



Orthopaedics and Spina Bifida

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Most individuals born with Spina Bifida have orthopaedic issues at some point in their lifetime. The extent of orthopaedic involvement includes both those present at birth and those that occur after birth.

1. What are the orthopaedic problems that are present at birth?

The orthopaedic problems which are present at birth include spinal curvature, hip dislocation, and clubfoot.

2. What are the orthopaedic problems that may develop later in the life?

Some orthopaedic problems develop over time with growth and are often related to muscle imbalance. Examples include lower leg rotation (tibial torsion), contractures (tightness) in the hips or knees, and other foot deformities.

3. What are the goals of orthopaedic treatment?

The goal of orthopaedic treatment in patients with Spina Bifida is to make the musculoskeletal system as functional as possible by helping each patient and family to develop realistic goals and then provide the care necessary to meet these goals. Often, orthopaedic treatment may be needed to prevent or correct deformities to maximize a patient's function, mobility, and independence.

4. What does the orthopaedist do at Spina Bifida clinic visits?

The orthopaedist is an important member of the healthcare team for a patient with Spina Bifida. At each visit, the orthopaedist monitors the patient's function, range of motion, spinal and lower limb alignment, skin integrity, and orthotic (brace)/ assistive device appropriateness.

Patients with Spina Bifida may have functional goals that range from standing with support to walking with crutches or a walker to walking independently. Many patients will also use a wheelchair for mobility, especially for longer distances. This frees their hands, reduces energy expenditure and allows them to keep pace with their friends.

It is very important to focus on participation and independence as functional goals as well, and the orthopaedist may recommend adaptive sports or other community involvement to facilitate this. As the individual's body grows and changes, the orthopaedist will help to guide the patient and family on what equipment or braces to use in addition to any surgical treatment recommended to optimize their function. It is important that orthopaedic care is provided in the setting of a multidisciplinary care team to facilitate collaboration with other professionals to optimize each patient's motor development, mobility, and function.

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This information does not constitute medical advice for any individual. As specific cases may vary from the general information presented here, SBA advises readers to consult a qualified medical or other professional on an individual basis.