

Twisted spine is no obstacle to budding jockey

Joanne Ginley

ELLA Coulton is passionate about horses and always dreamed of becoming a professional jockey but her hopes were shattered when she was diagnosed with a severe curve in her spine.

Doctors told Ella her condition was so severe that she would need major spinal surgery but after learning about an intensive exercise programme she has turned a corner and is now back riding again.

The 14-year-old from York said yesterday: "I feel like I have been re-born, it's incredible the results I have."

"My back looks amazing and I have my energy back. My confidence has soared and I am so excited about getting back to riding and really focusing on horses and making it into a career. I am still very determined to make it as a professional jockey and as soon as I leave school this is something I am going to pursue."

"I am ecstatic that I have been able to avoid surgery; having surgery would have stopped me from being who I want to be and would have damaged my ability to ride," she added.

Ella was just 12 when she was diagnosed with a severe curve in her spine and told she needed an operation.

She was told her spine was so twisted and contorted she would never stand up straight again.

Ella had always been very fit and active until it became noticeable her shoulder blade was protruding on one side, she started getting tired far quicker than normal and complained of aches and pains in her back.

Riding teachers had noticed her lack of energy, saw her posture was getting worse and that she was struggling to sit up properly when she was riding.

Her family GP diagnosed a condition called scoliosis, which means curvature of the spine. The GP believed that her condition was particularly severe and she was referred to see an orthopaedic surgeon.

"Scoliosis completely rocked my world. I have always been



GALLOPING TO SUCCESS: Amy Ryan wins The Investec Asset Management Stakes at Epsom. PICTURE: PA WIRE

so passionate about riding, getting up on a horse and giving absolutely everything to performing but when I started feeling tired and getting pain down my back, it was really hard to stay motivated," Ella said.

Her family decided to do a bit of their own research into the treatment of scoliosis. The more they read, the more alarmed they became, after discovering the progressive condition needed to be treated as soon as possible.

When Ella received a referral and saw the orthopaedic specialist the fears she had that her condition was severe were confirmed. The family were told that Ella's curve was one of the worst they had seen and that her only option would be to have a 10-hour operation to fuse the spine from top to bottom.

Ella's life fell apart, she was facing the prospect of major risky surgery as her only option, and

her dream of riding professionally or a career with horses would be out of the question.

In a last attempt to find a solution, Ella and her family started to search the internet for alternative treatments and discovered Scoliosis SOS, a clinic based in London. Founded and run by Erika Maude, the clinic offers a programme of non-surgical treatments.

It creates a programme of specially-tailored exercises using a number of techniques such as osteopathy. They are designed to strengthen the muscles around the spine and improve posture.

Ella was booked into a four-week treatment course. Her family were not concerned about how she would cope with the exercises because she had always thrown herself in to everything throughout her life.

Her family overwhelmed with the results she has achieved and she is now able to focus on her dream of becoming a professional jockey.

Her determination to succeed comes as jockey Amy Ryan, also from North Yorkshire, recently tasted more success, when she became champion apprentice jockey.

Ella added: "I know I am young but I know what I want and I know that I will just need to go out and get it."



CONDITION CAN CAUSE SEVERE SPINE CURVE

SCOLIOSIS causes the spine to abnormally curve sideways.

The condition affects more than four per cent of the population and the severity of the curve can vary from very mild and barely noticeable to severe.

Most people have mild scoliosis and do not need any treatment.

When viewed on an X-ray the condition makes the spine can look like a C or S shape.

In the UK, scoliosis affects around three or four children out of every 1,000 and can develop at any time during childhood and during the teenage years.

In the vast majority of cases the condition corrects itself as the child grows. Of the remaining cases most can be treated but a few need surgery to correct the problem.

The condition can affect girls between the ages of ten and 14 at the start of their adolescence and is more common in girls than boys.

It is also a condition that affects those in later years. It is thought as many as seven out of ten older adults aged 65 or over have some degree of scoliosis.



HORSE SENSE: Fourteen-year-old Ella Coulton of York, left, aims to follow in the footsteps of champion apprentice jockey Amy Ryan from North Yorkshire, inset. PICTURE: PA

YORKSHIRE POST

Yorkshire's National Newspaper