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## **Hygiene for your son's uncircumcised penis**

Many parents who have chosen not to have their son circumcised have questions about how to care for the penis. They also want to know what is "normal" for a penis that has foreskin - the skin that covers the head of the penis.

When a boy is born, the foreskin is not usually retractable. This means that it can not be pulled back over the head of the penis (called the glans). A normal process occurs that gradually separates the foreskin from the glans. The penis sheds skin cells, which may look like whitish pearls, lumps, or bumps under the foreskin. These cells, called smegma, are part of the separation process. Erections aid in this process, causing the foreskin to retract or loosen up a little at a time.

The foreskin separates from the glans bit by bit until it can be retracted (pulled back) without difficulty. This occurs in most boys by the time they are 5 years old, but the age varies for each child; in some boys, the foreskin may stay partially stuck to the head of the penis until puberty. The foreskin should never be forcibly retracted, as this may cause pain and bleeding and may result in scarring and trouble with natural retraction.

### **Care and cleaning of the penis**

The foreskin of an infant's penis needs no special care. The most important thing to remember is not to force the foreskin to retract. Wash the penis regularly when you give your son a bath. Avoid most soaps or cleansing agents because they can irritate the penis; water is usually sufficient for cleansing.

Frequent diaper changes to keep urine and feces away from the skin decrease skin irritation, helping to prevent diaper rash, which can occur on just the penis or scrotum or on any part of the diaper area. Diaper creams containing zinc oxide are useful if a rash does develop, as they create a protective barrier.

Once the foreskin separates easily from the glans, gently retract and clean underneath the foreskin with a washcloth and water at least once a week. After cleansing, always put the foreskin forward to its normal position to cover the head.

Teach your son to retract the foreskin and clean on a regular basis as he takes more responsibility for his own bathing, usually during the preschool years. As he gets older and bathes alone, verbally remind him about proper penile hygiene; the foreskin should be cleaned with each bath or shower.

### **Possible problems**

- The opening of the foreskin should allow a normal urine stream. If you notice that the stream is weak or dribbling or your son appears to have difficulty or discomfort when urinating, talk to your pediatrician.
- If the foreskin has swelling, redness, or yellow pus - signs of a possible infection - seek medical advice.
- If the foreskin is pulled back and gets stuck behind the head of the penis, immediately seek medical treatment. This is an unusual problem, which can usually be avoided by routinely replacing the foreskin back over the head following retraction.
- If the foreskin cannot be retracted at all and the opening of the head of the penis cannot be seen by the time your son is 5 years old, talk to your pediatrician.

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