

The spinal problems of a young Preston gymnast could have spelt the end of her sporting dreams – but an alternative to surgery has given her a new lease of life. Health reporter **AASMA DAY** finds out more

# Kirsty's back to health



**BALANCING ACT:** Kirsty Thompson on the beam and (inset) an X-ray of her spine before treatment

**E**NTHUSIASTIC about sports from a young age, Kirsty Thompson relished the thought of school PE lessons and was a keen gymnast.

However, a couple of years ago, Kirsty, 12, of Hoghton, near Preston, began suffering from lower back pain and noticed her spine was starting to curve towards the right.

Kirsty found she was having to sit out from her PE lessons, and started becoming withdrawn from her classmates.

Her parents, Melissa and John, who also have a 10-year-old son, Tom, were devastated when Kirsty was diagnosed with scoliosis, a severe spinal deformity.

Scoliosis causes the spine to excessively curve sideways, which affects more than 4% of the population. If left untreated, it can lead to fatal heart and lung problems.

Current practice in this country is to wait until the curve becomes so severe, that the only option left is to operate.

However, the operation carries higher risks than open heart surgery, and involves metal rods being inserted either side of the spine, before the spine is fused solid.

Kirsty was referred to Manchester Children's Hospital, but was told although her condition could become a problem in the future, for now it was just a waiting game.

But just two years later, a check-up revealed Kirsty's spine had deteriorated further and that surgery was her only

chance of continuing with a normal childhood.

Kirsty, a pupil at St Michael's CE High School in Chorley, recalls: "When I was first diagnosed with scoliosis, I thought my life was over.

"I love gymnastics, and the thought of having to give it up was soul destroying.

"I knew that having major spinal surgery would mean at least six months off school, and put an end to any contact sports.

"I was frightened and in a state of panic, so I began searching the internet for alternative treatments."

Kirsty and her family found out about a Scoliosis SOS in Suffolk, a clinic founded and run by Erika Maude, who has scoliosis herself, which opened five years ago.

It has since brought relief to hundreds of sufferers.

It is the only clinic in the world to offer treatment following the ScolioGold method, which is a combination of internationally

renowned non-surgical treatments, which have been practised separately in Europe for several decades.

A new branch of the clinic, Scoliosis SOS London subsequently opened, and Kirsty went there for a consultation and was astounded

by what she was told.

Experts told her the pain she had been experiencing was due to an imbalance of the muscles surrounding her spine, caused by her scoliosis.

Kirsty booked in for an intensive four-week course

of treatment and by the end of the first week of the course, she had noticed a dramatic decrease in the amount of pain she was experiencing.

Kirsty says: "My therapist was so enthusiastic and caring.

"It also helped meeting other people suffering from scoliosis, as I felt for the first time I wasn't alone, and somebody else understood what I was going through."

Kirsty has noticed a massive improvement in her posture and physical appearance. She is now completely pain-free and has regained her confidence.

She is continuing to do a specially-designed 30-minute programme of exercises each day, so she can continue to be pain-free and go back to gymnastics.

Kirsty says: "I can now take part in gymnastics with no discomfort.

"This is the main thing I am grateful for, along with avoiding surgery.

"I am passionate about gymnastics, and if I had had my spine wrenched straight and titanium rods inserted or continued suffering from pain, I would never have been physically able to be involved in any sport again.

"The operation is dangerous and could have gone extremely wrong.

"As a young person, my appearance was really important to me.

"So to find a treatment which has saved me from surgery has been amazing.

"I hope everyone with scoliosis has the chance to avoid surgery in the same way.

"When I leave school, physiotherapy is something I



would like to pursue. Being able to fulfil my dreams and future career plans is something I will always be thankful for."

Scoliosis is a three-dimensional condition of the spine, where there is sideways curvature of the spine.

This curve can be measured on an X-ray to give a 'Cobb angle'.

If the Cobb angle is greater than 10 degrees then this is classified as scoliosis.

The Scoliosis SOS clinic in Suffolk has been effective for patients aged eight to 86, and with curvatures of more than 100 degrees benefiting.

For more details, call 01394 389 670 or visit the clinic's website at [www.scoliosisSOS.com](http://www.scoliosisSOS.com).