

# I'm hoping exercises will stop me needing surgery

A city teenager has told how she is battling a spine condition using exercise, in the hope it means avoiding an operation.

Megan Harris, 17, of Dover Street, was told she would need a major operation to correct the scoliosis which had caused her spine to curve sideways and left her with terrible headaches and back pain. The City College Norwich student was struggling to play the piano and join in with her friends, but her parents were keen to avoid surgery if possible.

She said: "I found it almost impossible to relieve my back pain. It was bad enough having to cope with how my back looked, let alone the constant pain."

The condition affects more than four per cent of the population and if left untreated can lead to fatal heart and lung problems. It got to the point where Megan and her mother Sam had almost decided that they needed to go ahead with the operation when they saw a news feature on the television about a clinic called Scoliosis SOS, which has a branch in London and uses non-surgical treatments. Megan went on a four-



**Improvement:** Megan Harris, who is battling the spinal condition scoliosis using exercise.

week course at the clinic, at a cost of £25 an hour, and says she now no longer suffers from constant back and neck pain.

She said: "I thought I was going to be exhausted by the end of each day but the exercises were more about correcting the muscular imbalance and getting your muscles to work in a different way." She added: "Being able to avoid having surgery has just been amazing. I am now in control of my body. I know what's good for

my back and what's not. I just don't understand why there are so many people out there who are told that the operation or wearing a brace is their only option when it clearly is not."

Independent charity the Scoliosis Association UK (SAUK) says it advises patients to follow the advice of a scoliosis specialist and that serious complications arising from surgery are very rare indeed. A spokesperson for the charity said: "The scientific

evidence that extensive exercise 'cures' scoliosis is sparse. In mild curvatures intensive exercise can improve posture, muscle strength, flexibility and appearance, but there is no long-term evidence that it will ultimately prevent the progression of a curve.

"It is important to remember that the scoliosis is different in individuals and that some may have only very mild curvatures that will not progress. Such individuals will therefore benefit from treatments that improve appearance – largely because of positive psychological benefits.

"Specialists undertake surgery only if it is essential for the long-term health of the individual; how much of the spine is fused will depend on the position and severity of the curve, and great care is taken to minimise the effect on spinal flexibility."

**→ Are you battling against a painful medical condition? Call Kim Briscoe on 01603 772419 or email kim.briscoe@archant.co.uk**

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