



Clemens Setz on his circumcision

**"I had my foreskin removed when I was 22.
Before that, sex was definitely better."**

**If I could have read an article like this one twenty years ago, I wouldn't have had a surgeon cut on me.
It would have saved me a lot and preserved something indispensable.**

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Time and time again, one comes across reports on the Internet about young women who were given the gift of a complete removal of all their teeth for their sixteenth or twenty-first birthday some ninety or a hundred years ago. There are a few articles about this bizarre custom, which was widespread at the time, especially in the USA and Europe, and it is also occasionally mentioned in biographies as something quite commonplace. The removal of all teeth was justified in most cases by the fact that this would save the husband later dental costs. It was also thought to prevent all sorts of psychological problems, such as melancholy, lethargy or anxiety. But no matter what the exact reason, it made sense to everyone involved, it seemed virtuous and desirable, it was an act of caring.

With this historical example as back-up, I would now like to talk about my penis. I know this is not a topic for an article, and everyone is free to scroll on, but I would have saved myself a lot of pointless suffering had I read such an article addressed to me, the unsuspecting youth, twenty years ago. The enlightenment of men is known to be treading water or has come to a complete standstill altogether, which can be seen just from the fact that the vast majority of heterosexual men know nothing about their prostates, let alone how to stimulate them. Despite instructive pornography, much is still surrounded by darkness, mystery and giggling.

Even as a teenager, I had noticed that my foreskin was too tight. It didn't slide back when I had an erection, but stuck in front. I wasn't quite sure what that meant. I never had pain, not even during erections, but I sometimes had to concentrate in order not to finish after a few minutes when masturbating, because the friction pressure always remained quite strong. Besides, as I was assured, it looked completely impossible. Like the hooded head of Kenny in "South Park" pulled closed in the front.

Logically, with the awakening of sexuality, I began to feel very ashamed of this misshapen body part, so for a long time I avoided being naked in front of anyone. The longer I waited to tell a person about "my problem", the more impossible it became to even name the problem.

The sleeve is shortened

So it was not until I was twenty-two, driven to the urologist by a prolonged, intensely itchy infection, that I received from him the diagnosis and immediately the appropriate referral for surgery. The reason for the inflammation was my tight foreskin, he said. As long as it was there, it would "always come back". The only solution: removal.

Two weeks later I was in the clinic. A nurse took care of the entry formalities with me. She asked about eating habits and sleep disorders and joked about the upcoming procedure. I was going to have my sleeve shortened, so to speak. She pantomimed it. Before the medical consultation, I had to fill out questionnaires. Giant stylized penises were waiting for me on them, all looking very helpless and lost.

I read through the column with the gruesome splatter scenes, i.e. the possible postoperative consequences and complications, several times. The educational talk itself consisted of the attending's friendly question, "Is anything unclear to you?" I asked him if it was really necessary to remove my entire foreskin. "That's not for me to decide, it's for the surgeon to decide," he explained. I should not have been intimidated into silence in response.

That afternoon I was given a pair of thrombosis stockings so tight that one had the thoroughly pleasant sensation of being stuck in sand up to the knees. I swallowed a sedative tablet. An orderly, who had the fate-tanned face of a sherpa, picked me up and led me down the hall, past the mysteriously lit nurses' station, then followed by several automatic doors, and slowly everything began to dissolve into nonsense. We passed a lot of doctored and bandaged people milling about like broken pilgrims. Everything made sense again somehow, and I giggled silly to myself, despite the fear. Finally, a long white corridor so reminiscent of familiar depictions of near-death experiences that I began to sing softly while lying down.

We stopped in a deserted corridor, large metal temple doors on either side. Out of one door, which now opened heavily and hydraulically, came a couple of masked figures that looked like the high-tech version of Perchten or Mummenschanz figures. The anesthesiologist was friendly, she even, standing behind me, massaged my jaw a little because it had started to shake uncontrollably. They put the sleeping pill into my vein and told me to think of something pleasant.

Next I saw bright temples overgrown with green, then soldiers with blue faces running toward me and disappearing into my chest. It was beautiful. A sister's adorable face kept rising above me as a silent movie moon, plus her lips were moving. Madness! I made an effort to follow her, because I knew that she was "talking" to me and that it was probably important to receive the signals addressed to me.

Now just don't get an erection

When I could think and speak again, urgency to urinate announced itself. The nurse came and rooted around inside me - my body was pleasantly made of white dough - and pulled out the body part in question. I realized it was huge and misshapen, almost wider than long. She held the thing in a sort of transparent canteen. "Try it. But it won't work yet."

I tried to relax and get rid of the urge to urinate, but only a water balloon inflated inside me. Then I was given painkillers again and allowed to play with the cool flames that bounced gracefully between my fingers. I giggled and inwardly recited prayers with glee. Later, I even spotted a comet on the wall of the room.

In this state I was handed over to the night nurse. She was certainly no older than nineteen, and she unwrapped my badly battered penis from its bandage with obvious disgust, even head-shaking giggles, and there it fell, I felt it painfully, onto my belly, into the wire nest of pubic hair I had forgotten to shave off. I asked her how much of my foreskin had been removed, and she actually looked closely (I felt the twists) and announced, "Looks like it's all gone!" And as she left, she said, "Now just be careful not to get an erection at night."

No, I'm not making this up. I'm a writer. If I wanted to invent anything after the fact, it wouldn't be such a striking sentence. - Then, sometime after midnight, I awoke to a small lake of blood. I rang for the nurse. The swab that had been wrapped around my member a few hours ago was now a dark red dripping ball. The nurse came and helped me. "That's right," she said, "the vein is cut now. That's where this is coming through." I now had to go to the bathroom really badly and, in short, made a horrible mess there.

It now bled the same way almost every night for about a week. Then a month of bandage changes and chamomile baths. I went to the university, limped around there cowboy-legged and had trouble sitting down. People asked me what was wrong, and I answered truthfully. Most of them thought it was totally nuts. "As an adult?" - "Yeah, I guess I waited too long." A German studies student asked me in a concerned tone if I had changed religions. I nodded that I had. She went "Oh" and put a hand over her open mouth.

Great loss of feeling

After about eight weeks, things looked a little better. However, I found it very strange that they had not only shortened my foreskin, but had also sewn the "sleeve edge" to the bottom of the shaft, so that my member, like a plastic dildo, no longer had any skin that could be pulled back and forth. But at least the feeling was there again. Even quite strong! I felt permanently aroused. This lasted for about one to two months. Then the feeling quickly disappeared, and everything went numb, numb, and stayed that way.

Masturbation became a very difficult job. In a few places, the remaining nerve remnants still conducted some lost erogenous impulse, which, after much practice, I learned to internally hold, strengthen, and use. Overall, I would put the loss of sensation at about 90 percent.

In addition, an interesting neurological body boundary illusion developed. Because the nerves have all been removed, whenever my erection is encircled and stimulated along its entire length, I feel as if I possess only a stump a few millimeters short, on which there is very minimal sliding back and forth. Only when I look, my brain immediately corrects the impression, and I interpret my length ratios correctly again. If I then close my eyes, the curious compression illusion returns after a while.

So I know sex with and without foreskin. And to state the obvious right away: With foreskin it is worlds more intense. No comparison at all. Most circumcised men, however, don't know this difference because the operation, whether medically or religiously justified, was performed on them in infancy. Their brain therefore networks itself, as one may assume, already at the beginning of puberty, so to speak, one hundred percent with the existing nerve endings - and the sexual pleasure is never experienced as diminished. In this respect, it can be stated that they are not deprived of any capacity for enjoyment.

The custom to circumcise healthy babies, nevertheless, does not open itself to me in the least, because it seems to me to serve neither the defense of an imminent nor the correction of an existing calamity. Its prevalence in so many cultures of the world never ceases to amaze me.

Stretching for half an hour a day

So, dear youth in the same situation: should you have your scandalously shaped penis trimmed? Or is there nothing wrong with you in the end? Of course, that depends on the degree of constriction. My advice in any case would be: first look at the alternatives. You can even try them out secretly and completely for yourself if, like me, you feel great shame.

Before I name them, here is the most important question for the reader: could you name any alternative to the total surgical removal of the foreskin from memory?

I couldn't either until a few years ago.

And why are these alternatives so unknown? Mystery, obscurity, giggles. It's pretty absurd. As if brushing teeth was an obscure technique discussed only in some forums, while removing all teeth was considered the normal solution.

So, first of all there is stretching, supported by cortisone ointment. You can ask hundreds of people on forums about this. They will confirm you that it worked very well, even in cases of pronounced phimosis. If you can go to the gym every day and stretch, you can also stretch your foreskin. Half an hour a day is enough. And you can even combine it with masturbation. So don't look so despondent.

If you don't feel like stretching manually, you can also hand over the task to special stretching rings that you slide under your foreskin and increase its circumference in small steps. You wear them under your clothes and no one will notice anything. Thin tissue like the foreskin can be stretched wide in almost all cases. Think of earlobes. Think of it as "body modification". Couple of months, then it should work.

Only the next step should then be minimal surgical procedures that leave most of the foreskin intact. The "total circumcision", as I see it after long, grim study of the matter, should practically never be used at all. Even in the circumcision practice mentioned in the Old Testament, one removed only the acroposthion, that is, the uppermost part of the foreskin. Why ever remove the frenulum? Complete nonsense. It fulfills an important task, it has meaning, it is a real little nerve center.

You might also consider the possibility that, apart from the increased need for care of the constricted skin areas, there is actually nothing - I repeat - nothing at all wrong with your physiology and it's not necessary to remove all the sensitive areas of your genitals just to make your penis look like all the others. I know that's not so easy to accept. But believe an older man with no nerve endings.

And what about the often-mentioned STD transmission aspect? It's true that "according to studies," some type of cancer may actually stop occurring if the foreskin on which it thrives is missing. And HIV? Yes, that, according to a thousand articles on the Internet, is "less easily" transmitted. May be all. But these are completely absurd reasons. Decreased viral load, because of me, but so what, it is completely unsuitable as a real HIV prophylaxis. Test both of you before, use condoms. Everything else is and remains Russian roulette. And of course, you won't get cancer in your leg if you remove it first.

And the cosmetic argument? "Many women/men like the sight of a circumcised limb better." Indeed, you hear that all the time. But, with respect, that's their problem, not yours. And any inflammation of the glans? Simple solution: hygiene. Learn to take better care of yourself.

I would like the nerve magic back

Even if, unlike me back then, you have pain during erections and therefore surgical treatment seems reasonable to you, please, don't be as docile and well-behaved and immature as I was, but inform yourself in detail beforehand about less radical versions of surgical correction of your foreskin. Google: "preputialplasty." Google: "v-flap circumcision" or "z-shape circumcision." There are few cases where it is really inevitable to remove everything. I also had internet at that time. But I just thought medicine would have solved the problem by now.

If it is so overdone, where did the complete circumcision practiced today actually come from? It was conceived at the end of the 19th century to keep boys like you and me from masturbating. All the medical justifications like "much more hygienic" or "less STD transmission" were tacked on after the fact. I think we're very lucky that this now thankfully abated fashion of circumcising all newborns didn't just come up today, in the age of Twitter, where its scientifically proven beyond a shadow of a doubt benefits would be peppered around your ears by a thousand influencers non-stop. "Just cut it!"

Is erotic life ruined without a foreskin? Not at all. But the experience shaped, I think, my attitude toward medical practice in general. Doctors don't always have your best interests at heart, only the quickest or what reliably makes money. When that is and isn't is never easy to determine. - And no, this is not code for mRNA vaccinations now, because foreskin stenosis is not in the least a matter of life or death. Nor were the teeth of the young women mentioned at the beginning a matter of life or death. There, even the most passionate skepticism puts no one in serious danger.

I don't like to revel in the tragedy of irretrievably lost things, but sure, if you ask me, I would quite like to have the old wealth of sensation and nerve magic back. It was a grotesque mistake to just let everything be cut away. So don't make the same mistake I did, kid. Don't look stupid, but get informed. Talk to people who have experienced it. The prevailing culture is not your friend. You don't have to sacrifice your body to it.

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About the author

The Austrian writer Clemens J. Setz was born in Graz in 1982 and now lives in Vienna. In 2007, he made his debut with the novel "Sons and Planets," which was followed by numerous other novels, as well as short stories, poems and plays. He also translates from English. He received the Bremen Literature Prize for his novel "The Frequencies." Last year, Setz was awarded the Georg Büchner Prize. His work is published by Suhrkamp-Verlag.