

NAVIGATING A CURVE

NATIONAL SCOLIOSIS AWARENESS MONTH BRINGS ATTENTION TO A NEW TREATMENT

Joe Madonia and 12-year-old daughter Taylor say their recent trip to Germany was incredible for many reasons—mostly because they learned so much about scoliosis. Unusual? Perhaps, but this past fall the father-daughter duo joined physical therapists from Spinal Dynamics of Wisconsin for a seminar on scoliosis bracing and the Schroth method, a non-surgical treatment method. Three of the clinic's therapists are among fewer than 20 in the U.S. now certified in Schroth, an exercise-based approach used successfully in Europe for decades.

Some may remember a time when scoliosis screenings were done routinely in schools and when kids wore heavy-looking metal braces. Today's approaches are different.

Wisconsin is one of more than 25 states where screenings are not mandated today. Screenings are quick and involve viewing the spine (stand-

ing and bending) by a health care professional. Some physicians perform screenings during annual check-ups. By adolescence, many children no longer schedule these exams.

Today's bracing options are different, too. Many braces, like Taylor's, are barely visible. Her brace was fitted by Manuel Rigo, doctor and developer of the Rigo-Cheneau brace, with assistance from her orthotist.

Taylor's experience with scoliosis detection is not unlike others. After spiking a fever during a summer visit to a Wisconsin cottage, the family sought medical care at Marshfield Clinic. The physician noticed a spinal problem and suggested follow up with her pediatrician. An x-ray revealed a spinal curvature and the family was given names of several orthopedic surgeons.

"Although Taylor's curve was significant, the doctor didn't immediately recommend surgery," says Joe. "He suggested bracing and based upon my research, I inquired about physical therapy."

The family attended an informational session about Schroth last year. "It just seemed to make sense that exercise could help," Joe says adding that he and his wife wanted to do everything they could to avoid surgery and also to avoid looking back with regrets about not trying this option.

"It's important to gather information from different sources," says Taylor. "This helped me discover that with a brace and physical therapy, my curve may not worsen and that it may be possible to prevent surgery."

Many U.S. physicians say research is inconclusive for bracing or physical therapy. Some recommend waiting to initiate treatment and monitoring curve progression. Once a curve passes a certain threshold, bracing and/or surgery may be recommended.

"If we just waited to see what happened, it could be dangerous," Taylor says. "Since I'm growing so much, my back could have gotten much worse. I've learned a lot about my back during therapy. Schroth techniques help address the effect of the curve on my breathing and how I do daily tasks."

Taylor says most kids don't understand scoliosis. She was initially concerned about classmates' reactions to her brace, but adds that her friends were really supportive and even named her brace.

"If someone asked me about scoliosis I would explain what it is. I would tell them it's not scary and that they shouldn't treat someone differently just because of a brace," Taylor says. "I'd also tell them it's very important to look for signs of scoliosis from early on." •



Taylor Madonia is fitted with a brace to treat scoliosis.

ABOUT SCOLIOSIS, SCREENINGS AND SCHROTH TREATMENT

According to the National Scoliosis Foundation (scoliosis.org), the U.S. House of Representatives proclaimed June as National Scoliosis Awareness month.

- Scoliosis affects 2 to 3 percent of the population (six million in the U.S.) Curves are at highest risk for worsening during growth spurts between ages 10 and 15.
- At onset, scoliosis rarely involves pain and is, therefore, often not diagnosed early. Once progressed, scoliosis can impact a person's quality of life.
- Early detection through screening and treatment may alleviate the worst effects of scoliosis.
- Many organizations recognize the benefits of screening programs including the American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons, Scoliosis Research Society, and American Academy of Pediatrics.

To support Scoliosis Awareness Month, Spinal Dynamics of Wisconsin offers free screenings and lectures on the first Saturday of each month.

- 8:00 to 8:30 a.m.: Free screenings for children ages 10-15. Physician follow-up is recommended if a potential problem is identified.
- 10:30 a.m. to noon: Lecture about scoliosis and Schroth treatment

Sessions are at 2300 N. Mayfair Rd, Suite 555, in the Mayfair Bank Tower. Registration is required. Call (414) 302-0770 or visit sdwpt.com. The clinic also offers opportunity for schools and community groups to discuss scoliosis screening at their location.

