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## Going Back to Square One

# Circumcision Reversal Gains in Popularity

Greg Toppo

*The New Mexican*, p. C-1, November 29, 1996

followed by [Letter to Editor from Christopher Fletcher, M.D.](#) December 11, 1996

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It may have taken him a year but Paul Russo got his foreskin back. The 31-year-old technical support representative for a Boulder, CO software company has been working since November 1995 to restore the flap of skin removed when he was circumcised as a newborn. And he's got pictures to prove it. Just check out his site on the World Wide Web.

Russo is one of a small but growing number of circumcised men, both in the United States and abroad, who have elected to restore their foreskins, at home and, for the most part, without the help of a doctor. "I'm far from over, but I'm very happy with it," said Russo, who anticipates spending another year to 1½ years to complete the process.

The improbable, some would say unspeakable, procedure is virtually unheard of even in medical circles, but it has its advocates. And while nobody can say for sure how many men are currently "restoring," the numbers of men looking for information, both in print and on the internet, is growing, Russo said.

Most men give two reasons for their decision. The first, invariably, is that they are trying to regain, often with a fair degree of anger, something taken from them without their consent. "It's my body and I should have a say in it," Russo said. "They didn't bother to ask me, and they didn't bother to use an anesthetic."

*Men who restore say the increased sensation is comparable to "the difference between seeing in black and white and seeing in color."*



The second reason men give is that restoration of the skin over the head of the penis restores a large amount of sensation, making for greater sexual pleasure.

According to Marilyn Milos, a San Anselmo, CA registered nurse who runs NOCIRC, the National Organization of Circumcision Information Resource Centers, men who restore say the increased sensation is comparable to "the difference between seeing in black and white and seeing in color."

The restoration process is time-consuming, and generally takes anywhere from a year to five years of nearly continuous attention and care. In most men, the entire process takes one to two years. There are a number of methods used, including the following.

- Taping the existing shaft skin with surgical tape and stretching it as far as possible over the head of the penis. This tape is worn virtually all day and night and is seldom removed.
- Wrapping a ring of tape snugly around the bunched skin of the shaft, stretching it farther.
- Using a weight or a tension device that pulls the skin even farther.

Another method uses a length of tape connected to a suspender clipped onto a sock, around a belt or over the shoulder. Most devices sell for about \$100, and can be mail ordered.

All of the men interviewed for this story said the single hazard in "restoration" lies in pulling the skin too forcefully or with too much weight. "If you are doing something that's painful, you're doing it wrong," said R. Wayne Griffiths, 63, a retired engineer construction inspector in Concord, CA. Griffiths began restoring in 1987. "If you're doing the restoration properly, then you're aware of your body and you're not trying to do damage to it, it works just fine," Griffiths said.

***"The glans is an internal organ, just like the tongue. Circumcision denudes the glans."***

In 1989, Griffiths, a father of five with 13 grandchildren, co-founded NORM, the National Organization of Restoring Men, a support group that helps men get information about restoration. Griffiths, who began restoring his foreskin after becoming dissatisfied with his diminishing sensation, said he saw results in just a few weeks.

"At that point, I said, 'I'm never going to stop restoring,' because the pleasure was just too wonderful for me."

Griffiths said his glans is now "delightfully sensitive to the touch." He added, "The glans is an internal organ, just like the tongue. Circumcision denudes the glans." Griffiths, who spent 1½ years restoring, is satisfied with the results. "I've fooled doctors," he said with a laugh.

***"If a woman has a mastectomy, no one thinks it's odd or peculiar that she would want to have a prosthesis. But if men want to restore their bodies to the way that they were born, people find it peculiar. It's not peculiar."***

Milos, like others in the so-called "restoration movement," said the urge to bring back one's foreskin shouldn't be scoffed at. "If a woman has a mastectomy, no one thinks it's odd or peculiar that she would want to have a prosthesis. But if men want to restore their bodies to the way that they were born, people find it peculiar. It's not peculiar," she said. Milos pointed out that skin stretching techniques are used regularly in other areas of medicine besides breast reconstruction, such as skin restoration in burn victims.

***"You can definitely stretch skin voluntarily all over the body."***



The textbook of the foreskin restoration movement is *The Joy of Uncircumcising!* a 200 page how-to guide first published in 1992, authored by Jim Bigelow, a former evangelical minister. Bigelow pointed out that men have restored their foreskins for a number of serious reasons than the merely cosmetic or sensual, including painful erections and tearing or bleeding during intercourse.

For his part, Bigelow recommends that men work with their doctors while restoring, if they can get the doctor to support the decision.

***People have said, 'Get a life,' but my response is 'Get a clue.' There are some very serious consequences to this. Losing the most erogenous part of your genitals is a serious issue.***

Tim Hammond, another restoration movement leader and founder of the San Francisco-based NOHARMM, the National Organization to Halt the Abuse and Routine Mutilation of Males, said the group has collected about 500 "harm documentation forms" of men who have written describing the injuries that they've suffered as a result of being circumcised. He said those injuries include meningitis, infections and hemorrhages, as well as the more common loss of sensation.

"People have said, 'Get a life,' but my response is 'Get a clue.' There are some very serious consequences to this. Losing the most erogenous part of your genitals is a serious issue," he said.

It's difficult to say how many men have restored their foreskins or are currently undergoing the procedure, but Bigelow's book has gone through two editions and sold nearly 10,000 copies. NORM has a mailing list of more than 3,000 men and operates about a dozen groups in the United States, with another dozen worldwide.

Russo recently said he's getting 200 "hits," or people logging onto his Web site, every day. As of last week, more than 11,000 people had found Russo's site in the past six months.

"I'm getting a lot of really good, positive response," he said of his "restoration journal," a year-long, illustrated account of his efforts to bring his foreskin back. "The phone's ringing off the hook. It's crazy."

And the slow process of restoration may soon be a thing of the past. Whitehead, the New York urologist, is developing a tissue expander for foreskin restoration that could cut the time required for the procedure down to a matter of months. Placed under the skin, the device, essentially a balloon similar to those used for breast augmentation, could produce enough skin for complete foreskin recovery within three to six months. Whitehead expects to begin testing the device next month.

- For more information on circumcision issues and foreskin restoration, call [Marilyn Milos](tel:415-488-9883) at NOCIRC, 415-488-9883, or [R. Wayne Griffiths](tel:510-827-4077) at [NORM](http://www.norm.org): 510-827-4077.
- Paul Russo's restoration Web site address: <http://www.indra.net/~shredder/restore>
- Dr. E. Douglas Whitehead's office can be reached at: 212-879-3131
- [The Joy of Uncircumcising!](#) Jim Bigelow, Ph.D.

## Restore Yourself

*Letter to the Editor, The New Mexican, December 11, 1996*

Greg Toppo's article on circumcision reversal breaks new ground in the larger discussions about circumcision which have appeared increasingly in the last couple of years.

Instead of continuing the us versus them arguments of anti-circ and pro-circ physicians and nurses, he has chosen to discuss in a quite reasoned fashion the growing movement of men

who have chosen to restore themselves to some semblance of their pre-surgical, intact state.


Although foreskin restoration is become increasingly popular in other parts of the country, it has not yet surfaced much in Santa Fe, a city where circumcision rates are among the lowest in the U.S., and where anti-circumcision attitudes have been quite openly vocalized.

One would hope that the well-balanced information he presents will help local men interested in foreskin restoration find sympathetic physicians who will learn the techniques required, and thereby, in some sense, help mitigate the genital damage done to these men when they were innocent newborns.

Finally, lest some readers still believe that there may be scientifically valid reasons for newborn circumcision, large-scale, world-wide studies have demonstrated conclusively that circumcision does not, in any way, prevent any cancer (cervical or penile), prevent urinary tract infections in boys, prevent any STDs (some studies show a slight increase in AIDS, chlamydia, and genital warts in *circumcised* Americans), or improve hygiene.

[Christopher Fletcher, M.D.](#) - Santa Fe

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