



Your Whole Baby™

Dear Healthcare Provider,

Enclosed please find an educational pamphlet that you may photocopy and distribute to your staff and patients, or you can purchase more through YourWholeBaby.org. We have also included a sample of our intact care cards that we would be happy to supply your office at no cost. Your Whole Baby is sending these as part of our mission to provide gentle education on both proper intact care and the functions of the foreskin in an effort to promote genital integrity for all children.

Although the neonatal circumcision rate is steadily declining in our country, information about the foreskin is lacking in U.S. medical schools and textbooks. Many pediatricians and nurses continue to be taught outdated information about natural male anatomy, including the belief that the foreskin should be retractile by age four. This misinformation persists, despite recent studies that have shown that the mean age of foreskin retractability is closer to ten, with some boys not developing retractile foreskin until their late teens.¹ Although the AAP specifically warns against premature foreskin retraction,² many pediatricians and nurses continue to believe this is necessary and do not realize the complications their advice can cause, including but not limited to pain, bleeding, tearing, scarring, infection, and adhesions.³

It is our hope that these materials will be a valuable tool for you as you educate parents and patients when they are referred to you for conditions such as physiologic phimosis,⁴ a normal and harmless condition, or when they have been given misinformation on routine foreskin care.

Thank you for your time. We hope this information will help ensure your patients are cared for with the best and most accurate evidence-based care.

With sincere appreciation,

Jennifer Williams, Founder & Director, Your Whole Baby, 501(c)(3)

Adrienne Carmack, MD, Board-certified urologist and author of *The Good Mommy's Guide to Her Little Boy's Penis*

Alex Rotta, MD, Professor of Pediatrics, Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine

Ryan McAllister, PhD, author and presenter of "An Elephant in the Hospital"

*Your Whole Baby is a subsidiary of the 501(c)(3) nonprofit The Children's Rights Coalition

¹ See the following:

- Kayaba H., *et al.* (1996). Analysis of shape and retractability of the prepuce in 603 Japanese boys. *J Urol*, 156(5), 1813-5. The authors found that by ages 8-10, only 42% of boys were retractable, and by 11-15, this had increased to 62.9%.
- Thorvaldsen M.A., Meyhoff H. (2005). Patologisk eller fysiologisk fimose? *Ugeskr Læger*, 167(17), 1858-62. Researchers administering this survey found that the mean age of retraction in Denmark was 10.4 years.

² American Academy of Pediatrics. (2007; updated 2015, November 21). Care for an uncircumcised penis. Retrieved from <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/baby/bathing-skin-care/Pages/Care-for-an-Uncircumcised-Penis.aspx>. Of particular note: "As a boy becomes more aware of his body, he will most likely discover how to retract his own foreskin. But foreskin retraction should never be forced. Until the foreskin fully separates, do not try to pull it back. Forcing the foreskin to retract before it is ready can cause severe pain, bleeding, and tears in the skin."

³ Geisheker, J., Denniston, G. (n.d.) Forced retraction. Retrieved from <http://www.doctorsopposingcircumcision.org/info/info-forcedretraction.html>

⁴ Shahid, S. K. (2012). Phimosis in children. *ISRN Urology*. Regarding physiological phimosis, the authors state, "Around 96% of males at birth are noticed to have a nonretractile foreskin. This is due to naturally occurring adhesions between prepuce and glans and due to narrow skin of prepuce and 'frenulum breve.' The foreskin gradually becomes retractable over a variable period of time ranging from birth to 18 years of age or more."



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More Statements on Forced Retraction

“As a boy becomes more aware of his body, he will most likely discover how to retract his own foreskin. But foreskin retraction should never be forced. Until the foreskin fully separates, do not try to pull it back. Forcing the foreskin to retract before it is ready can cause severe pain, bleeding and tears in the skin.” **(The American Academy of Pediatrics)**

“At birth, the inner foreskin is usually fused to the glans. . . . This prevents it from being pulled back or retracted to uncover the glans. . . . The foreskin should never be retracted forcefully.” **(The Canadian Urological Association)**

“It has become quite common in the United States for doctors, nurses, and other parents to tell mummies that they need to retract their son's foreskin when he bathes. This is not true . . . your son's foreskin is able to separate on its own, with time. . . . Pulling on this sensitive tissue can cause tearing and lead to infections and scarring. Many boys who need emergency care and even circumcision . . . do so because of premature retraction of the foreskin . . .” **(Dr. Adrienne Carmack, Board-Certified Urological Surgeon and author of *The Good Mommy's Guide to Her Little Boy's Penis*)**

Summary of Intact Penis Care

- Never pull a child's foreskin back toward his body to “clean” under it, or for any reason.
- The foreskin is fused to the head of the penis, sometimes through puberty.
- The only person who should EVER retract the boy's foreskin is THE BOY HIMSELF.
- Catheters can safely be inserted without retraction in boys whose foreskin is still fused to the head of the penis.
- Forced retraction is painful and can cause bleeding, infection, scarring, and other complications.

For a reference list and more in-depth information on normal preputial development and care, including separation, ballooning, and smegma pearls, please visit:

www.YourWholeBaby.org/For-Healthcare-Providers.

Thank you for taking time to educate yourself on best practices for care of the intact (uncircumcised) penis!



Your Whole Baby.
YourWholeBaby.org

Avoiding Retraction Injuries: Correct Pediatric Foreskin Care



Forced retraction — pulling back a child's foreskin (prepuce) to **any** degree — is an ongoing problem in the U.S.A. Forced retraction can happen at the hands of, or the advice of, medical professionals. The nonprofit organizations Doctors Opposing Circumcision and Your Whole Baby receive hundreds of forced retraction complaints annually from parents of boys with intact (uncircumcised) penises, and many of these incidents happen at baby well-checks. It is likely that far more incidents go unreported, as some parents are unaware that the practice is harmful and not evidence-based. We send out educational materials on normal preputial development and penis care to healthcare providers to help prevent patient injuries.

Forced retraction is painful and can cause complications requiring corrective surgery. As the number of intact U.S. males increases, it is important for healthcare providers to educate themselves on correct intact penis care.

At What Age Does Foreskin Become Retractable?

Current research demonstrates wide variance in normal age of retractability. Some boys will be able to retract their foreskins before puberty, while other boys may not have retractable foreskins until the late teens.

A 2005 Danish study of more than 1,000 male children found **10.4 years** to be the average age participants were first able to retract their foreskins.¹

Two Japanese studies, together following 845 boys from birth, found that between one quarter and one third of healthy participants ages 11-15 were not yet able to retract their foreskins.^{2,3}

While some medical professionals may mistakenly assume the naturally adhered foreskin of a male patient is problematic, “The fused mucosa of the glans penis and the inner lining of the prepuce separates gradually over years, as a spontaneous biological process”⁴ and should not be forced apart. This natural fusion, sometimes incorrectly referred to as “adhesions,” dissolves on its own with hormone production and self-exploration.

The natural state of pediatric non-retractability is often erroneously termed “physiologic phimosis,” but it is not a condition requiring treatment. “The majority of referrals to pediatric urologists for circumcision constitute developmentally nonretractile foreskin rather than true [pathological] phimosis,”⁵ a condition that can actually result from forced retraction of the foreskin. Paraphimosis, a rare, often iatrogenic emergency condition where the foreskin becomes stuck behind the glans penis, can be avoided by not forcibly retracting the foreskin. Parents and healthcare providers sometimes express concern that a boy’s foreskin is “too tight” if his preputial sphincter does not allow visualization of the meatus, but this is a natural occurrence. Ballooning, spraying, and smegma pearls under the foreskin are also all normal aspects of preputial development.

Consequences of Forced Retraction

“... I have had to do circumcisions on young boys because of scarring ... that developed as a result of either doctors forcibly retracting their foreskins or parents doing it on doctor’s advice.” **(Dr. Adrienne Carmack, Board-Certified Urological Surgeon)**

“Forced retraction also may lead to cracking and bleeding of the foreskin tip. Over time, this may cause scarring of the tip making retraction impossible.” **(Canadian Urological Association)**

How to Clean an Intact Child's Penis – “If intact, don’t retract! Only clean what is seen!”

“The uncircumcised penis requires no special care. . . . It is important not to retract the foreskin forcefully for any reason. Some parents feel the need to pull the foreskin back to ‘clean under it.’ Since the young boy’s inner foreskin and the glans are initially fused, there is no space to clean.” **(The Canadian Urological Association)**

“No intrusive or interior cleaning of the genitalia . . . is ever needed or desirable, and aggressive hygiene is destructive of developing tissue and natural flora, and is harmful as well as painful.” **(Doctors Opposing Circumcision)**

“Soap irritates mucosal tissue and dries it out. . . . Don’t wash your baby’s foreskin with soap . . . just rinse the outside of the penis gently, from body to tip, as you would wash a finger.” **(Dr. Adrienne Carmack in *The Good Mommy’s Guide to Her Little Boy’s Penis.*)**

Once a male's foreskin has become retractable, he can simply pull back his foreskin and rinse with water, no soap, when bathing/showering. While this step can be suggested if the child is retractable before puberty, it should not be forced, as it still might cause him discomfort to pull back his foreskin.

Required Knowledge for Pediatric Physicians: Smegma, Ballooning, Yeast, and Redness

The following are normal aspects of penile development in intact (not circumcised) males and are not a cause for concern:

Smegma/Smegma Pearls

Smegma, a white amalgam of sloughed skin cells and moisture, is present underneath the foreskin of males and between the labia of females. At birth, the foreskin is fused to the glans (head) of the penis by a delicate epithelial membrane that dissolves naturally over time. Before the ongoing process of foreskin separation is complete, the smegma that forms may remain under the foreskin for some time and can form small lumps known as smegma pearls. These lumps are not cause for alarm and should not be removed manually, as they will eventually work their way out.

Ballooning

Ballooning is a normal and harmless occurrence that intact boys may experience. As the shared epithelial membrane that connects the prepuce to the glans begins to dissolve, pockets can form where the foreskin has separated. Urine can momentarily swirl around in these spots and briefly fill them up before exiting. This is often referred to as “ballooning” because it appears as just that: a balloon being blown up, then deflated.

The following are minor issues that can be easily treated and are not a cause for aggressive medical intervention:

Yeast

When a boy has an overgrowth of yeast, both the glans and the foreskin can appear swollen beyond their usual size, shiny, and more red/pink than usual. White patches or a red rash on the skin may also be present, as well as a cheesy, foul-smelling discharge. Just as with females, yeast infections can cause itching, discomfort, and pain for males. Yeast is easily treated in most cases with antifungals, diet changes, and breathable clothing.

Red/Irritated Foreskin Tip

Redness on the tip of the foreskin is a common occurrence on intact boys and is not cause for alarm. In its normal state, the foreskin tip frequently appears flushed or darker in color than the rest of the skin covering the penis. Typically, any increased redness will clear up on its own within a few days. Warm baths may help. Calmoseptine can also be used if redness persists.

Images and More information:

YourWholeBaby.org/smegma
YourWholeBaby.org/ballooning
YourWholeBaby.org/yeast



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