

## Medical Illness Stressors

### Embarrassment about Back Problem Leads to Depression

I was diagnosed with scoliosis in the seventh grade. At first, it didn't bother me to have a curved spine; no one even knew except for my family. I was fitted for a back brace that I had to wear 23 hours a day. I hated every minute of it and was so embarrassed that I covered it up with baggy clothes. I stayed away from school dances and social events where kids could easily find out I was wearing a brace. I felt so ugly and deformed. I didn't know it then, but my illness caused me to be very depressed. I would cry myself to sleep every night, praying that I wouldn't have to wear the brace anymore. I never really told my parents how I felt about the brace and just tried to be positive. I ended up wearing the brace for 2½ years before I had a spinal fusion.

My depressed feelings didn't go away after having the spinal fusion. Instead of being embarrassed about the brace, I was embarrassed about my foot-long scar. I also had a lot of medical complications from the surgery and was in a lot of pain. I then had to deal with physical pain as well as the emotional pain. I didn't want to tell my parents because they suffered a lot through my surgery and I didn't want to cause them anymore grief. I couldn't hide it, though. They could see that I was losing weight, becoming more irritable and had no energy. My mom took me to the doctor and a therapist who treated me for depression. I began to feel a little better within a few weeks on the medication. After some time in therapy, the doctor took me off the medication, and I was able to cope with my problems on my own.