

Circumcision Decision - Pros and Cons

Circumcision means cutting off the foreskin or ring of tissue that covers the head (glans) of the penis. This surgical procedure is performed on the day of discharge of the hospital. The following information should help you decide which is best for your son. Cultural Aspects

Cultural Aspects

Followers of the Jewish and Moslem faiths perform circumcision for religious reasons. Non-religious circumcision became popular in English speaking countries between 1920 and 1950 because it was thought that circumcision might help prevent sexually transmitted diseases. Circumcision never became a common practice in Asia, South America, Central America or most of Europe. Over 80% of male population is not circumcised. Circumcision rates have fallen to 1% of newborn males in Britain, 10% in New Zealand and 40% in Canada.

Purpose of the Foreskin

The presence of the foreskin is not some cosmic error. The foreskin protects the glans against urine, feces and other types of irritation. Although rare events, infections of the urinary opening (meatitis) and scarring of the opening (metaplasia) occur most exclusively in a circumcised penis. The foreskin may also serve a sexual function, namely protecting the sensitivity of the glans.

How is circumcision done?

Circumcision is usually done a day or two after your baby is born. The procedure is fairly simple and doesn't take very long. There are different methods of circumcision, but all involve removing (cutting) the foreskin. Your baby will be awake for the procedure. Different methods of anesthesia may be used to prevent pain. A local anesthetic such as lidocaine may be injected (as a shot) into areas around the penis, or an anesthetic cream may be applied 60 to 90 minutes before the operation.

Benefits of Circumcision

In 1989 the American Academy of Pediatrics issued a new statement on circumcision clarifying that the procedure carried potential risks and benefits that parents need to consider. Circumcision may protect against urinary tract infections during the first year of life. However, there is only one chance that a circumcised infant will get a urinary tract infection.

Removal of the foreskin prevents infections under the foreskin (posthitis) and persistent foreskin (phimosis). However, both of these conditions are uncommon and usually due to excessive attempts to retract the skin. In general, circumcision does not prevent sexually transmitted disease later in life. Although it does protect against cancer of the penis, good hygiene also offers equal protection.

Risks of Circumcision

Like any surgical procedure, circumcision may cause complications (in less than 1 per 100 circumcisions). Circumcision is generally a safe procedure. It has a small risk of complications, most of them minor. After the initial pain and swelling go away, these are usually no problems. The main complications are excessive bleeding, infection (usually minor), injury to the penis, problems with healing, and parents not being satisfied with the appearance of the penis. Rarely, additional surgery was needed.

Some infant boys should not be circumcised right away for medical reasons: for example, if they have hypospadias (a minor birth defect involving abnormal location of the urethra, the opening where urine comes out) or possible bleeding abnormalities. If desired, circumcision can be performed after these problems are taken care of.

- Circumcision should only be done in normal, healthy newborns.

Finally the cost of circumcision is about \$100 per procedure in the United States. You may have to cover the cost of the procedure yourself because many medical insurance companies do not cover the costs of this procedure.

Should I have my baby circumcised?

This is a decision the parents must make after considering the possible benefits and risks. Talking to the doctor may help you decide.

There are a few medical situations in which it's best to have you baby circumcised and others in which it's best to avoid or delay circumcision. For many families, the decision depends on social factors:

- Having boys circumcised is traditional in some religions.
- In the past, most American boys were circumcised. Some families have their sons circumcised because that's what they're used to, or so that the boy will look "like dad."
- It may be easier to keep the penis clean if it's circumcised. However, most uncircumcised boys can easily push the foreskin back for cleaning. *Never force your son's foreskin back!* It will go back easily in time.
- Circumcision can always be performed later if needed or desired. However, the operation is simpler in newborns. If not, later, general anesthesia may have to be used.

How do I care for my baby after circumcision?

- After your baby has been circumcised, follow the surgeon's instructions for care.
- Generally, Vaseline or other ointments are applied to the circumcision area until the wound is healed and won't stick to diapers.
- Remember that circumcision is a healing wound. At first it looks red with white areas that look like pus.

When should I call your office?

After circumcision, call the surgeon's office or our office if:

- The penis is very swollen or redness is increasing.
- You have any concerns about the appearance of the penis.

