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## Local men restoring their foreskins

Tuesday, April 25, 2000

By Christopher Snowbeck, Post-Gazette Staff Writer

If you were circumcised as a child, you can restore your foreskin.

Ron Miller will show you how.

The 58-year-old engineer who lives in the Pittsburgh area used surgical tape, paper and a suspender belt every day for two years to slowly restore the foreskin to his penis.

On a Saturday night earlier this month, he shared his experiences with a small group of local men who are convinced that circumcision has diminished their capacity for sexual pleasure. They, too, are undergoing the procedure.

It was the first meeting of Pittsburgh NORM, a local branch of the National Organization for Restoring Men -- a movement that began in San Francisco in November 1989 and is gaining popularity across the country.

NORM provides guidance and support for men and teaches methods for stretching the skin along the shaft of the penis so that it grows to cover the penis tip.

The four members of Pittsburgh NORM believe their numbers will grow as they spread their belief that the key to sexual pleasure is foreskin, which members say has its own erogenous function and helps heighten sensation.

"I'm pissed off about the 40 years of wasted sex I've had," Miller told the group. "What you're going to get back is so different, don't expect your brain to understand it."

So, how exactly do you restore the foreskin?

The most popular method is called T-tape. Basically, a man uses tape and paper to make a sleeve that covers the end of the penis. The sleeve is attached to the middle shaft of the penis with about an inch strip of surgical tape. The open end of the sleeve is closed over the penis tip by the clip of a suspender belt. A restoring man then wraps the suspender belt around his waist before clipping the other end to his underwear.

The idea is to apply tension -- but, please, not too much tension -- to the shaft skin to stretch it and promote new skin growth.

Doctors say the concept makes sense, but suggest men who want to try it consult with a physician. R. Wayne Griffiths, the national director of NORM, said he thinks it's OK if men talk with their family doctors about foreskin restoration. But he says most don't know much about it.

"We caution about the things that you have to watch for," said Griffiths. The stretching should never hurt or cause the penis to change color or temperature. If it does, the "tugger" -- the nickname for men who are restoring their foreskins -- should stop the procedure.

After months of using T-tape to restore foreskin, a man can use other restoration methods that use weights to promote skin growth, Griffiths said. One is called PUD for Penis Uncircumcising Device and another involves attaching the mouthpiece of a tuba, trombone or Sousaphone inside the restored foreskin. This "musical" method promotes skin growth while allowing men to urinate while wearing the device -- the mouth end of the mouthpiece covers the penis tip while urine flows out the stem. (Men using T-tape must unclip the paper sleeve every time they go to the bathroom.)

There are surgical procedures available to restore foreskin, too, although men in NORM profess a certain distrust of surgical procedures involving the penis.



Miller sought the procedure about three years ago because he believes his sexual function was greatly diminished due to circumcision. The doctor gave him a "very, very tight cut," he says, meaning that for years the tip of his penis was often sore after sex. About three years ago he felt he had lost all sensation during intercourse.

He tried Viagra, but that didn't improve his sensitivity. The new foreskin did.

"If you can imagine looking at an old black and white TV versus watching HDTV, that's the difference," he said.

An article published last year in the British Journal of Urology seems to support Miller's case.

"Excision of normal, erogenous genital tissue from healthy male or female children cannot be condoned, as the histology confirms that the external genitalia are specialized sensory tissues," the authors wrote.

Men who are restoring their foreskin say, though, that a new foreskin doesn't provide as much erogenous sensation as an original foreskin.

Local doctors aren't convinced -- even with Miller's assertion of greater pleasure.


"One snowflake doesn't make a winter. It's hard to draw conclusions from anecdotal experiences," said Dr. Leo McCafferty, a plastic surgeon in private practice at UPMC Shadyside. "It's such a subjective thing -- how do you measure pleasure?"

Dr. Walter F. O'Donnell, chief of the division of urology at Pittsburgh Mercy Hospital, said: "There's obviously a role for the foreskin that was designed by God or nature, but I don't know how you could design a study that would be able to specifically identify what role in sensuality or sexual function the foreskin plays."

Dr. Carl Bruning, a urologist in Monroeville, said a few of the circumcised men he treats for erectile dysfunction complain of decreased sensation, but doctors have had trouble documenting the problem in these men.

"Measurable sensation decreases aren't a big cause of erectile dysfunction," said Bruning. The condition is often caused by arteriosclerosis, diabetes and pelvic surgery.

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