



FORESKIN CARE & PROBLEMS

What normally happens to the foreskin:

At birth, the foreskin is normally attached to the head of the penis (glans) by a layer of cells. The glans at birth is delicate and easily irritated by urine and feces. The foreskin protects the glans. Over the next 5-10 years, the foreskin will naturally separate from the head of the penis without any help. It gradually loosens up (retracts) a little at a time.

What problems can occur?

The foreskin generally causes no problems. However, forcing the foreskin back before it has fully loosened can cause it to get stuck behind the head of the penis, causing severe pain and swelling. If forceful retraction causes bleeding, scar tissue may form and interfere with natural retraction. Occasionally, the space under the foreskin becomes infected. Most of these problems can be prevented.

How can I take care of my child?

In general, the foreskin requires minimal care other than maintaining good hygiene.

During the first year of life, clean only the outside of the foreskin. Don't try to retract it.

Gentle, partial retraction can begin when your son is 1-2 years old. Once a week during bathing, gently pull the skin on the shaft of the penis downward toward the abdomen. This will make the foreskin open up, revealing the end of the glans. Be gentle - retraction should never cause pain or crying.

During retraction, clean the exposed part of the glans with water. Wipe away any whitish material (smegma) that you find there; it's just dead skin cells that are normally shed from the glans and lining of the foreskin. Do not use soap or leave soapy water under the foreskin as this may cause irritation. After cleaning, always pull the foreskin forward to its normal position.

Avoid vigorous retraction because this can cause pain, bleeding, or the foreskin to get stuck behind the head of the penis. Retraction is excessive if it causes any discomfort or crying.

By the time your son is 5-6 years old, teach him to retract his own foreskin and clean beneath it once a week during baths. Gentle reminders are necessary in the early years.

In general, foreskin retraction is overdone. Any degree of foreskin mobility is normal as long as your son's urine stream is normal. There is no rush to achieve full retraction; it will occur naturally by puberty.

When should I call my child's healthcare provider?

Call IMMEDIATELY if:

- The foreskin is pulled back and stuck behind the head of the penis
- Your child can't pass any urine
- Your child starts acting very sick

Call within 24 hours if:

- The foreskin looks infected (yellow pus, spreading redness or streaks)
- You have other concerns or questions