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## CLEANLINESS IS NEXT TO MANLINESS

The foreskin may be a tiny piece of skin, but it engenders an amount of controversy enormously disproportionate to its size. Circumcision, removal of the foreskin, is a practice common to many religions. The reasons for its recommendation range from hygienic to ritualistic, and in some degree it is a practice common to many if not most of the religions of the world. Circumcision is also a consequence of the medicalization of pregnancy and birth. In the United States, where hospital births are almost universal, more than 50% of male infants are circumcised. However, in recent years, there has been a movement that decries infant circumcision as a cruel mutilation that diminishes sexual capacity, and has no real benefit. Some insurance companies have stopped paying for the procedure, and the medical societies of many countries have decried the practice as unnecessary surgery for routine cases. Today, some men are even undergoing procedures to stretch the skin of the penis to create a new foreskin. Since the foreskin of an uncircumcised man contains roughly half the entire skin area of the penis, the additional skin contains numerous nerves, and as such may improve the sensitivity of the penis as well as the ease of arousal and penetration.

Uncircumcised men are at increased risk of certain sexually transmitted diseases, compared to circumcised men, mostly because the foreskin provides addi-



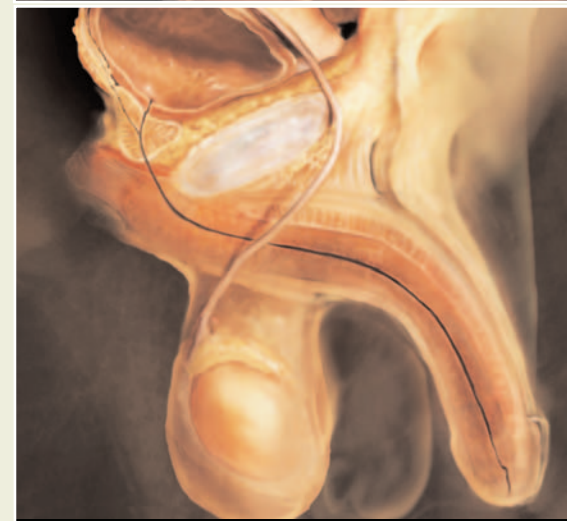
tional surface area for infection, and can also harbor a warm moist environment in which bacteria can grow. It is for this reason that some doctors recommend that parents gently retract the foreskin and cleanse the head of the penis once a week with water, in order to reduce the risk of urinary tract infections. Although it is normally an elective procedure chosen by the parents of an infant, circumcision can be necessary for some men who experience foreskin pain, inflammation, or other problems.

Jock itch is a fungal infection of the genitalia, and is also called tinea cruris or ringworm of the groin. It almost always occurs in adult men, thrives in warm wet places, and can be worsened by friction from clothes. It's also contagious – skin to skin contact can transmit it as can contact with unwashed clothing... or towels being snapped around in the locker room. Mostly it just causes intense itching of the upper thighs, but it can also spread to the anus and cause itching there as well. Treatment is topical, and behavioral, since the skin needs to be kept warm and dry. Unfortunately, because of the need for a change in lifestyle, jock itch frequently takes much longer than other ringworm infections to heal.



Urinary tract infections (UTI) are a common irritation for both men and women. When people are healthy, urine is a sterile, bacteria free, solution. However, growth of bacteria in the bladder, urethra, colon, or other parts of the GI tract can cause this to change. UTIs do occur more frequently in women, because the shorter length of their urethra makes it easier for the bacteria to traverse, but the symptoms

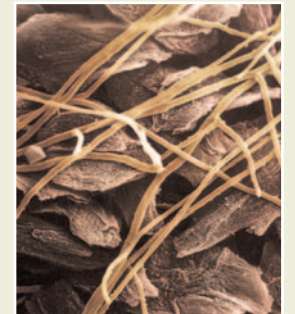
are largely the same for both sexes. When you have a UTI, you will constantly want to go to the bathroom, but not that much will come out, and you'll still feel like you have to pee, and/or urinating will feel like it burns. More serious infections can lead to fever, nausea, and even back pain if the bacteria ascend to the kidneys. Treatment usually requires going to the doctor for antibiotics, but prevention is, as always, the simpler route. Drinking plenty of water, peeing before and after sex, and using a condom to prevent transmission of bacteria back and forth with your partner all will help to prevent you from developing a UTI in the first place. As will drinking cranberry juice, at least for women. It may be because of natural antibiotic properties of the juice, or it may simply be its acidity, but



studies have actually proven that drinking cranberry juice reduces the number of urinary tract infections experienced by women... which is better than another doctors visit any day.

For some women, there is no health condition that causes as much cursing and grumbling as a yeast infection. Although largely harmless in the grand scheme of things, they are incredibly annoying, causing not just discharge, but intense itching and also pain during sex. They're easily curable, but just like potato chips it seems that you can never have just one. Women who are prone to yeast infections tend to get them regularly – sometimes as frequently as once a month when their hormones make their vagina ripe for a takeover. There is a reason why drugstores offer multi-packs of the various over the counter creams and pills.

No one really knows why some women never get a yeast infection, and others have put the children of anti-fungal manufacturers through college, but it's important that women who have repeat episodes make certain that they are correctly diagnosed. Although prevention of recurrent infection is largely a crapshoot, it's always safe to go back to the basics. Make certain that your vaginal area is rinsed clean and patted dry after you take a shower, stick to the cotton instead of the fancy underpants, and wipe from front to back. Many women with frequent yeast infections eat live culture yogurt to try and replenish the healthy vaginal bacteria that could guard against the disease, and this folk cure is soundly based in theory. Some women have also had success with reducing the amount of refined sugars, carbohydrates, and fermented products in their diet – losing the first takes away the yeasts' food, losing the second cuts down on their re-supply. You did know that that's how they make beer, didn't you?



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