



MID-JERSEY PEDIATRICS

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NEWBORNS: CARE OF THE UNCIRCUMCISED PENIS

This handout explains what you need to know about caring for your newborn's uncircumcised penis. It will cover foreskin hygiene during infancy and puberty, and other medical information you should be aware of.

The Uncircumcised Penis

The penis consists of a cylindrical shaft with a rounded end called the glans. The shaft and glans are separated by a groove called the sulcus. The entire penis--shaft and glans--is covered by a continuous layer of skin. The section of the penile skin that covers the glans is called the foreskin or prepuce. The foreskin consists of two layers: the outer foreskin and an inner lining similar to a mucous membrane. Before birth, the foreskin and glans develop as one tissue. The foreskin is firmly attached--fused actually--to the glans. With time, the inner surface of the prepuce and the glans skin begin to separate by shedding the cells from the surface of each layer. Underlying skin layers of the glans and the inner foreskin lining are regularly replaced, not only in infancy but throughout life. The discarded cells accumulate as a whitish, paste-like secretion that gradually works its way out via the tip of the foreskin. This white material is normal and need only be wiped away when it appears on the surface.

Eventually--sometimes as long as 5, 10, or more years after birth--full separation of the foreskin occurs, and it may then be pushed back away from the glans toward the abdomen. This is called foreskin retraction.

The foreskin may retract during erections, which occur normally from birth on and even during fetal life.

All children discover their genitals as they become more aware of their bodies and may retract the foreskin themselves. If the foreskin does not seem to retract easily early in life, it is important to realize that this is not abnormal and that it should eventually do so.

Foreskin hygiene

The foreskin is easy to care for. The infant should be bathed or sponged regularly, and all parts, including the genitals, should be washed. The uncircumcised penis is easy to keep clean; no special care is required. **No attempt should be made to forcefully retract the foreskin.** No manipulation is necessary. There is no need for special cleansing with cotton swabs, irrigation, or antiseptics; external cleansing with soap and water is all that is required. Once your son's foreskin is fully retractable, he should be taught to cleanse under the foreskin regularly during his bath or shower.

Summary

Cleansing of the uncircumcised penis is quite easy. External washing and rinsing on a daily basis is all that is required. **Do not retract the infant's foreskin, as it is almost always attached to the glans. Forcing the skin back may cause pain, bleeding, and even adhesions. "Leave it alone" is good advice. The natural separation of the foreskin from the glans may take many years.**

Once the foreskin is fully retractable, your son can cleanse under it on a daily basis.