Information for Parents About
Phimosis and Penile Adhesions

Phimosis refers to the condition where the prepuce (foreskin) covers the glans penis (head of the penis). Separation of the prepuce from the glans penis occurs spontaneously over several months as glanular secretions accumulate (generally complete by 4 years of age). This material can form small white bumps or prominent masses visible beneath the prepuce (appearance compared to tofu), which can periodically erupt at the preputial margin (which does not indicate penile infection).

Recurrent inflammation from diaper friction, or from penile bacterial or yeast infection (balanoposthitis) can cause progressive scarring and narrowing of the prepuce. A tight preputial scar band can progressively thicken and contract, restricting urinary flow and causing ballooning of the prepuce and accumulation of urine beneath the prepuce with voiding (which can promote escalating penile inflammation and urinary infection).

Phimosis and penile adhesions can also occur following neonatal circumcision (sometimes resulting from incomplete separation of penile attachments with circumcision). Penile adhesions covering the coronal margin are often easily separated with gentle intermittent traction. Application of a low-dose topical steroid cream (Betamethasone twice daily for up to 8 weeks) is often beneficial in achieving separation of persistent penile adhesions. Refractory penile adhesions can be separated under topical Lidocaine analgesia during a pediatric urology office visit.

Dense and thickened penile adhesions (penile scar bands) often require resection (incision and separation). Some penile scar bands in infants can be managed during a pediatric urology office visit. Reoperative circumcision under general anesthesia may also be necessary for definitive management.

Using Betamethasone Topical Cream
Gently retract the prepuce (foreskin) as far possible, and apply a small amount of Betamethasone cream to the leading edge of the penile adhesion twice daily for up to 8 weeks. Then use petroleum jelly or Aquaphor to maintain separation of the prepuce from the penile glans margin. 

NOTE: Although the package insert indicates that Betamethasone topical cream has not been approved for use in children (not tested in children), no problems are anticipated if therapeutic use is limited to an interval less than 8 weeks duration.

David Ewalt MD office telephone: 214-750-0808
Sallie Robertson PA-C website:
Israel Nosnik MD 8315 Walnut Hill Ln, Suite 205, Dallas, TX 75231
William Strand MD 4001 W 15th Street, Suite 300, Plano, TX 75093