

The Foreskin: For Boys and their Parents

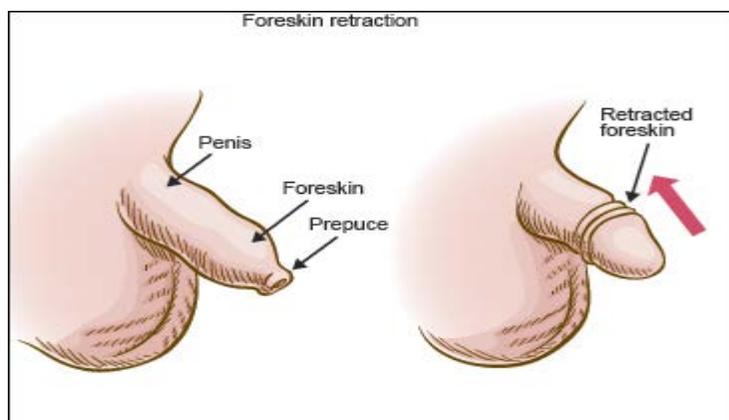
Normal Development

The foreskin is the loose skin that covers and protects the end or head of the penis. The inside fold of the foreskin keeps the surface of the penis head soft, moist and sensitive.

At birth, the inner foreskin is usually connected to the head of the penis, and the opening at the tip of the foreskin through which urine flows may be narrow. The foreskin with a narrow opening is prevented from being pulled back (retracted) to uncover the head of the penis. As your child gets older, the inner foreskin will gradually separate from the head of the penis and the foreskin opening will widen, allowing your son to gradually retract his foreskin. The age at which this occurs varies from child to child. It usually happens in childhood or during puberty but even later for some boys – about 1 to 2% of boys are still not able to retract their foreskin by 16–17 years of age.

It is important to remember that the foreskin should never be forcefully pulled back or retracted. This is not only painful but can lead to many problems such as:

- An open wound which can lead to infection.
- Raw surfaces between the head of the penis and the foreskin which then heal and stick together, so that retraction of the foreskin becomes impossible.
- Small tears in the foreskin opening that can form scar tissue – which can also make retraction of the foreskin impossible.
- Paraphimosis – a condition where the foreskin gets “trapped” in the retracted position warranting emergency medical attention.



Foreskin Care

In infants and boys whose foreskin cannot be retracted, there is no need to clean inside the foreskin. If the foreskin does not retract, there is nothing to clean under! Simply wash the foreskin the same as any other body part and be sure to rinse off the soap. For boys in diapers, frequent diaper changes are essential for preventing skin irritation.

Once the foreskin is easily retracted, teach your son to:

- Pull his foreskin back gently.
- Clean the skin and exposed surface of the head of the penis with gentle soap (not antibacterial soap) and warm water. Thoroughly rinse with water and dry the head of the penis with a towel.
- Return the foreskin to its usual position to cover the head of the penis.

Sources:

- 1) Foreskin Care For Boys. Canadian Urological Association. 2014. www.cua.org;
- 2) McGregor TB, Pike JG, Leonard MP. Pathologic and physiologic phimosis: approach to the phimotic foreskin. *Canadian family physician*. 2007;53(3): 445-448.

