



Newborn Male Circumcision

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What is male circumcision?

Male **circumcision** is the surgical removal of the **foreskin**, which is the layer of skin that covers the head of the **penis**.

When is circumcision performed?

Circumcision may be performed before or after the mother and baby leave the hospital. It is performed only if the baby is healthy. If the baby has a medical condition, circumcision may be postponed.

How is circumcision performed?

Circumcision takes only a few minutes. During the procedure, the baby is placed on a special table. Various surgical techniques are used, but they follow the same steps:

- The penis and foreskin are cleaned.
- A special clamp is attached to the penis and the foreskin is cut and removed.
- After the procedure, gauze with petroleum jelly is placed over the wound to protect it from rubbing against the diaper.

What pain medication is used for circumcision?

Analgesia is safe and effective in reducing the pain associated with newborn circumcision. Before the procedure, you should ask what type of pain relief will be used.

Who performs circumcisions?

The procedure may be done by your **obstetrician–gynecologist (ob-gyn)** or by a pediatrician, a physician who takes care of the health of children. In some cases, a circumcision may be done in a nonmedical setting for religious or cultural reasons. If this is the case, the person doing the circumcision should be well trained in how to do the procedure, how to relieve pain, and how to prevent infection.

Is circumcision a required procedure?

It is your choice whether to have your son circumcised. It is not required by law or by hospital policy. Because circumcision is an **elective procedure**, it may not be covered by your health insurance policy. To find out if your policy covers the procedure, call your health insurance provider.

Why do some parents choose to have their infant sons circumcised?

One reason why parents circumcise their newborn sons is for health benefits, such as decreased risk of urinary tract infection during the first year of life and decreased risk of **sexually transmitted infections (STIs)** later in life. Others may choose circumcision so that the child does not look different from his father or other boys. For some people, circumcision is a part of cultural or religious practices. Muslims and Jews, for example, have circumcised their male newborns for centuries.

Why do some parents choose not to have their infant sons circumcised?

Some parents choose not to circumcise their sons because they are worried about the pain the baby feels or the risks involved. Others believe it is a decision a boy should make himself when he is older. However, recovery may take longer when circumcision is done on an older child or adult. The risk of **complications** also is increased when circumcision is done later.

What are the health benefits associated with circumcision?

Circumcision reduces the **bacteria** that can live under the foreskin. This includes bacteria that can cause urinary tract infections or, in adults, STIs. Circumcised infants appear to have less risk of urinary tract infections than uncircumcised infants during the first year of life. Some research shows that circumcision may decrease the risk of a man getting **human immunodeficiency virus (HIV)** from an infected female partner. More research is needed in this area.

After studying scientific evidence, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) found that the health benefits of circumcision in newborn boys outweigh the risks of the procedure. But the AAP also found the benefits are not great enough to recommend that all newborn boys be circumcised.

Are there risks associated with circumcision?

All surgical procedures carry some risk. Complications from a circumcision are rare, but they can occur. When they do occur, they usually are minor. Possible complications include bleeding, infection, or scarring. In rare cases, too much of the foreskin or not enough foreskin is removed. Complications generally are less likely if the circumcision is done by someone well trained in the procedure. It also is less likely for complications to arise if the circumcision is done in a medical setting.

Some parents also may worry that circumcision harms a man's sexual function, sensitivity, or satisfaction. However, current evidence shows that it does not.

When should circumcision not be done?

Circumcision should only be done when the newborn is stable and healthy. Reasons to delay circumcision include the following:

- The baby is born very early
- The baby has certain problems with his blood or a family history of bleeding disorders
- The baby has certain congenital abnormalities

How should I care for my circumcised son?

If you choose to have your baby boy circumcised, you will need to care for his penis as it heals. With each diaper change, the penis should be cleaned and petroleum jelly placed over the wound. The jelly can be placed on a gauze pad and applied directly on the penis or placed on the diaper in the area the penis touches. In most cases, the skin will heal in 7–10 days. You may notice that the tip of the penis is red and there may be a small amount of yellow fluid. This usually is a normal sign of healing.

How do I keep the circumcised area clean?

Use a mild soap to gently wash the penis. Remove any stool with soap and water during diaper changes. Change diapers often so that urine and stool do not cause infection. Signs of infection include redness that does not go away, swelling, or fluid that looks cloudy and forms a crust. Call your health care professional right away if you notice any of these signs.

How should I care for my uncircumcised son?

If your baby boy is not circumcised, wash the outside of the penis with a mild soap and water. Do not attempt to pull back the infant's foreskin. The foreskin may not be able to pull back completely until he is older. This is normal. Your child's pediatrician will tell you when it is ready to be pulled back and cleaned.

As your child gets older, teach your son how to wash his penis. When he is old enough, he should gently pull back the foreskin and clean the area with soap and water. The foreskin then should be pushed back into place.

What should I consider when making a decision about circumcision?

It is important to have all of the information about the possible benefits and risks of the procedure before making a decision. You may think about future health benefits, religious or cultural beliefs, and personal preferences or social concerns. Remember, circumcision is elective—it is your choice whether to have it done. If you have any questions or concerns, talk with your ob-gyn or other health care professional during your pregnancy so you have enough time to make an informed decision.

Glossary

Analgesia: Relief of pain without loss of muscle function.

Bacteria: One-celled organisms that can cause infections in the human body.

Circumcision: The surgical removal of a fold of skin called the foreskin that covers the glans (head) of the penis.

Complications: Diseases or conditions that occur as a result of another disease or condition. An example is pneumonia that occurs as a result of the flu. A complication also can occur as a result of a condition, such as pregnancy. An example of a pregnancy complication is preterm labor.

Elective Procedure: A planned, nonemergency procedure that is chosen by a patient or health care professional. The procedure is seen as positive for the patient but not absolutely necessary.

Foreskin: A layer of skin covering the end of the penis.

Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV): A virus that attacks certain cells of the body's immune system and causes acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS).

Obstetrician–Gynecologist (Ob-Gyn): A physician with special skills, training, and education in women's health.

Penis: An external male sex organ.

Sexually Transmitted Infection (STI): An infection that is spread by sexual contact, including chlamydia, gonorrhea, human papillomavirus (HPV), herpes, syphilis, and human immunodeficiency virus (HIV, the cause of acquired immunodeficiency syndrome [AIDS]).

If you have further questions, contact your obstetrician–gynecologist.

FAQ039: Designed as an aid to patients, this document sets forth current information and opinions related to women's health. The information does not dictate an exclusive course of treatment or procedure to be followed and should not be construed as excluding other acceptable methods of practice. Variations, taking into account the needs of the individual patient, resources, and limitations unique to the institution or type of practice, may be appropriate.

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