

SPINE: Treatment could mean no op

Hopes rise for dancing teen

WHEN dance-mad teenager Grace McDonagh was told she needed major spinal surgery, her first question was if she would still be able to dance.

Now, thanks to a month of intensive physiotherapy treatment, the 13-year-old from Donnington Bridge Road, Oxford, is hoping she won't have to go under the knife.

Grace's mum, Tricia McDonagh, first noticed her daughter's back was uneven in December last year.

After visiting her GP and taking the St Gregory the Great School pupil to the Nuffield Orthopaedic Centre in Oxford, Grace was diagnosed with sco-

SCOLIOSIS

SCOLIOSIS is a condition which causes the spine to curve abnormally to one side.

It can vary from slight to severe and can occur at any point along the spine. In about 80 per cent of cases, the cause is unknown.

Scoliosis affects three to four children out of every 1,000 in the UK. It can develop at during childhood and teenage years, and is more common in girls than boys.

Treatment is not necessary in about 90 per cent of cases as it corrects itself as the child grows.

According to NHS statistics most of the remaining 10 per cent of cases can be successfully treated using a back brace, and about three out of every 1,000 children with scoliosis will need surgical treatment.

liosis - curvature of the spine.

She was told the condition, which affects four in 1,000 people, would need spinal fusion surgery to correct.

Princess Eugenie recently revealed she had an operation for the condition aged 21.

Miss McDonagh, a teaching assistant at The Ormerod School, in Waynflete Road, said: "I was devastated but Grace coped really well and took it in her stride.

"She just wanted to know if she could carry on dancing and she was told she could carry on for now, but she would need surgery which would affect her flexibility."

Then she read an article in the *Oxford Mail*

■ Fran Bardsley

about fellow sufferer Katie Burrows, who improved her condition through exercise and non-surgical treatment at a private clinic, Scoliosis SOS.

Miss McDonagh paid £3,000 for a month of intensive treatment at the London clinic, six hours a day, five days a week.

Miss McDonagh said: "I was worried about going private but because the hospital said to come back in August, I felt I needed to try something.

"I couldn't sit back and let it progress because that's what happens with scoliosis, it just gets worse."

Measurements of the curve before and after the treatment show an improvement and the family is awaiting x-ray results from the NOC in August.

Miss McDonagh said: "There's always that bit of me that thinks you have to be aware of worst case scenarios, but I feel it has made a big difference and I am hoping."

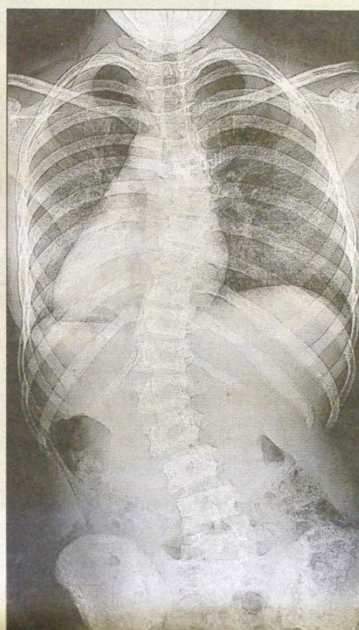
She said Grace still has to do 45 minutes of exercises every day but has a better posture.

Grace dances at Flair Dance Studio and trains three times a week, competing at least once a month.

The youngster said: "When I was first told I had to scoliosis my whole world fell down around me. I lost so much confidence and I thought my only option was surgery.

"Now I feel like I have been given some control back, my back looks a million times better and I feel stronger."

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■ **CONDITION:** Below, Tricia McDonagh and Grace McDonagh, 13; above, an x-ray showing Grace's curved spine before treatment

Picture: Andrew Walmsley

