



Phimosis

What is Phimosis?

Phimosis (pronounced fy-MOH-sis) is the inability to retract the foreskin behind the tip (also called the “head” or “glans”) of the penis in an uncircumcised child. This is a normal finding in children under 5 years old. There are two types of phimosis: **physiologic** and **pathologic**.

Physiologic phimosis: Phimosis is a normal finding in newborn boys where the inner surface of the foreskin is fused to the glans of the penis. As this inner surface begins to shed skin cells (called smegma), the foreskin naturally separates from the glans over time. Smegma may appear as a white cheesy material or small pearls. Sometimes smegma collects between the layers of the glans and inner foreskin—these are not cysts and they usually work their way out through the tip of the foreskin. Physiologic phimosis usually resolves around the age of 5 years but some may take longer. No treatment is necessary for physiologic phimosis.

Pathologic phimosis: This type of phimosis occurs as a result of inflammation, infection, or scarring. If this is accompanied by ballooning of the foreskin during urination, infection of the foreskin (balanitis), urinary tract infections, difficulty or pain with urination, or painful erections, treatment may be necessary.

Care of the Uncircumcised Penis

For infants, there is no special care needed—just regular bathing. Never forcibly retract the foreskin. As the foreskin begins to retract over time, gentle retraction and cleansing beneath the foreskin during diaper changes or at bath time should be part of daily hygiene routine. A child should not experience pain during gentle retraction. The foreskin should be replaced over the head of the penis in its natural anatomic position after retraction. When child is potty trained, he should retract the foreskin while urinating and be taught daily hygiene of the fully retracted foreskin.

How to treat pathologic phimosis?

Treatment options include daily gentle manual retraction, a cream or ointment to help loosen the foreskin, or circumcision.

Topical Corticosteroid Therapy

A topical steroid cream or ointment called Betamethasone Dipropionate aids in softening the foreskin, allowing for easier retraction. To use: gently retract the foreskin and apply a small amount of ointment into the tightest ring of foreskin around the penis. When the foreskin can be fully retracted, the cream can be discontinued. Note: Gently retracting the foreskin should not cause pain. The topical steroid cream should not be used for longer than 4-6 weeks at a time unless otherwise directed.

Circumcision

Surgical removal of the foreskin under general anesthesia.

Questions

If you have any questions or concerns, please call your provider at Pediatric Surgical Associates at (612) 813-8000 or 1-800-992-6983.