

Overview - Scoliosis

People with scoliosis have overly curved spines, 20% or more out of true. Adolescent idiopathic scoliosis, the most common type of scoliosis, can be treated by bracing to stop curves getting worse, or surgery to correct spinal alignment and improve posture.

Most cases are mild: individuals can manage day to day activities, even if with effort, and take exercise. But even mild scoliosis can affect a person's posture, impair their athleticism and have a negative psychological impact. In more severe cases, individuals can struggle with mobility, manual handling and pain control.

Students with scoliosis may experience the following issues:

- Slow starts to their day because of pain and difficulties getting washed and dressed.
- Difficulty with manual handling tasks – needing to kneel to lift heavy items rather than bend to pick them up.
- A need to pace themselves, conserve energy and rest between physical tasks.
- A need to stretch or walk after standing or sitting for a long time to ease pressure on the spine.
- Problems with balance and co-ordination.



Top tips for teaching students with scoliosis:

- Place course materials at a manageable height – between hip and eye level - and within easy reach.
- Provide course materials in low weight and size packages.
- Stack lighter items on higher shelves and heavier items lower down.
- Don't require the student to bend to carry out tasks.
- Allow the student to sit down whenever needed in a chair that offers good support.
- Allow the student to walk around as needed – maybe after 30 minutes of sitting.
- If the student has a support worker to assist with machinery and equipment, provide her/him with an induction by a technician.
- Be prepared for the student to use specialist equipment in lecture/seminar rooms or studios.
- Be flexible about course attendance and participation – take account of slow morning starts or exhaustion from busy days.

Useful links

Personal accounts from three women who attended university:

- <http://www.sauk.org.uk/adolescent-idiopathic-scoliosis-personal-accounts/sarah--leanne-trappe>
- <http://www.sauk.org.uk/adolescent-idiopathic-scoliosis-personal-accounts/holly-edwards>
- <http://www.sauk.org.uk/adolescent-idiopathic-scoliosis-personal-accounts/sarah-little>

