

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 mommies 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.
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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.