

Active Treatment for Idiopathic Adolescent Scoliosis (ACTivATeS): a feasibility study

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Plain English summary

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Plain English summary

Adolescent idiopathic scoliosis (AIS) is a three-dimensional twisting of the spine of unknown cause, resulting in a sideways curvature and sometimes an obvious hump. It affects approximately 2 in every 1000 children in the UK. Depending on the stage of growth and amount of spinal curvature, patients may be offered surgery or conservative treatment with progress monitored by a spinal consultant.

Current standard NHS care for those not requiring surgery is variable but generally consists of advice and monitoring, supplemented with bracing for a small minority of patients. Exercises are not routinely prescribed and, according to our up-to-date systematic review, there is limited evidence regarding whether or not exercises are beneficial.

The main study aim was to assess the feasibility of conducting a conclusive randomised controlled trial (RCT) comparing a scoliosis-specific exercise programme with routine NHS care for patients with AIS. The study aimed to find out if enough patients could be recruited and randomised to a pilot study and if there are enough patients to conduct a conclusive RCT by surveying specialist UK hospitals. It also refined and assessed the acceptability of the exercise programme and study processes to patients, parents and physiotherapists by reviewing literature and consulting with experts and patients.

There were sufficient numbers of patients recruited into the feasibility study to suggest that conducting a conclusive RCT is possible. Interviews with patients, parents and physiotherapists suggest that the exercise programme was acceptable. In conclusion, this supports the feasibility of a full RCT to evaluate clinical effectiveness and cost-effectiveness.

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