

Caring for Your Uncircumcised Baby Boy

Contributed by Jacque Shannon-McNulty

In countries where circumcision is rare, care of the intact penis is not a topic of discussion at all. "The prepuces have never been an object of interest or of manipulation by doctors or parents," Danish physician and researcher Dr. Jacob Oster noted, "because in Denmark, such a tradition has never existed."

In the United States, where routine circumcision has been the norm and most men becoming fathers are themselves circumcised, infant penis care has been a focus of concern for new parents. Baby boys healing from circumcision procedures require careful observation and regular wound care at every diaper change. U.S. parents have internalized the idea that their baby boy's penis requires special attention and concern.

In fact, it does not. Circumcision wounds require special care. Intact penises are healthy, functioning body parts, and their care is simple and straightforward.

Leave it alone

So how do parents take care of their baby's uncircumcised penis? With Zen-like wisdom and simplicity: leave it alone. Many people, including many pediatricians, mistakenly believe that it is necessary to retract or pull back the foreskin for cleaning. This is absolutely not the case. In fact, forcibly retracting the foreskin can create serious problems including intense pain and bleeding, even creating scarring and harmful adhesions that can cause long-term problems. Forcibly retracting the foreskin before it is naturally ready is the cause of the majority of childhood complications of the foreskin that necessitate later medical circumcision.

Infant foreskin is not like adult foreskin. The foreskin and glans need not even be considered separate in baby boys. Infant foreskin is naturally sealed to the glans of the penis, much like a fingernail is to the skin beneath. This creates a protective barrier, keeping the sensitive area between the foreskin and glans of the penis clean and free of infection.

As a child grows and develops, the tissue gradually sloughs off and over time, the foreskin becomes naturally retractable. This process is gradual and is generally completed at some point between early childhood and adolescence. It is less common, but still normal, that the foreskin could remain not fully retractable until much later. Danish research has indicated that when left alone, some boy's foreskin can maintain some adherence through adolescence, and it causes no problems.

The first person to retract a boy's foreskin should be the boy himself. Naturally as your son explores his own body during bathing, he will discover if his foreskin can retract. If he can retract it, then he can be taught to gently pull it back to clean underneath with water during bathing, then pull it back to its normal position.

Cleaning and hygiene

Intact baby boys only need basic cleaning. Common sense diaper care and washing the outside of the penis with warm water and a mild soap during bath time is all that is necessary. No creams, antiseptics or cotton swabs are needed to clean a healthy penis.

Some babies and children produce a substance called smegma, which appears white and has a waxy consistency. Smegma is normal and is common in intact boys, as well as in girls between their labial folds. Smegma is produced when dead cells slough off. If your little one has some smegma, simply wipe it off during a diaper change or in the bath with warm water.

It is also possible for intact baby boys to have a little redness at the opening of his penis from time to time. This is not related to the foreskin itself. Like every baby in diapers, a little redness in the diaper area most likely indicates a minor diaper rash. It is also possible that it could be irritation from chemicals in his diaper, harsh soap or bubble bath. If your son has sensitive skin, simply discontinue using the irritating product. Either way, clean him with warm water, keep him dry and if you can, let him be without a diaper and get some fresh air for awhile.

Ballooning

Many intact boys experience a phenomenon during urination illustratively called "ballooning." This occurs when some of the urine that is being passed fills up the end of the foreskin for a few seconds, like a balloon. It can be surprising or even alarming for some parents to see this, causing some to worry that their son's penile opening is too small.

The opening of a healthy intact penis is very tiny, naturally, like a pinhole. Ballooning merely indicates that the membrane between the glans and the foreskin is beginning to separate naturally. Because urine is sterile and contains no bacteria when it leaves the body, ballooning does not cause infection.

All in all, caring for your intact baby boy is not about any physical care required. The obstacle really is the paradigm shift necessary for parents and caregivers of intact baby boys. Our culture envisions a circumcised penis and all of the care it requires as normal. Parents, grandparents and caregivers of intact baby boys simply need to shift their view of normal: a whole, healthy, intact baby boy, perfect just as nature intended.

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<http://www.naturalfamilyonline.com/go/index.php/180/uncircumcised-care/#more-180>

Resources

Ask Dr. Sears Web site of Dr. William Sears, author of The Baby Book

National Organization of Circumcision Information Resource Centers Comprehensive information for parents who choose not to circumcise

Oster, MD., Jacob, "Further Fate of the Foreskin," Archives of Diseases of Childhood, vol 43, no. 228, April 1968, p. 200-203.

Briggs, Anne, Circumcision: What Every Parent Should Know, [ISBN: 0961548401] Birth and Parenting Publications, 1985.

"Newborns: Care of the Uncircumcised Penis, A Parent's Guide," From the American Academy of Pediatrics; includes anatomical diagram