

# Circumcision

## Information for Parents



Parents have different opinions about newborn circumcision based on medical, religious, cultural, and ethnic traditions, and personal reasons. Some parents choose circumcision. Some parents do not choose circumcision. Parents who are undecided should talk with their child's doctor before their child is born. They can learn about the benefits and risks of circumcision to help them choose what is best for their son. Read on for more information from the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) about circumcision.

### What is circumcision?

At birth, boys have skin that covers the end of the penis, called the foreskin. Circumcision is the surgical removal of the foreskin, exposing the tip of the penis. Circumcision is usually performed by a doctor in the first few days of life. The surgery should be done under sterile conditions with adequate pain management. (See "Is circumcision painful?") An infant must be stable and healthy to safely be circumcised.

Because circumcision may be more risky if done later in life, parents should decide before or soon after their son is born if they want it done.

### Is circumcision painful?

Yes. However, there are pain medicines that are safe and effective. The AAP recommends that they be used to reduce pain from circumcision.

### What should I expect for my son after circumcision?

After the circumcision, the tip of the penis may seem raw or yellowish. If there is a bandage, it should be changed with each diapering to reduce the risk of infection. Use petroleum jelly to keep the bandage from sticking. Sometimes a plastic ring is used instead of a bandage. This should drop off within 5 to 8 days. The penis should be fully healed in about 1 week to 10 days after circumcision.

### Are there any problems that can happen after circumcision?

Problems after a circumcision are very rare. However, call your child's doctor right away if

- Your baby does not urinate normally within 6 to 8 hours after the circumcision.
- Bleeding doesn't stop at the spot where the foreskin was removed.
- The redness around the tip of the penis gets worse after 3 to 5 days.
- Yellow discharge lasts longer than a week. It is normal to have a little yellow discharge or coating around the head of the penis in the first week.

### Reasons parents may choose circumcision

**Medical benefits.** New scientific studies show the health benefits of newborn male circumcision outweigh the risks of the procedure, including

- A markedly lower risk of acquiring HIV, the virus that causes AIDS.
- A significantly lower risk of acquiring a number of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including genital herpes (HSV), human papillomavirus (HPV), and syphilis.
- A lower risk of urinary tract infections (UTIs). A circumcised infant boy has about a 1 in 1,000 chance of developing a UTI in the first year of life; an uncircumcised infant boy has about a 1 in 100 chance of developing a UTI in the first year of life.
- A lower risk of getting cancer of the penis. However, this type of cancer is very rare in all males.

#### Other medical benefits, including

- Prevention of foreskin infections.
- Prevention of phimosis, a condition in uncircumcised males that makes foreskin retraction impossible.
- Easier genital hygiene.

**Social reasons.** Many parents choose to have it done because "all the other men in the family" had it done or because they do not want their sons to feel "different."

**Religious or cultural reasons.** Some groups, such as followers of the Jewish and Islamic faiths, practice circumcision for religious and cultural reasons.

### Reasons parents may NOT choose circumcision

- **Belief that circumcision should be a child's choice.**
- **Belief that if "it ain't broke, then why remove normal tissue?"**
- **Fear of the risks.** Complications are rare and usually minor but may include bleeding, infection, cutting the foreskin too short or too long, and improper healing.
- **Belief that the foreskin is needed.** Some people feel the foreskin is needed to protect the tip of the penis. Without it, the tip of the penis may become irritated and cause the opening of the penis to become too small. This can cause urination problems that may need to be surgically corrected.
- **Belief it can affect sexual sensation.** Some feel that circumcision makes the tip of the penis less sensitive, causing a decrease in sexual pleasure later in life.
- **Belief that proper hygiene can lower health risks.** Boys can be taught proper hygiene that can lower their chances of getting infections, cancer of the penis, and STIs.

## What if I choose *not* to have my son circumcised?

If you choose not to have your son circumcised, talk with your child's doctor about how to keep your son's penis clean. Keep in mind that the foreskin will not fully retract for several years and should never be forced. When your son is old enough, he can learn how to keep his penis clean just as he will learn to keep other parts of his body clean.

## Female genital mutilation

Female genital mutilation has sometimes been called female circumcision, though it has no known medical benefits and causes many known harms, both medical and psychological. It involves removing part or all of a female's clitoris. It may also include sewing up the opening of the vagina. It is often done without any pain medicine. The purpose of this practice is to prove that a female is a virgin before she gets married, reduce her ability to experience sexual pleasure, and promote marital fidelity. There are many serious side effects, including

- Pelvic and urinary tract infections
- Negative effects on self-esteem and sexuality
- Inability to deliver a baby vaginally

The AAP is absolutely opposed to this practice in all forms because it is disfiguring and has no medical benefits.

The information contained in this publication should not be used as a substitute for the medical care and advice of your pediatrician. There may be variations in treatment that your pediatrician may recommend based on individual facts and circumstances.

## From your doctor

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