

Boys' problems

Phimosis is a condition when the foreskin of the penis is too tight to be retracted over the glans (head). Ineffective cleansing of the area may result in infection. Phimosis may also cause pain during erection and increase the risk of cancer.

Most boys are born with non-retractable foreskins. Foreskins start to become retractable with age (retractable foreskins occur in around 50 per cent of five-year-olds and 90 per cent of 10-year-olds). It is therefore not necessary for most infants to have circumcision.

Applying steroid cream to the foreskin is one form of treatment. The effect takes place after a few weeks of applying the cream. Once the foreskin is retractable, daily retraction and cleansing is needed to prevent recurrence. But if infections keep occurring, circumcision should be considered. This can usually be done without having to stay in hospital.

Undescended testis (when the testicle does not move down from the abdomen to the scrotum) is relatively common among newborns (3-4 per cent). In normal embryology (early development of organisms) the testes travel down to the scrotum from abdomen. In the case of babies with undescended testis, the normal descent is interrupted and the testis fails to reach its normal position. If the testis is left in the abnormal position, there is a higher risk of infertility and cancer.

Sometimes, the testis takes up to six months after birth to move from the abdomen to the scrotum. If it is not in the scrotum by then, surgery should be considered. The operation involves making an incision of about one inch in the groin area. The testis is then separated from the tissues surrounding it and pulled down to the scrotum. In some cases where the testis is positioned in the abdomen, surgery is done in two stages. It should be noted that despite surgery, some testes (up to 15 per cent) continue to shrink and become weak and waste away because of inherent abnormalities.