

Phimosis

Treatment Options

This handout explains the condition phimosis (fy-MO-sis), how to care for it, how to treat it if it's mild, moderate or severe, and when to call the doctor.

What is phimosis?

- Phimosis is when the hood of skin (called foreskin) around the head of the penis is too tight or too narrow.
 - Phimosis can lead to infections or trouble peeing.
 - Any uncircumcised penis with foreskin could experience phimosis. However, some babies are born with foreskin tighter than others (we call conditions you are born with congenital). Most babies born with phimosis will outgrow it by 5 years of age.
 - We might recommend steroid cream to loosen the foreskin or a surgery to remove the foreskin (circumcision).
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How do I care for phimosis?

To prevent infection or the foreskin from getting narrower, please follow these care guidelines:

- Never pull back (retract) the foreskin by force. It can be painful, and you could tear or scar the penis. If that happens, we may need to do a circumcision surgery to repair it.
 - Wash your baby's penis during bath time with gentle soap and lukewarm water.
 - If your child is toilet trained, teach them to gently pull the foreskin back if they can when they pee or bathe. This prevents pee from collecting under the foreskin and allows the area to be cleaned.
 - If your child is in diapers, gently pull the foreskin back when you change or bathe them. Always return the foreskin to the correct position after peeing or bathing and cover the head of the penis.
 - You may notice white clumps under the foreskin. This is not an infection. This is called smegma, and it is the body's natural way to lubricate the area. Do not forcibly clean off the smegma.
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How is phimosis treated?

Your doctor will let you know if your child has a mild, moderate or severe case of phimosis.

Mild phimosis

- For mild cases, we expect the tightness of the foreskin to get better with time.
 - Your provider will discuss the care instructions noted above. This is a common treatment plan for children under age 4 years old.
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To Learn More

- Urology
206-987-2509
- Ask your child's healthcare provider
- seattlechildrens.org

Free Interpreter Services

- In the hospital, ask your nurse.
- From outside the hospital, call the toll-free Family Interpreting Line, 1-866-583-1527. Tell the interpreter the name or extension you need.



- Review and follow this care handout after the foreskin loosens, and your child can completely retract it.
- For more information, see this American Academy of Pediatrics handout “Care for an Uncircumcised Penis.”
[healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/baby/bathing-skin-care/pages/Care-for-an-Uncircumcised-Penis.aspx](https://www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/baby/bathing-skin-care/pages/Care-for-an-Uncircumcised-Penis.aspx)

Moderate phimosis

- On some children, the foreskin is even more narrowed.
- Routine cleaning may not loosen the foreskin enough to provide healthy penis care.

Instructions for steroid cream use:

- Your provider may prescribe a steroid cream called betamethasone valerate 0.1% (Valisone). You may need prior authorization for this medicine before your insurance will cover it.
- Gently pull the foreskin back exposing the head of the penis as much as possible **without** causing pain.
- Apply a dab (a pea-sized amount) of cream to the foreskin allowing it to absorb.
- Do this twice a day for 6-8 weeks depending on what your provider recommends.
- The cream may make the area slightly red or discolored. The color change happens because blood vessels are close to the skin and are reacting to the medicine. The redness or discoloration will go away after you stop using it.
- Stop using steroid cream after the 6-8 weeks and use petroleum jelly (Vaseline) instead. Use the petroleum jelly until your follow-up evaluation.
- Call the urology office if you notice signs of infection such as spreading redness, pain, swelling, yellow or green discharge with odor or fever.
- This video shows you how to apply steroid cream: “Using Steroid Cream to Treat Phimosis.”
youtu.be/ghhAMc-rT_k

Severe phimosis

- For some children, the foreskin is so tight that it will likely never be able to retract in a healthy way. Your provider may recommend a circumcision. We perform circumcisions in an operating room.
- We will give your child medicine (general anesthesia) for this procedure, so they will be fully asleep and not feel pain. General anesthesia can be given through an IV (intravenous) tube that goes into a vein or by breathing in gas.
- For more information, see our handout “Circumcision: Care After Surgery.”
seattlechildrens.org/pdf/PE151.pdf

When do I call?



Monday to Friday, call the Urology Clinic at **206-987-2509** for questions or any of the concerns listed below. Send MyChart messages for non-urgent questions.

Nights, weekends and holidays, call **206-987-2000** and ask for the urology resident on call for urgent concerns from the following list:

- Fever higher than 101.5° F (38.6° C)
- Redness, swelling or discharge (fluid) from the wound
- Pain when they pee (urinate)
- White bands across the foreskin
- The foreskin has a pale color (blanching)
- The foreskin swells up when they pee
- Throwing up (vomiting) 4 or more times in 12 hours

Go to your local emergency room if:

- They have not peed for 8 hours
- The foreskin is pulled back and you cannot return it to its normal position covering the head

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