

CAN AN ANCIENT YOGA POSE CORRECT SCOLIOSIS SPINE DEFORMITY?

Courtesy Texas Back Institute

For the more than six million people in the U.S. who suffer from scoliosis, performing a basic yoga pose for a few minutes each day may dramatically improve this spinal deformity. According to Dr. Rajesh Arakal, a spine surgeon and expert on this disease at Texas Back Institute, scoliosis is an often painful condition which causes the spine to curve in an "S" shape.



Dr. Arakal and patient.

altery such as King Richard III was not immune to this debilitating disease.

"There is no cure for scoliosis," Dr. Arakal said. "And genetic pre-disposition is the only known cause." This bleak prognosis for those suffering from scoliosis recently got a little brighter.

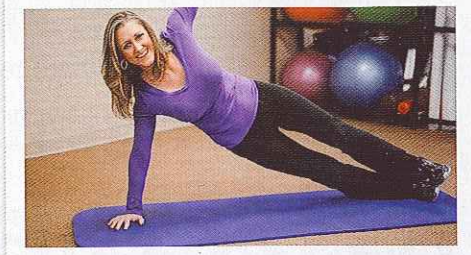
EXCITING SCOLIOSIS RESEARCH

According to a study published in a recent issue of *Global Advances in Health and Medicine*, spinal curvature of scoliosis patients was reduced by about 50 percent when they practiced a yoga pose known as *Vasisthasana*. This position is also known as a "side plank."

Researchers noted scoliosis patients who employed this pose on the curved side can strengthen muscles in the lower back, abdomen and spine which allows the spine to straighten. This suggests patients who practice this side plank pose regularly may not need corrective bracing (the usual therapy for scoliosis) or surgery.

As noted in the article, researchers at Columbia College of Physicians and Surgeons in New York City recruited 25 patients, 21 women and 4 men, ages 14 to 85 years of age. After the participants spent a week learning the pose, which involves leaning on one arm on the floor so the shoul-

ders, hips and ankles are in a straight line, with the other arm pointing straight up, they were instructed to hold this pose for 10 to 20 seconds or longer at least once a day.



With the help of one of our TBI teammates who practices yoga, here's how the side plank is accomplished.

THE RESULTS WERE OUTSTANDING

The results of this simple yoga physical therapy were surprising. The x-rays, which were taken before the study was conducted, when compared with those taken three to 22 months later showed fairly dramatic improvement of the spinal curvature.

According the report, after 6.8 months of follow-up, spinal curving decreased by an average of 41 percent in 19 of the subjects who practiced the poses daily. The average improvement in the group was 32 percent. "The most exciting part of this study involved the improvement among adolescents," said Dr. Arakal. "It is during adolescence when most scoliosis is diagnosed and this study showed curved reduction among regular practitioners was highest in the seven teenage subjects – 49.6 percent compared to 38.4 percent in adults."

As with most strength building exercise, repetition seems to be important with this therapy. Those participants who performed the side plank fewer than four days a week improved by an average of only 0.5 percent.

Dr. Arakal noted the benefits of this type of exercise. "When there is scoliosis deformity, the nerve pathways change," he said. "This side plank pose helps to re-center them. It also works isometrically to build the strength in the oblique muscles which support the spine."

"This research confirms our opinion that scoliosis patients as well as those with milder forms of spine degeneration, of all ages, should be using these yoga muscle strengthening poses," he said.

If you're experiencing back pain, you can talk to one of the specialists at Texas Back Institute. Just call 800.247.BACK (2225) and ask to speak with Jaclyn McDaniel. For information on scoliosis or other diseases and injuries of the spine, visit our website at www.texasback.com.