



CIRCUMCISION

What is Circumcision?

At birth, baby boys have loose skin that covers the head of the penis. This is called the “foreskin.” When all or part of the foreskin of the penis is cut off, it is called “circumcision.”

Why is Circumcision Done?

Circumcision is done for religious, cultural, appearance, or health reasons. Some religious groups circumcise boys. Persons who are Jewish believe that circumcision of baby boys at 8 days old is a commandment from God and therefore, circumcision is a faith-based practice. Muslim people also believe that circumcision of boys is a way to be more faithful to God. In the Muslim faith, circumcision can be done at any point in a boy’s life, depending on local traditions.

Some parents choose circumcision so that their son will have a penis that looks like his father’s. Other people choose circumcision because they believe it is cleaner or will protect the boy or man from infection or cancer.

Is Circumcision Cleaner? Does it Protect from Infection or Cancer?

Regular washing with soap and water will keep any penis clean. Circumcision does not make the penis cleaner. Uncircumcised boys do need to be taught to clean beneath their foreskin, just like they need to be taught to wash their hands or brush their teeth.

Circumcision does seem to protect against some types of infection or cancer. Cancer of the penis is one type of cancer that circumcision may prevent. However, cancer of the penis is very rare. Three hundred thousand circumcisions would need to be done to prevent one case. See the reverse side of this page for more information on the risks and benefits of circumcision.

What Happens During A Circumcision?

Your health care provider will typically perform the circumcision in the hospital before you go home. Religious circumcisions are most often done at home or in a synagogue.

Before the procedure, some providers inject a small amount of anesthesia at the base of the penis to block the pain. If you have a Jewish religious circumcision, your baby may be given a few drops of sweetened wine in a nipple just before the procedure.

There are different ways to do a circumcision. In one type, a clamp placed around the head of the penis cuts off the blood supply to the foreskin and the foreskin above the clamp is cut off. The clamp is left on the penis until area heals and it falls off a few days later. In another type of circumcision, the foreskin is cut off with scissors or a scalpel.

After the circumcision, petroleum jelly and sometimes gauze may be put over the wound. This protects the end of the penis while it heals.

How Do I Decide if I Should Have My Son Circumcised?

The American Academy of Pediatrics says that you do not need to circumcise your baby for health reasons. They recommend that you talk to your health care provider to decide if circumcision is the right choice for your family. You may also wish to discuss the question with your family or spiritual advisor.

While many people in the United States choose to circumcise their baby boys, it is not a common practice in Europe or Asia.

Who Chooses Circumcision?

Many people in the United States choose to circumcise their boys because they believe that a circumcised penis is cleaner than an uncircumcised one, which is not necessarily true: soap and water will keep any penis clean.

What Are the Risks and Benefits of Circumcision?

People have strong feelings about circumcision. We do not have a lot of good information about the risks and benefits.

Possible Risks:

- About 1 in 500 baby boys will have a problem with circumcision. Problems include:
 - Bleeding or infection in the penis
 - Infection spreading to other parts of the body
 - Narrowing of the opening of the penis, which can cause problems with urination
 - Partial amputation of the penis
 - Death of some of the other skin on the penis
 - Removal of too much foreskin, which can cause pain during sex later in life
 - Very rarely, death. This occurs in about 1 in 500,000 boys
- We do not know much about pain in newborn babies. People used to think babies did not really feel pain. Now we know that they do. Many baby boys appear to feel a lot of pain during circumcision if anesthesia is not used.
- When older boys or men are circumcised, they have the same risks as babies. They report severe pain.

Possible Benefits:

- Less risk for some kinds of cancers, like cancer of the penis
- Fewer bladder or kidney infections
- Less risk for some sexually transmitted infections, like HIV.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

The American Academy of Family Physicians has great information about circumcision:

www.familydoctor.org/042.xml

Medline plus has more detailed information about circumcision:

www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/circumcision.html

The American Academy of Pediatrics policy statement on circumcision:

<http://aappolicy.aappublications.org/cgi/content/full/pediatrics%3b103/3/686>

This page may be reproduced for noncommercial use by health care professionals to share with clients. Any other reproduction is subject to JMWH approval. The information and recommendations appearing on this page are appropriate in most instances, but they are not a substitute for medical diagnosis. For specific information concerning your personal medical condition, JMWH suggests that you consult your health care provider.