Dear Alice,

I went crazy and started masturbating more than usual in the shower and then when I got out my foreskin was swelled up. Should I see a doctor?

Answer

Dear Reader,

Talk about an irritating situation! The swelling you're experiencing may be caused by a few different factors ranging from inflammation to certain medical conditions. Regardless, if it continues for more than one day, it's best to seek care from a medical provider, as the swelling may be due to a serious complication. Your health care provider will be able to help you understand the cause and options for treatment.

The swelling you mentioned is possibly due to injuries, such as scratches and burns, items pushed into the urethra, or creams that cause an allergic reaction. Since you masturbated more than you usually do, there may be slight cuts or burns from the friction that are causing the swelling you're experiencing. Those who are uncircumcised (or improperly circumcised) may also experience irritation with the foreskin, a sensitive layer of skin covering the head of the penis. Other potential causes of swelling include the following conditions:

- **Inflammation** that arises due exposure to irritants, such as certain bath products or towels that haven't been washed recently. The foreskin becomes sore and red, but is treated by washing the foreskin gently with non-irritating soaps and applying hydrocortisone ointment.
- **Infection**, such as posthitis (a fungal infection of the foreskin) or balanitis (infection of the foreskin and glans, caused by poor hygiene), may also cause swelling. Health care providers often treat infections by prescribing creams or antibiotics, as well as painkillers to relieve discomfort. Warm baths have also been found to be helpful for pain relief. Some of these conditions may be chronic and may be treated through circumcision.
- **Phimosis** comes from an abnormally tight foreskin, which makes it more difficult to retract the foreskin from the head of the penis. This makes hygiene much more difficult because it's harder to clean under the foreskin, leading to infections. Those experiencing phimosis may also suffer from the splitting and bleeding of foreskin when erect. To prevent infection or inflammation, it may be helpful to retract the foreskin often, such as when showering or using the bathroom.
Paraphimosis occurs when retracted foreskin can't be pulled back into place over the head of the penis. The swelling from this may make it difficult to put back into place, so a health care provider can manually roll the foreskin back over the glans to treat this condition.

What you're experiencing, Reader, may be due to a range of factors. In the future, you may want to hold back from further masturbation or other activities that may irritate the area and watch how it progresses over the next day. Seeking advice from a health care provider helps ensure that you treat it properly and start to feel better. If you're interested in learning more about masturbation, check out the Masturbation category of the Go Ask Alice! Sexual & Reproductive Health archives.

Here's to moving forward in good health!

Alice!
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Masturbation

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