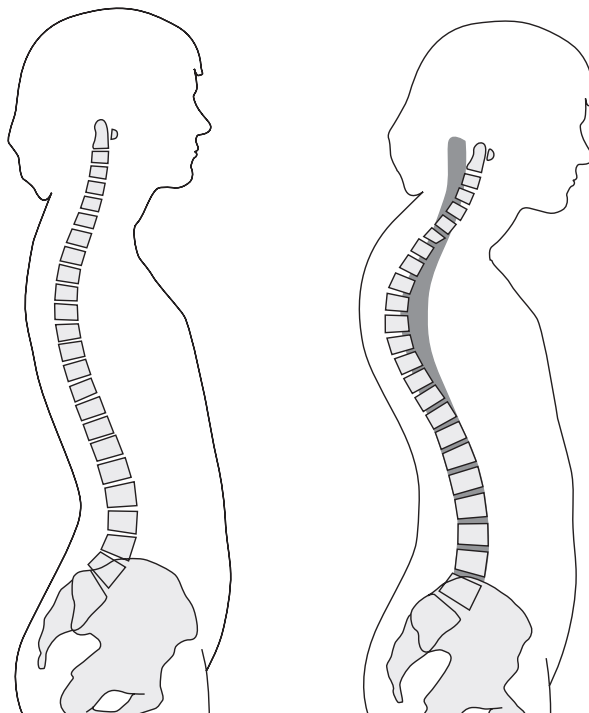




# Kyphosis

**This information sheet from Great Ormond Street Hospital explains the causes, symptoms and treatment of kyphosis and where to get help.**

**Kyphosis is an excessive curvature of the upper (thoracic or chest part) of the of the spine. Everybody's upper backbone curves forward gently but sometimes it can curve too much giving a very round-backed posture. It is usually a mild curve with no real symptoms but it is sometimes associated with pain and stiffness that might cause some breathing difficulties. It is a fairly common condition affecting teenagers and young adults.**



Normal spine

Kyphotic spine

## What causes kyphosis?

Kyphosis is caused when the vertebrae in the upper back are wedge shape causing the spine to curve forward more than it usually does.

Postural kyphosis is the most common form of kyphosis and tends to occur in teenagers. As its name implies, this curve is due to bad posture and becomes more apparent during the teenage growth spurt. It is more common in boys than girls.

Scheuermann's kyphosis usually occurs during a growth spurt. It is when the back of the vertebrae in the upper spine grow faster than the front. On an x-ray, the vertebrae, instead of looking like rectangular building blocks, look wedged at the front so that the spine curves forward.

Congenital kyphosis is rare but occurs when a baby is born with an abnormal spine. The spine has not developed properly and the curve can get worse as the child grows.



## What are the signs and symptoms of kyphosis?

In most cases, the spinal curvature is minimal and the kyphosis barely noticeable.

A more pronounced curve can look like someone is slouching. The most common symptoms include back pain and stiffness.

Serious cases of the condition can lead to further health problems. The child might be in pain and have trouble breathing.

## How is kyphosis normally diagnosed?

A doctor will look at the curvature of the spine by examining the child. An x-ray will confirm the diagnosis and show the extent of the kyphosis. It will help determine what treatment is necessary.

## How is kyphosis normally treated?

Treatment depends on the severity of the symptoms and its cause.

Physiotherapy is offered for postural kyphosis to help improve posture. A

brace is sometimes used for children with Scheuermann's kyphosis and some congenital cases to support their back as they grow.

Severe cases of kyphosis or young children with congenital kyphosis sometimes need surgery. This corrective surgery is called spinal fusion and involves inserting metal rods into the spine to hold it in a straight position.

## What happens next?

Kyphosis caused by bad posture usually improves over time. In most cases, children will respond well to physiotherapy.

Even children who require surgery often grow up without significant restrictions and they can and do lead a normal life.

## Further help and advice

Talk to the child's doctor or health visitor.

Contact the Scoliosis Association for advice and support

### **Scoliosis Association UK**

Tel (Helpline): 020 8964 1166

Website: [www.sauk.org.uk](http://www.sauk.org.uk)

### Notes

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[www.gosh.nhs.uk](http://www.gosh.nhs.uk)