

Faced with a costly operation to straighten her back kickboxer Paige Davis has sought an alternative method. **Diane Parkes** reports

The fightback...

Schoolgirl Paige Davis is no softy. How could she be when she enjoys the sport of kickboxing?

But the 13-year-old Birmingham girl may be forced to give up the sport because of spinal problems unless a revolutionary treatment succeeds.

Paige took up kickboxing five years ago, but was devastated to learn she would need a massive operation and metal rods in her back to correct a curvature of her spine.

Such surgery would stop her training and competing as a kickboxer because it would limit her movement and put her at risk of serious injury if she suffered a blow to the spine.

That is a devastating prospect for the Perryfields High School student, who lives in Quinton.

Her mother Tina, 38, explains: "It was in April that Paige told us that she was having some pain in her back. We looked but couldn't see anything wrong, but we were concerned so we took her to see her GP.

"He asked her to bend and when she did so you could see that there was an abnormality with her back - it wasn't straight. The GP told us that it was scoliosis."

Referred to Birmingham's Royal Orthopaedic Hospital, the family were given the news that Paige would have to undergo a ten hour operation which involved fusing parts of her spine and inserting metal rods to stabilise it.

"Basically they told us that scoliosis is caused in growth spurts," says Tina.

"They gave her an X-ray and they said she had a curvature of 54 degrees which is very bad and she would need an operation."

But there were potential problems as businessman father Kevin, 46, explains: "They said the operation really needed to be done while she was still growing and at her age that would probably be within the next two years. But then they said there was a waiting list of between 12-18 months."

Kevin, who runs a private ambulance service, and Tina decided they could not afford to wait and decided to go private.

"It was going to cost us £25,000 to go private but we felt we had to do it," he says.

A date was set for August 24 of this year but during the intervening period, the family were told about an alternative treatment based at two centres in Suffolk and London run by the organisation Scoliosis SOS.

Scoliosis SOS was founded by Erika Maude after she developed scoliosis and underwent treatment in Spain. Her treat-



Thirteen-year-old Paige Davis's passion for kickboxing is threatened by curvature of the spine

ment did not include surgery but instead depended on a series of exercises. Convinced it had been a success, Erika launched Scoliosis SOS in the UK where therapists are trained in a method known as ScolioGold.

"My sister-in-law read an article in a magazine about a girl who rode horses who has the same curvature as Paige and had been to Scoliosis SOS and had managed to avoid having the operation," recalls Tina.

"I was sceptical but I read the article and then I looked it up on the internet. We sent over our photographs and had a consultation on the phone and they said they could help us. But they made us no promises and never said it was a miracle cure."

And so, in the middle of August, Kevin, Tina, Paige and her 12-year-old sister

Kirstan, also a pupil at Perryfields School, spent a month in rented accommodation in Suffolk while Paige attended daily sessions at the centre.

The daily routine involved learning and practising exercise from 10am to 5pm Monday to Friday - mastering them so that Paige could continue the exercises at home.

"The exercises were basically aiming to elongate the back, straighten it and build up the muscles along the back. She was using bars, fit balls, all kinds of things," says her mum.

"They took measurements at the beginning of the month and again at the end of the month and they said there had been a small improvement.

"Because it would get worse as she continues to grow they are aiming to put a halt to the curvature getting any worse."

Since coming home, the family have converted a room into 'Paige's gym' and she has to follow the exercise regime for 45 minutes every day.

Once Paige stops growing she will still need to do the exercises for 30 minutes each day to keep her spine straight.

The course cost £2,500 as well as living costs but her parents believe it was well worth it - as long as the treatment works.

There is debate over the success of the method and Paige's family are refusing to be over-optimistic until they are able to see the proof.

With Paige having won UK and European championships in kickboxing, they are all hoping that by avoiding the operation she can carry on with the sport she enjoys.

"Our specialist said he understood why

we wanted to try it but he didn't think it would work," says Kevin.

"But we feel we have to try it as we would prefer for her not to have the operation.

"If she has the operation it will mean she can hardly do any sport and she loves it. Also, who would want to put their daughter through a ten-hour operation if there was an alternative?"

"We had X-rays done before she went to Suffolk and we intend to have more X-rays done in December. We felt we needed to give it enough time to work.

"We are trying to be positive about it but we may find later in the year that she still needs to have the operation."

Web: visit www.scoliosissos.com or phone 0330 440 1808 for more information