
Orthopaedics and Spina Bifida

September 2024

Many people born with Spina Bifida have problems with their bones, joints, or muscles at some point in their life. These problems can be present at birth or show up as they grow.

What problems might be there at birth?

Some bone and joint problems can happen before a baby is born, such as:

- A curved spine
 - Hips that are out of place (hip dislocation)
 - Feet that are turned in or out (clubfoot)
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What problems might show up later?

As kids grow, some new problems might develop because their muscles are not balanced. These can include:

- Legs that turn in or out (called tibial torsion)
 - Loss of movement in the hips or knees (contractures)
 - Changes in how the feet look or work
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Why is orthopedic treatment important?

Doctors who take care of bones (called orthopedic doctors) want to help each child:

- Move as well as possible
- Prevent or fix bone or joint problems
- Be as independent as they can

The treatment plan is based on what each child and family wants and needs. The goal is to help them stand, walk, or move in ways that work best for them.

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What does the orthopedic doctor do in clinic?

Orthopedic doctors are an important part of the Spina Bifida clinic team. At each visit, they:

- Check how the child moves
- Look at how straight the spine and legs are
- Make sure braces or walking tools (like crutches or walkers) still fit
- Check the skin for sores from braces or sitting too long

What are some goals for movement and independence?

Some kids with Spina Bifida may:

- Stand with support
- Walk with crutches or a walker
- Walk on their own
- Use a wheelchair, especially for long distances

Using a wheelchair can help save energy and move faster, so kids can keep up with their friends.

Doctors also encourage fun physical activities, like adaptive sports, that help kids stay healthy and included in their communities.

As kids grow, their needs may change. Orthopedic doctors help families decide which tools, braces, or surgeries might help their child move better.

Working with a team of doctors, therapists, and other specialists helps make sure each child gets the best care possible to stay active, strong, and independent.

By Vineeta T. Swaroop, MD, September 2024

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