



Condoms and a headstrong foreskin

Question

Dear Alice,

I believe I have a mild case of phimosis. When my penis is not erect, I can retract my foreskin all the way back to reveal the glans. However, when I have a full erection, it is impossible to retract the foreskin to that extent. I can only retract it to reveal the slit and top part of the penis. Due to this problem, I have a question about condom use. I'm still a virgin, so I have never experienced intercourse using a condom. When I read the instructions on how to use a condom, they almost always instruct you to retract the foreskin completely if you are not circumcised. Since I cannot retract the foreskin while erect, is it still possible to use a condom without retracting the foreskin, and will this complication affect slippage of the condom or sensation problems during intercourse? On a side note, why is it recommended to retract the foreskin fully before putting on the condom? Thank you in advance.

— Curious

Answer

Dear Curious,

It's great that you're thinking ahead about safer sex. It'll probably help make your sex life more relaxed and pleasurable, not to mention protect your health and that of your future partner(s).

Phimosis is a condition in males in which the uncircumcised foreskin is too tight to be pulled back over the head of the penis. (For most males, it isn't possible to retract the foreskin fully until puberty.) It can occur naturally or result from scarring due to infection or forceful retraction of the foreskin during bathing or sex. This tightness may cause pain during intercourse or get in the way of urination.

People — including those with phimosis — are encouraged use condoms to reduce the risk of pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections. Pulling back the foreskin when putting on a condom maximizes the free movement of the foreskin during sex, enhancing sensation. If phimosis prevents you from pulling back the foreskin, the condom can just be rolled down over the foreskin. Adding a few drops of water-based lube to the inside and outside of the condom may enhance pleasure and sensation for you and your partner. As long as you put the condom on properly (squeeze the tip of the condom to get rid of air bubbles, and roll it all the way to the base of the penis), whether or not you pull the foreskin back shouldn't increase the likelihood of condom breakage or slippage. Slipping is usually only an issue if someone has problems maintaining an erection.

If phimosis results in pain during sex, or if it impedes urination or leads to infection, several treatments are available. These may include gently stretching the foreskin, using a medicated cream, creating a slit in the foreskin, or circumcision. Speak with your health care provider to figure out what's best for you.

As with all matters sexual, practice and experimentation can lead to greater pleasure. No need to wait for a partner, you can try out different kinds of condoms on your own, with and without extra lube on the inside or

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outside, with partial retraction of the foreskin and without. What feels best to you? Every body is different, and the better you know your body and what you like, the better (and safer) your sex life is likely to be!

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