

PATIENT INFORMATION LEAFLET

PENILE SKINCARE

WHAT ARE THE AIMS OF THIS LEAFLET?

This leaflet has been written to help you understand about the skin of the penis and how to care for it. Many conditions can affect the skin of the penis. Sometimes, these conditions affect the penis only, and sometimes the penis is affected as part of a problem affecting other areas of the body. Good penile skin care is part of the treatment for many conditions affecting this area.

This leaflet does not discuss specific skin conditions affecting the penis. For more information on such skin conditions, check out the section '*Where can I get more information?*' at the bottom of this leaflet.

WHAT SHOULD I KNOW ABOUT PENILE SKIN?

Penile skin refers to the skin covering the penis. If you are not circumcised, a fold of skin called the foreskin covers the tip of the penis, called the glans or head. The rim of the glans is called the corona, and this may be studded with small shiny or skin-coloured bumps, known as pearly penile papules. These are normal. At the very end of the glans is a thin opening, known as the urethral meatus. This is where urine and semen come out.

The foreskin should be easily retractable (pulled back) and replaceable (pulled forward) over the glans. In boys, the foreskin cannot usually be pulled back (do not forcibly try) until puberty in most cases. By the age of 18, the foreskin should be easily pulled back.

- Tightness of the foreskin (known as phimosis) can be a sign of skin disease; seek medical attention from your General Practitioner (GP) if you notice this.
- It is a medical emergency if the pulled-back foreskin gets stuck and cannot be pulled forward again over the head. The foreskin

can swell and become painful. Seek urgent medical attention.

If the foreskin cannot be pulled back by age 18, seek medical advice from your GP. Check the entire penis regularly for any changes. Pull back the foreskin, if it is present. Look for rashes or changes in colour, any new or changing lumps or bumps, warts, **boils** or sores. See a healthcare professional if you have any concerns.

WHAT SHOULD I KNOW ABOUT CARING FOR THE SKIN OF MY PENIS?

- Tight clothing and underwear can cause friction and irritate penile skin. Try to avoid these.
- Keep pubic hair trimmed as it can get trapped between the foreskin and the penis. This can cause tiny scratches (micro-scratches) and irritation to the glans or pull on the urethral meatus and worsen urine leakage.
- Penile skin can be easily affected by irritants and friction. Keeping the penis clean and away from irritants will help with itchiness and soreness.
- A simple **emollient** (moisturiser) can be applied to soothe, protect, and act as a barrier to irritants such as urine. Your healthcare professional can recommend suitable simple, non-fragranced emollients.
- The most common irritant is urine. Tiny amounts of urine can leak from the meatus and get trapped under the foreskin if it is present, which can lead to inflammation.
- To reduce leakage, when urinating, gently pull back the foreskin to expose the urethral meatus. When finished, shake the penis, or gently squeeze from the

base of the penis shaft to the glans two to three times, to push out and expel any remaining urine. The meatus can be dabbed dry with plain tissue paper.

Applying a small amount of emollient to the glans, before replacing your foreskin, will provide a barrier against leakage. Do not insert emollient into the meatus.

- Smegma is the build-up of leaked urine, semen, and dead skin cells shed from the foreskin and glans as part of normal skin wear-and-tear. It is another irritant and cause an unpleasant smell.
- Avoid using deodorants and cologne around or on the penis. Fragrances can be irritants for penile skin, especially the glans, such as in cleansing (wet) wipes which should be avoided.
- If applying topical steroid, as prescribed by your clinician, do not apply it at the same time as the emollient. Allow a gap of 15-30 minutes before or after applying emollient.

HOW SHOULD I WASH MY PENIS?

- Washing should be performed with a non-fragranced, non-soap wash. Soaps and bubble baths contain additives such as sodium lauryl sulphate, which are strong irritants.
- Clean the penis with the wash suds (foam) rather than applying the wash product directly to the penis.
- Simple **emollients** should be used instead of soap.
- Gently remove any smegma when washing. Applying emollient before washing will soften tough smegma and make cleaning easier.
- After washing, apply a thin layer of emollient to the glans. This acts as a urine-proof barrier, provides hydration, and helps with skin healing.

Excessive washing may remove natural oils on the skin and lead to dryness and irritation. Avoid scented tissues or wipes, and simply pat-dry.

ARE ANY PRECAUTIONS NEEDED DURING SEXUAL INTERCOURSE OR MASTURBATION?

- Use water-based lubricants to avoid friction and skin tearing. Lubricated condoms can also help reduce aggravation.
- Use the correct condom size for your penis. Too tight or too loose a condom may cause friction and irritation, or the condom may break.
- Latex condoms can be weakened by moisturisers left on the skin. Use non-latex condoms.
- After sexual intercourse or ejaculation, urinate to flush out any semen. This reduces later leakage and smegma.

CAN MY HEALTH AFFECT THE SKIN OF MY PENIS?

- Smoking is a risk factor for skin cancers, including penile cancer. There are many smoking cessation services. Your local chemist or GP can recommend freely available resources.
- Good sugar control in people with diabetes can prevent infections such as thrush.

CAUTION:

This leaflet mentions 'emollients' (moisturisers). Emollients, creams, lotions, and ointments contain oils. When emollient products get in contact with dressings, clothing, bed linen, or hair, there is a danger that they could catch fire more easily. There is still a risk if the emollient products have dried. People using skincare or haircare products should be very careful near naked flames or lit cigarettes. Wash clothing daily and bedlinen frequently if they are in contact with emollients. This may not remove the risk completely, even at high temperatures. Caution is still needed. More information may be obtained at <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/safe-use-of-emollient-skin-creams-to-treat-dry-skin-conditions>.



WHERE CAN I GET MORE INFORMATION?

Weblinks to leaflets on penile skin conditions:

www.bad.org.uk/pils/lichen-sclerosus-in-males/

www.bad.org.uk/pils/lichen-sclerosus-in-male-children/

www.bad.org.uk/pils/lichen-planus/

www.bad.org.uk/pils/zoons-balanitis/

Please note that the British Association of Dermatologists (BAD) provides web links to additional resources to help people access a range of information about their treatment or skin condition. The views expressed in these external resources may not be shared by the BAD or its members. The BAD has no control of and does not endorse the content of external links.

This leaflet aims to provide accurate information about the subject and is a consensus of the views held by representatives of the British Association of Dermatologists: individual patient circumstances may differ, which might alter both the advice and course of therapy given to you by your doctor.

This leaflet has been assessed for readability by the British Association of Dermatologists' Patient Information Lay Review Panel

**BRITISH ASSOCIATION OF
DERMATOLOGISTS**

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