requiring a more drastic treatment process.

Treatments for Scoliosis

Suggested treatments are based on the severity of the condition. Options range from simple yoga poses and sleep

patterns to surgery (spinal fusion) with lots in between. The in-between may include **posture correcting**, various methods of **bracing**, exercises, chiropractic manipulations, and **inversion therapy.**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Yoga poses, good and bad

According to Healthline.com yoga poses beneficial for those with scoliosis include:

- Half Forward Bend (Ardha Uttanasana)
- Downward-Facing Dog (Adho Mukha Svanasna)
- Bridge Pose (Setu Bandha)
- Side Plank (Vasisthasana)
- Side-Reclining Leg Lift (Anantasana)
- Mountain Pose (Tadasana)

Be sure to avoid yoga poses (cobra, half moon, locust, sun salutation) that bend the spine backward as well as other exercises that twist the spine.

Adjusting Your Sleep Habits

Adjusting sleep patterns uses gravity to improve the alignment of the spine so the curve (sometimes) moves back into its proper position. So, if your abnormal curve is on your right side, try sleeping on your left side, and on your right side if your curve is on your left side.

Sleeping on your back would be a secondary choice, but lying on your stomach is not recommended.

Practice Good (Better) Posture

This might be the easiest way to alleviate pain and muscle strain. Find your natural body alignment and realign it as often as you can throughout your day.

Medical News Today lists the following strategy when standing:

- Drop your shoulders down and back.
- Position the ears over the shoulders
- Slightly tuck your chin in so that it is not jutting forward or too far down.
- Draw your stomach in slightly
- Unlock the knees slightly.

When sitting, keep your back and neck straight and legs uncrossed. Your ears should be over your shoulders, not in front of them as they would be if your neck is inclined.

What Now?

My research into scoliosis has taught me lots. Originally, I went to the doctor complaining about left chest pain that radiates from below my breast up to my shoulder. I wouldn't even call it a pain, more of a pressure. Due to the fact that both of my parents died of pulmonary ailments, I was concerned about the possibility of lung problems.

Regular mammograms have indicated no problem there, but a chest x-ray showed a moderate curve in my spine. My posture has not always been the greatest. Arthritis is present elsewhere in my body; when I'm stressed or tired my shoulders and neck get sore. I never suspected scoliosis though. When I questioned my doctor (after reading the x-ray results) she agreed that the left curve in my thoracic spine is most likely what is causing pressure on my ribcage for over a year now.

I'm a **proponent of natural remedies**, so this is my plan. I already do many of the yoga poses and exercises recommended, but also a few of the ones I shouldn't do, so will discontinue those. I will make a conscious effort to improve my posture when standing and sitting.

And, I will quit sleeping on my left side, something I have

been doing for as long as I can remember.