

Circumcision

If you give birth to a boy, you will be asked if you'd like him circumcised. This is a matter to be considered carefully before the baby is born, while you have time to think about it and discuss it with your care provider and pediatrician.

What is circumcision?

At birth, boys have skin that covers the end of the penis, called foreskin. Circumcision is the surgical removal of this foreskin, exposing the tip of the penis, and is usually done in the first few days of life before the baby leaves the hospital. A baby must be healthy to be circumcised.

It Is Your Decision

The American Academy of Pediatrics says that you do not need to circumcise your baby for health reasons. They consider circumcision a choice for parents to make. Some parents choose circumcision for religious or cultural reasons. It is important to consider the pros and cons, how the surgery is performed, and the potential complications.

Not all insurance companies pay for the procedure. If you plan to circumcise your son, you should contact your insurance provider for information about coverage.

Medical Reasons Parents Might Choose Circumcision

Research suggests that there may be some medical benefits to circumcision, including:

- A *slightly* lower risk of urinary tract infection (UTI). A circumcised boy has about one in 1,000 chance of getting a UTI in the first year of life. A baby who is not circumcised has a one in 100 chance of getting a UTI in the first year of life.
- A *slightly* lower risk of getting sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV (however, only abstinence or use of condoms can truly prevent STIs).
- A lower risk of cancer of the penis. However, this is *very rare* in both circumcised and uncircumcised men.
- Prevention of foreskin infections.
- Prevention of phimosis, a condition in which it is impossible to pull back the foreskin.

Medical Reasons Parents Might Choose Not to Circumcise

- Circumcision is surgery, and like all surgery it has 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
- The foreskin has more nerve endings than the glans, or sensitive tip of the penis, and its removal decreases sensitivity to touch.

- 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.
- Almost all uncircumcised boys can be taught proper hygiene that can lower the chance of getting infections, cancer of the penis, and sexually transmitted diseases.

How is the operation done?

Circumcision is usually performed by the hospital pediatrician before your baby goes home from the hospital. Like all surgery, circumcision is painful. Before the procedure, some providers use an anesthetic cream to block pain and some inject a small amount of anesthesia at the base of the penis to block the pain. The penis and foreskin are cleaned. In the most common circumcision procedure, a clamp is attached to the penis and the foreskin is removed by scalpel. This operation takes up to fifteen minutes. You can be with your baby during the operation if you choose.

Care of the circumcised penis

A nurse or doctor will give you directions for caring for your baby after circumcision. Clean the penis as you would with any diaper change. Apply the provided ointment to the penis with each change so that the penis does not stick to the diaper. It takes about one week to 10 days for the penis to fully heal. Call your baby's doctor if you notice any signs of infection such as redness, swelling, or foul-smelling drainage.

Care of the uncircumcised penis

A nurse or doctor will give you directions for caring for an uncircumcised penis as part of routine baby care. Wash the outside of the penis with soap and water. Do not attempt to pull back the foreskin. By the time your son is about 3 or 4 years old, the foreskin will begin to pull back and your son can be taught to wash the head of the penis and inside the fold of the foreskin. Pull the foreskin back over the head of the penis after washing.

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>

Circumcision Information and Resource Page is an Internet resource that provide you with information about all aspects of the genital surgery known as circumcision: <http://www.cirp.org/>