

Intact (Not Circumcised) Penis Care

Caring for a child's intact penis is far easier than you might have heard — there is no special cleaning involved.

Basic Intact Penis Information

To clean, wipe the outside of the penis from base to tip during diaper changes. That's it!

- A child's foreskin is naturally fused to the glans (head of the penis) to protect his developing genitals. On average, the shared membrane between foreskin and glans fully separates around age 10, with a wide range of normal. For some healthy children, the process of foreskin-glans separation lasts through puberty.^{1,2,3}
- **Never try to retract (pull back) a boy's foreskin** to clean under it. Retraction by a caregiver can be very painful and can cause bleeding, infection, scarring, and other complications.⁴
- The only person who should **ever** retract a child's foreskin is the child himself, and only if the fused membrane has dissolved naturally. Once a male's foreskin is fully retractable, he can simply pull it back in the shower or tub, rinse with water (no soap), and replace it to its forward position.
- Before any physical examination begins, it is **crucial** that you make sure your doctor knows not to retract your son's foreskin **for any reason — not even a little**.
- Many parents employ a "**look but don't touch**" policy for their children's genitals during checkups. You can simply say, "Please do not touch his penis. If you need to look at something in his diaper area, ask me and I will physically assist."

Bathing

Just wash your whole baby in the bath. Again, do not attempt to clean under the foreskin. Be cautious with bubble baths, and don't use soap directly on the genitals, as this can cause irritation for both boys and girls. Gently rinsing with warm water is enough to keep the penis clean.⁵

It's so easy! Simply remember: "When intact, do not retract. Only clean what is seen."

¹ Thorvaldsen, M.A., & Meyhoff, H. (2005, April 25). Patologisk eller fysiologisk fimose? *Ugeskr Læger*, 167(17), 1858-62.

² Ishikawa, E., & Kawakita, M. (2004, May). Preputial development in Japanese boys. *Hinyokika Kyo*, 50(5), 305-8.

³ Kayaba, H., Tamura, H., Kitajima, S., Fujiwara, Y., Kato, T., & Kato, T. (1996, November). Analysis of shape and retractability of the prepuce in 603 Japanese boys. *Journal of Urology*, 156(5), 1813-5.

⁴ Your Whole Baby. (2017). Avoiding retraction injuries: correct pediatric foreskin care. Retrieved from <http://www.yourwholebaby.org/forced-retraction>

⁵ National Health Service. (2015, April 20). How to keep a penis clean. Retrieved from <http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/penis-health/Pages/how-to-wash-a-penis.aspx>. *Because this article discusses the care of the adult penis as opposed to an infant's or child's penis, it references retracting the foreskin. However, the article's caution against using harsh soaps on the genitals is relevant for all ages.*

Special Considerations

Redness and/or Irritation

The tip of the foreskin is highly vascularized, and it can appear flushed or darker in color than the rest of the penis skin. Typically, additional redness resulting from exposure to irritants (e.g. soap, rubbing against the diaper, etc.) will resolve on its own once the irritant is identified and removed. A barrier cream may help. Persistent irritation, swelling, or discharge from yeast (candida) overgrowth or bacterial infection can be treated easily with topical cream or oral medication, just as it would be in a female patient. Probiotics may help restore and maintain optimal microbial balance, which can be disrupted by yeast overgrowth or antibiotics. Please see www.yourwholebaby.org/yeast for more information on probiotic treatment.

Smegma/Smegma Pearls

Smegma is a natural lubricant produced by all human genitals. In non-retractable males, small pearls of smegma occasionally may be present as visible lumps beneath the fused foreskin — this is normal, and they will resolve on their own. Once the foreskin is retractable, smegma pearls will no longer form, but the body will continue to produce smegma. This can easily be washed away from the glans (and the vulva in females) when the genitals are rinsed with warm water.

Ballooning

As a boy's fused membrane begins to separate, urine can swirl around the head of the penis inside the foreskin before it exits, giving the foreskin a brief ballooned appearance during urination. Ballooning is normal, beneficial, and temporary.

Catheterization

Unless a child is able to retract his own foreskin, catheterization can and should be done without retracting the foreskin.⁶ Learn more at yourwholebaby.org/catheters-urine-samples.

A Few Functions of the Foreskin

- The foreskin keeps the glans healthy, clean, moist, and sensitive.^{7,8}
- The sphincter-like tip of foreskin protects the urethra from contaminants.⁷
- The foreskin is densely populated with nerve endings that transmit fine-touch sensations.⁷
- The frenulum, which attaches the foreskin to the shaft (and is often partially or fully removed during circumcision), is a highly sensitive and pleasurable part of the adult male genitals.⁸

For more resources on intact penis care, including a printable brochure on forced retraction to share with your child's healthcare provider, visit www.yourwholebaby.org/basic-intact-care.

⁶ Carmack, A., & Milos, M.F. (2017, March). Catheterization without foreskin retraction. *Canadian Family Physician*, 63(3), 218–20. Retrieved from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5349724/>

⁷ Cold, C.J., & Taylor, J.R. (1999, January). The prepuce. *British Journal of Urology*, 83(Suppl 1), 34-44.

⁸ Sorrells, M.L., Snyder, J.L., Reiss, M.D., Eden, C., Milos, M.F., Wilcox, N., & Van Howe, R.S. (2007, March 19). Fine-touch pressure thresholds in the adult penis. *British Journal of Urology International*, 99(4). DOI: 10.1111/j.1464-410X.2006.06685.x