

# 'I hated looking at myself...'

# I got dressed in the dark'

**AFTER** hearing her doctor's diagnosis, Emma Raisin was in shock.

Her mum had booked her in to see their family GP after she noticed her shoulder blade was protruding and her hips were uneven.

And Emma, a keen swimmer, who lives in Abbey Meads, was also experiencing severe shooting down one side of her back, and was struggling to keep up during her training sessions.

At the appointment, Emma, who was 15 at the time, was told she had a condition called scoliosis, which meant her spine was curved.

"I had no idea what scoliosis was until I was diagnosed. I had seen people with really bad posture before but I thought it was just down to how somebody would hold themselves. I didn't realise it was actually a medical condition and that it was a problem with how the bones are formed," she said.

"I was so upset when I was told about the curve in my spine. I hated what it made me feel about myself. I lost all of my confidence and just wanted to hide away from the world."

Scoliosis is a progressive condition that causes the spine to excessively curve sideways.

The condition affects more than four per cent of the population and if left untreated can lead to fatal heart and lung problems.

When the Raisin family returned home they researched treatments online, as they were keen to find out how the condition would affect Emma's passion for anything that involved being in the water.

The more they read though, the more alarmed they became.

Current treatment in this country involves a risky major operation where metal rods are inserted either side of the spine, before the spine is fused solid.

Emma, who is now 16, said: "I

could not stand seeing myself in a mirror and would get dressed without the lights on if I could. It completely changed everything for me. I was devastated. I was crying all of the time and I just fell apart.

"I had always loved being the centre of attention and having my family watch me swim; I was getting really good, training up to five times a week.

"When I was told that swimming and excessive exercise would put more pressure on my spine and it was something I should consider giving up, I was devastated."

In a desperate last attempt to find a miracle, Emma and her family started to search for alternative treatments.

It was around this time that she discovered Scoliosis SOS in London.

Founded and run by Erika Maude, who has scoliosis herself, the clinic opened seven-and-a-half years ago and 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 the combination of internationally renowned non-surgical treatments, which have been practiced separately in Europe for several decades.

Within weeks of being on the four-week treatment course, which involves exercises to strengthen the muscles surrounding her spine, Emma's condition dramatically improved.

She was no longer getting short of breath when doing exercise and her pain disappeared.



Emma Raisin in the pool

- Scoliosis is the abnormal curvature of the spine to the sides. Physical signs include:
  - a visibly curved spine
  - one shoulder or hip being more prominent than the other
  - clothes not hanging properly
  - a tendency to lean to one side

The cause of scoliosis is often not identified. This is known as idiopathic scoliosis and accounts for about eight out of every 10

Emma became more determined than ever to get her scoliosis under control when she saw how bad some of

the other patients' curves were and she also met a patient who had had her spine fused solid.

She made huge improvements and learned that her condition would not ruin her life if she kept up the exercises.

Emma, who has previously been recognised at competitions for her skills in the water, said she felt a massive sense of relief that she was not going to need surgery as it may have meant giving up swimming all together.

"I am so relieved to get back to what I love. I really didn't want to have surgery. Swimming is my life," she said.

"I was terrified of being different. I wanted to be normal again. I am so glad I found these exercises; they

had to have such a risky invasive procedure. I feel happier and like I have a more positive outlook.

"I just think although this diagnosis was terrible and completely rocked my world, there are a lot of things that could be worse.

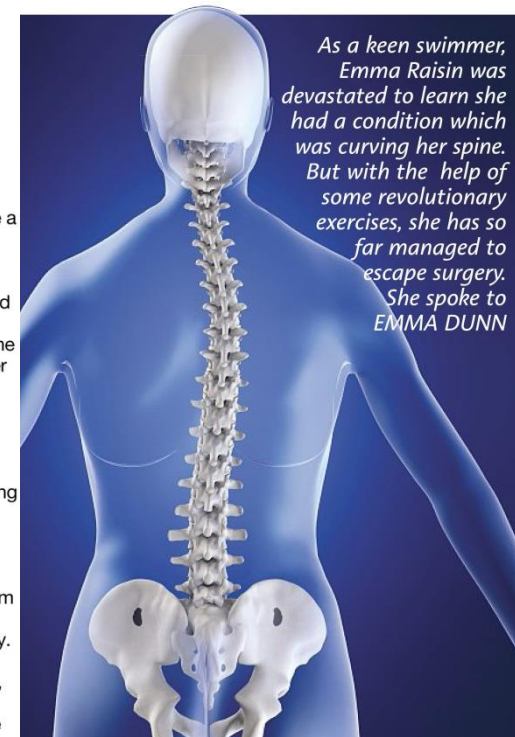
"My hopes are to continue to avoid the surgery and to keep my condition under control.

"I am really excited about how these exercises have put me back in control. It's crazy how much back pain can cause so much stress and so many problems. I am looking forward to getting everything back on track and being a normal girl."

Emma's mum, Claire, said: "Emma changed literally overnight; she had become so deflated and depressed from the diagnosis and I had seen her confident, happy personality drain away. As soon as she started treatment and met other girls with the same condition, she started to bounce back.

"It's so exciting to start looking to the future again. If she had ended up having surgery it would have been a nightmare."

● For more information visit <http://www.scoliosissos.com>.



As a keen swimmer, Emma Raisin was devastated to learn she had a condition which was curving her spine. But with the help of some revolutionary exercises, she has so far managed to escape surgery. She spoke to EMMA DUNN

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