



The Great Uncircumcision Debate

By Jeninne Lee-St. John | Friday, Nov. 02, 2007

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In his early 30s, Sabin Prince's libido was waning and he wasn't enjoying sex as much as he once had. His urologist checked him out and told him that everything was normal, that he was perfectly healthy and that his problems were probably part hormonal and part psychological. Don't worry about it so much, the doctor said, you're psyching yourself out. Prince took the advice, tried to relax, and eventually started enjoying sex a little more. But he never fully regained his appetite — "I would go for four or five days longing to feel sexual," he says — and, so, earlier this year he started looking for answers online.



Roy McMahon / Corbis

After doing a few Web searches and trolling men's health chat rooms, Prince, an actor in Los Angeles, decided that his problem had less to do with a mental trap he was in than a physical flap he was missing: his foreskin. That is, he felt that the routine circumcision he had undergone as a baby had left him, now at age 47, desensitized from the years of exposure. The solution: for the past five months, he's been growing his foreskin back using a device he bought online called the TLC Tugger. "The changes!" he says, going on to describe his improved pleasure in expansive terms. Suffice it to say, "It's 100% more sensitive."

As the number of newborn American boys who get circumcised appears to be declining, the number of men uncircumcising themselves seems to be rising. Ron Low, who makes the conical silicone TLC Tugger, has sold about 9,000 Tuggers since 2003. Stephen Kwan, sales manager of 4restore.com, which makes a competing product, says sales of his stainless steel apparatus increase by about 15% each year. Many men, like Prince, restore their foreskins to improve sex; circumcision, after all, removes some of the most sensitive cells in the body. Others do it because they feel dry and uncomfortable. Some feel abnormal — though circumcision is customary in the U.S., it is uncommon in most of the rest of the world. Finally, since so many new parents are choosing to leave their baby boys intact, Low says, "I even hear from men that they want to look more like their son."

Lucky for these men, they have an array of devices to choose from. That wasn't the case 20 years ago, when R. Wayne Griffiths, a construction inspector whom some consider the granddaddy of foreskin restoration, jury-rigged a system out of two ball bearings, which he taped to his penis to regrow the skin in a year and a half. That was the prototype for Foreballs, which he now sells for \$130 a pop. Griffiths' invention has been joined over the years by about a dozen competitors, which use tape, tension, suction, weights and straps to gently coax the skin to expand over time. Among the options are the Tug Ahoy, T-Tape, VacuTrac and, of course, the 4restore and TLC Tugger — which Low, an industrial engineer, invented in his Northbrook, Ill., basement when he lost sensitivity in his mid-30s. "It certainly doesn't make any sense to me that nature would produce a part that is harmful," says Low. "Foreskin feels really good."

So good, in fact, that many restorers have also become "intactivists" who say involuntary circumcision of newborn males is cosmetic surgery and a civil rights violation. When Prince realized his sensitivity loss was a result of being cut, he says, "I could feel so much anger building up in me because I didn't have a choice." Griffiths, who co-founded San Francisco-based NORM, or National Organization of Restoring Men, says, "I felt that I had been mutilated and denied the pleasures of a foreskin. I never felt comfortable in clothes because my glans was always being abraded." NORM now has outposts in Canada, Britain, Australia and New Zealand. But its message doesn't persuade everyone. "My daughters went and circumcised their boys even though I talked to them about it," Griffiths says. "I cried."

But tradition is hard to break. And restoration isn't for everyone. Only a small minority of circumcised men report sensitivity loss and dryness. In fact, the National Health and Social Life survey by the University of Chicago found



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