

Should my son be circumcised?

Paediatric surgeon Ong Lin Yin answers questions about penile hygiene, caring for your son's foreskin and circumcision

The foreskin is a sheath of skin that covers the head of the penis (glans). In most baby boys, it is stuck to the glans and cannot be pulled back (retracted). As they grow older, the foreskin can be retracted back over the glans, exposing the hole where the pee comes out (urinary meatus). This is a gradual process, and may only be complete after puberty.

Paediatric surgeon Ong Lin Yin shares more on how parents can care for their baby's foreskin to prevent infection and inflammation.

Q How should I care for my son's foreskin and what if it can't be fully retracted?

Good penile hygiene is important as it is common for small amounts of urine to remain within the foreskin after a pee, causing irritation and infection.

If your son's foreskin can be retracted, it should be done gently when showering to expose the glans for cleaning. After this, the foreskin should be returned to its original position, covering the glans.

If the foreskin is only partially retractile, parents may aid the separation process by gently retracting the foreskin on a regular basis. Do not forcibly retract the foreskin if it remains tight or if the child complains of pain when doing so.

Q How are some common problems with my son's foreskin treated?

Some common potential problems include:

- **Phimosis:** A condition where the foreskin is very tight and cannot be retracted. This is normal in younger boys, and only requires treatment if it is causing persistent irritation, infection such as balanitis, or a condition called paraphimosis. Your son may be prescribed a cream to help with retraction of the foreskin.
- **Balanitis or balanoposthitis:** Infection or inflammation of the glans or foreskin. Your son



Proper care of your son's foreskin can help prevent infection.
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may experience pain from passing urine, redness of the foreskin and swelling. There may also be pus discharge. This is usually treated with antibiotics.

- **Balanitis xerotica obliterans:** A long-term infection of the foreskin. Left untreated, it can scar the glans and lead to narrowing of the meatus. Your child is likely to experience frequent pain and bleeding of the foreskin, as well as difficulty peeing. An early circumcision is recommended in order to minimise complications.

- **Paraphimosis:** A condition where the foreskin is retracted over the glans, gets stuck and cannot be returned to its original position. This causes pain and swelling of the glans. If the foreskin is not reduced urgently, the blood supply to the glans can be also be affected.

Q Is it necessary to circumcise my son and what are the possible complications?

Circumcision is an irreversible procedure to remove the foreskin, leaving the glans permanently uncovered. Medical indications, religion or cultural beliefs are common reasons for circumcision.

Should you wish to circumcise your son, it's best to first discuss it with your surgeon as there are still risks and complications, though uncommon. There are also different techniques of circumcision, and the final appearance of the penis may differ depending on the technique and your son's penile anatomy.



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