



## WHAT IS SCOLIOSIS?

SCOLIOSIS affects four per cent of the population and causes curvature of the spine.

If left untreated, it can be life-threatening, leading to heart and lung problems.

Scoliosis SOS was founded by scoliosis sufferer Erika Maude.

It has been open for four years and is used by hundreds of people with the condition. The organisation has clinics in Woodbridge, Suffolk and East London.

Its programmes follow the ScolioGold method, a combination of non-surgical treatments practiced separately across Europe.

For more information about scoliosis, call 01394 389670, or visit [www.scoliosisSOS.com](http://www.scoliosisSOS.com)

■ Helping himself – Rowan Cottee is dealing with his condition without having to go under the knife **Picture: NIGEL BROWN** CO44377\_004

# An hour's stretching a day keeps the surgeon away

THE thought of having metal rods inserted into his back and fused to his spine was enough to make Rowan Cottee search for an alternative solution to his medical condition.

The sporty 17-year-old was diagnosed with scoliosis when he was 15 and faced a year-long wait to see a consultant about his treatment.

It gave him time to research other options and he is thankful he did.

Now his condition, which causes a curvature of the spine and twisting of his ribs, is being controlled through exercise as part of a programme called Scoliosis SOS, rather than that frightening-sounding operation.

Rowan, of The Street, Tendring, says: "The operation seemed pretty extreme to me.

"If I'd had to have rods inserted into my back I wouldn't have been able to do the activities I am enjoying now. It would have restricted the movement of my spine and I would have been mov-

ing about uncomfortably. It just put me off."

Rowan first realised something was wrong when his parents, Julia and Richard, noticed his shoulder blade sticking out. A closer look confirmed his back was "a bit deformed".

It didn't hurt and it still doesn't, Rowan says, despite the fact his curvature is quite severe – 82 degrees, in something of an S-shape.

He says: "There doesn't seem to be much correlation between the severity of scoliosis and the level of pain you have. At the clinic where I go, there are people who have a mild curvature of the spine. They get lots of pain, but I don't."

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Doctors monitored Rowan over the course of a year while he waited for his appointment with a specialist, but nobody ever mentioned the Scoliosis SOS programme to him.

It is run at a clinic in Woodbridge, Suffolk, and uses non-surgical methods. For Rowan, this means a series of muscle-strengthening exercises around the spine and an hour a day of stretches. He then visits the clinic once every three months.

He says: "Doing these exercises has generally made me more aware of my own posture and making sure I don't slump. In June, I will have been doing this for two years. I had my 16th birthday there and I turn 18 this June."

Each time at the clinic, Rowan's spine is checked for curvature and the rotation of his ribcage, which gives him a hump. He also receives physiotherapy and gets to meet others with the condition.

Rowan says: "I can see the hump getting smaller. It's making quite a dramatic difference."

However, Rowan, who is working as an apprentice at an animal rescue centre in Thorington, insists he is not bothered about how the scoliosis looks to others.

More important to him is the fact his condition hasn't stopped him playing sport, though contact sports and lifting heavy objects are a no-no.

Since his diagnosis his siblings have been also checked for the hereditary condition and found to have a mild case, though his parents and grandparents show no sign of it.

He is positive about the future and sees no reason not to remain pain-free and surgery-free for the rest of his life.

Rowan says: "It's up to me if I do have surgery if the scoliosis gets worse, but I would rather not have it, so I can keep all the movement in my spine.

"It's up to me, really. I need to keep doing the exercises, which should stop or decrease the curves of the spine for the rest of my life."