

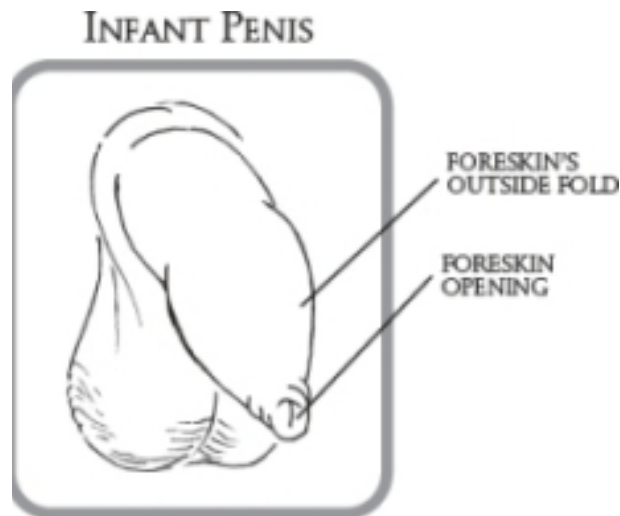
## FORESKIN CARE

### **Key points to remember about foreskin care**

- The foreskin and penis of an infant or child need no special care
- A child's foreskin should never be retracted (pulled back) by force
- There is no need to clean inside the foreskin in young boys; just wash the penis the same as any other part of your son's body and be careful to wash off any soap
- Once the foreskin is ready to be retracted, your son will most probably discover this for himself
- After the foreskin is easily retracted, your son should learn to do this as part of normal washing in the bath; make sure he rinses off any soap and pulls the foreskin back over the head of the penis afterwards

### **The Foreskin**

The foreskin is the loose skin that covers and protects the end or head (glans) of the penis. The inside fold of the foreskin is a mucous membrane which keeps the surface of the head of the penis soft, moist and sensitive.



### **Foreskin Care**

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During the first few years of life, the foreskin is stuck to the head of the penis by a membrane (called the synechia). This membrane or connective tissue dissolves naturally – a process that should never be hurried. It is normal for the foreskin not to retract in this age group. The foreskin can be retracted when its inside surface separates from the head of the penis and the foreskin's opening widens. This process happens naturally in childhood or during puberty, and has usually happened by the age of 18. Even if the head of the penis and the foreskin separate naturally in infancy, the foreskin may still not be able to be pulled back because the opening in an infant's foreskin may only be large enough for the passage of urine.

When a young boy pulls at his foreskin, he usually pulls it outward. This is normal and natural and no cause for concern; he won't hurt himself. Once the foreskin is ready to be retracted, your son will most probably discover this for himself. He should be the first person to retract his foreskin. Telling your son about retracting his foreskin beforehand will keep him from becoming alarmed the first time it happens.

### **Washing**

There is no need to clean inside the foreskin in young boys. Just wash the penis the same as any other part of your son's body and be careful to wash off any soap. When a boy is old enough to bathe himself, he can wash his own penis.

Once your son can retract (pull back) his foreskin, you can talk to him about retracting his foreskin and washing. A simple explanation of "how to" may be helpful:

- gently slip your foreskin back
- rinse the head of your penis and the inside fold of your foreskin with warm water
- slip your foreskin back in place over the head of the penis

Tell him to make sure he rinses off any soap before pulling the foreskin back over the head of the penis.

### **What happens if someone retracts (pulls back) my son's foreskin too early?**

Forcing the foreskin back before the natural separation of the foreskin from the glans has occurred causes tearing of the connective tissue. This is painful and can lead to problems:

- tearing the foreskin from the head of the penis leaves an open wound which can lead to infection
- the raw surfaces touching each other can heal together and form adhesions (areas that stick together) between the foreskin and the head of the penis leading to permanent problems with retraction (pulling back)
- small tears in the opening of the foreskin can heal to form non-elastic (non-stretchable) scar tissue, possibly causing acquired narrowing (phimosis)
- the foreskin can get "stuck" behind the head of the penis (paraphimosis)

### **Smegma**

The white lump (smegma) is made up of the cells that once attached the foreskin to the head of the penis. As new cells form on the head of the penis and the foreskin's inside fold, old cells form pockets that eventually work their way to the tip of the foreskin, where they can eventually be wiped away. So if you see a white lump (smegma) under the foreskin you know that the separation from the head of the penis is occurring naturally.

### **Ballooning**

This is another indication that the natural separation of the foreskin from the head of the penis is occurring, but the opening of the foreskin is still narrow. Ballooning can be normal but if it is severe so the flow of urine is restricted you should seek advice from your doctor. Encouraging boys to gently try and retract (pull back) the foreskin as part of daily hygiene can help. Sometimes a course of steroid cream is needed. Your doctor can advise you about this.

### **Phimosis**

Phimosis refers to a foreskin that cannot be retracted (pulled back) because its opening is too small to expand over the head of the penis. ***This is normal during infancy and childhood.*** In later childhood if the child is still unable to retract the foreskin, a course of steroid cream may be prescribed which thins the skin and helps it to stretch over the head of the penis.

### **Balanitis**

Sometimes the tip of the foreskin becomes reddened. This indicates the penis is irritated and the foreskin is doing its job of protecting the sensitive head of the penis and the opening in the penis where urine comes out (urinary meatus). If children are still in diapers it may be part of diaper rash. When bacteria in the stool react with urine, they produce ammonia, which burns the skin and causes nappy rash. Ways to prevent a reddened foreskin and diaper rash can include the following:

- changing diapers more frequently
- allowing diaper free times to allow air to circulate and help healing
- soaking in warm baths
- avoiding things that can irritate the skin (such as bubble baths, soap, highly chlorinated water, some laundry powders)
- encouraging your child to drink more so the wee is dilute (not too concentrated)

If the foreskin or penis is red, painful and swollen there may be an infection and you should see your doctor.