

STANDING TALL AGAIN

Emily Bates had to wear a body brace for 23 hours a day and feared that she would never lead a normal life again. But two years later the courageous youngster has made a remarkable recovery. CHRIS DARBY reports



WHEN talented Emily Bates was just ten years old her dreams of becoming a top gymnast were cruelly dashed.

The youngster was diagnosed with a devastating degenerative back condition called scoliosis – where the spine bends to the side and becomes twisted.

Told she may never lead a normal life again, she was forced to wear a rock-hard body brace around her torso for a gruelling 23 hours each day for two years – taking it off only to bathe and shower.

Most girls of her age spend their stress-free days socialising with schoolfriends.

For Emily, her world spiralled into darkness and she even shunned social events with other girls in her year out of fear school bullies might make cruel comments.

Just two years later this remarkable young girl, who has always dreamt of becoming a PE teacher, is standing tall.

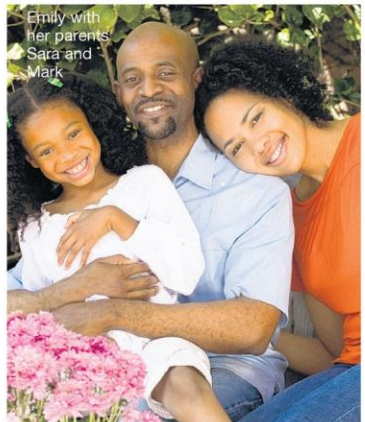
Not only has she dramatically improved her own condition avoiding intrusive surgery – but she has even pulled on her gym kit and has returned to her favourite sport.

Her mum Sara, proudly said: “I cannot put into words how pleased I am that Emily has been able to avoid surgery. And the fact that she has been able to return to gymnastics is something we are all particularly pleased about as she is

very talented.”

Speaking to the *Daily Echo* she told how the family had noticed Emily's devastating twisted spine condition “almost overnight”.

Her beloved little girl had always led an active life and had a special love of gymnastics, which she religiously attended five times every week.



the news that any child would dread by the specialist hospital consultant – that her spine was curving gradually to the right.

An estimated four per cent of the population suffer from scoliosis and it is inexplicably prevalent in young girls. The causes are largely unknown and the most severely affected need correction.

Left untreated it can lead to fatal heart and lung defects.

After a relentless schedule of X-rays and appointments with specialists, Emily was told her condition was worsening and that a nine-hour operation to have stainless steel rods inserted permanently under her skin next to her spine to correct her curve was the only option.

This treatment developed more than 30 years ago, and currently favoured in the UK, involves spinal fusion to solidify the spine in the straightened position. Without this, movement would loosen the rod and make it snap causing devastating internal damage.

Despite desperately seeing several spinal hospital consultants, their answer was the same – surgery was inevitable and the youngster faced the dreadful prospect of losing her flexibility forever.

Unsurprisingly Emily plunged into depression

But she was given

and would not discuss her back problems with anyone.

And worse was to come.

The problem became so bad, specialists told her she must wear the restrictive brace – a constant reminder of her dreams in tatters.

Emily felt distraught and trapped.

When finally the last appointment with the bracing specialist was near, parents Sara and Mark and Emily who were all at their wits' end, were ecstatic.

But the excitement was short-lived and the reality was cruel.

Far from helping it, Emily's curve had actually increased with the brace, which had failed to work in her particular case.

Despite defiantly refusing surgery all along, it seemed to be her only option.

Not only had she endured the nightmare of life in the brace with nothing to show for it, Emily had to cope with other problems. Wearing it had caused her muscles to waste away.

Her distraught mother scoured the Internet for information on patients who had undergone the fusion surgery and the stories left her horrified.

Then the family discovered a centre set up five years ago by a scoliosis sufferer Erika Maude, which is dedicated to improving scoliosis without

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surgery.

The Scoliosis SOS Centre, in London and Suffolk, offers a programme made up of spinal flexibility, posture and breathing exercises teamed with exercises at home to help correct curves in the spine.

It is the only intensive form of rehabilitation that does not use the complex surgery to correct curvature of the spine.

It works for people with a certain type of curve but doctors say some types will still need the surgery, which prevents serious problems later in life.

After a four-week course with the clinic brave Emily had achieved remarkable results.

Her condition had stabilised, and more crucially she was free of pain.

She made significant improvements to her posture, physical appearance and lung capacity.

The 12-year-old is now back at her Eastleigh home and said she is back to gymnastics again – stronger and more flexible than ever.

Sara added that Emily has been able to continue her exercises and maintain her improvements at home by practising on wall bars fitted in her bedroom.

Now she wants others to know there is hope for people with scoliosis and urged other young girls to keep a careful eye on their backs, so they won't notice it curving too late.

Mum Sara urges parents to monitor their children too.



The 43-year-old, said: “We were lucky that we found it when we did as if it had been much later, the exercises would not have worked and she would have had no option but to have spinal fusion surgery.”

Sara continued: “Emily is so much happier now, she wakes up full of energy and is confident in her appearance. She has gone from being a frightened little girl back to her bubbly self.”

“Emily has really grown up and matured, I think taking control of her condition and learning how to self-manage has played a key part in this.”

WHAT IS THE SCOLIOSIS CENTRE?

The Scoliosis SOS Centre is based on a treatment known as the Schroth method, named after its creator Katharina Schroth, used successfully in Germany since 1921.

Erika Maude set up the centre after she herself was diagnosed with scoliosis and was determined to find a non-invasive treatment.

The four week programme offers spinal flexibility, posture and breathing exercises.

The centre has provided relief to hun-

dreds of sufferers using the ScolioGold method- a combination of non surgical treatments tailored to each individual.

The principles behind the intensive course focus on the correction of a patient's asymmetric posture and on controlling their breathing.

They complete specific exercises tailored to their individual needs for six to eight hours with the help of a horizontal bar and other equipment, learn to control their posture with the help of mirrors and can maintain the improvement by completing daily exercises at home.