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When viewed from the side, the spine has both inward and outward curves. It curves out at the neck, in at the mid-back and out again at the lower back. Scoliosis causes the spine to curve in the wrong direction. It causes sideways curves, and those are different from the spine's normal curves. If one looks at the spine from behind, no curve should be seen. **When there are sideways curves in the spine from the rear view, that is scoliosis.** The curves can look like an "S" or a "C."

**Degenerative Scoliosis** is diagnosed in people older than 50.Adult degenerative scoliosis is caused by degeneration of the moving parts of the spine which are the facet joints and intervertebral discs. Facet joints are like hinges that help the spine bend smoothly, and intervertebral discs are like cushions that absorb shock between vertebral bones. It occurs slowly over time with aging.

### ****Other Types of Scoliosis:****

* Adolescent idiopathic scoliosis is diagnosed in young people ages 11 to 18. Idiopathic means it does not have a known cause, although it appears to involve hereditary factors, because scoliosis tends to run in families
* Infantile idiopathic scoliosis is diagnosed in children ages 0 to 3
* Juvenile idiopathic scoliosis is diagnosed in children ages 4 to 10
* Neuromuscular scoliosis is caused by brain, spinal cord, and muscular system disorders such as cerebral palsy or muscular dystrophy
* Scoliosis develops after injury or infection of the spine

**Adult Degenerative Scoliosis Development**

The facet joints and discs degenerate with aging. Degenerative scoliosis develops when degeneration is more pronounced on one side of the spine. The degenerative scoliosis curve is often located in the lower back and forms a "C" shaped spine curve on one side or the other.



## X ray of the lower back showing a "C" shaped curve due to degeneration of the disc on one side (red lines) more than the other side.

## **Symptoms of Degenerative Scoliosis:**

* Pain can range from a dull back ache to excruciating sensations that shoot down the leg, commonly referred to as sciatica, and make walking difficult
* Stiffness in the mid to low back
* Pins-and-needles tingling and/or numbness that can radiate down the buttock and into the leg
* Sharp leg pain that develops while walking but subsides with rest
* Uneven shoulders
* One shoulder blade that appears more prominent than the other
* Uneven waist and one hip higher than the other

**Treatment for Degenerative Scoliosis:**

When degenerative scoliosis becomes symptomatic, the pain typically starts gradually. Early symptoms are most commonly a dull ache or stiffness in the mid to low back that comes and goes. The main goal of treatment is to reduce pain.

Treatment does not tend to focus on correcting the curve because that is typically not the cause of pain, nor is the curve likely to progress enough to cause a deformity. Nonsurgical treatment options such as physical therapy, avoiding strenuous activities, medication, using a back brace and spine injections are usually sufficient.

In rare cases, surgery may be considered when the pain persists or is negatively affecting quality of life despite multiple treatment efforts. Although, given that the population with symptomatic degenerative scoliosis trends toward age 65 and older, some people should still avoid the surgery due to other age-related risk factors, such as having fragile bones or a weakened heart.

The recovery time after surgery is significant, ranging from 3 to 12 months, so the patient’s symptoms should be severe enough to necessitate such a decision.