

Circumcision Information for Parents

Circumcision is a surgical procedure in which the skin covering the end of the penis is removed. Circumcision is usually performed by a doctor in the first few days of life. An infant must be stable and healthy to safely be circumcised.

Scientific studies show some medical benefits of circumcision. However, these benefits are not sufficient for the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) to recommend that all infant boys be circumcised. Parents may want their sons circumcised for religious, social and cultural reasons. Since circumcision is not essential to a child's health, parents should choose what is best for their child by looking at the benefits and risks.

Many parents choose to have their sons circumcised because "all the other men in the family were circumcised" or because they do not want their sons to feel "different." Others feel that circumcision is unnecessary and choose not to have it done. Some groups, such as followers of the Jewish and Islamic faiths, practice circumcision for religious and cultural reasons. Since circumcision may be more risky if done later in life, parents may want to decide before or soon after their son is born if they want their son circumcised.

As noted above, research studies suggest that there may be some medical benefits to circumcision. These include the following:

- 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 both circumcised and uncircumcised males.
- A slightly lower risk of getting sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), including HIV, the AIDS virus.
- Prevention of foreskin infections.
- Prevention of phimosis, a condition in uncircumcised males that makes foreskin retraction impossible.
- Easier genital hygiene.

Just as there are reasons parents may choose circumcision, they are reasons why parents may choose NOT to have their son circumcised:

- Possible risks. As with any surgery, circumcision has some risks. Complications from circumcision are rare and usually minor. They may include bleeding, infection, cutting the foreskin too short or too long, and improper healing.
- The belief that the foreskin is necessary to protect the tip of the penis. When removed, the tip of the penis may become irritated and cause the opening of the penis to become too small. Rarely, this can cause urination problems that may need to be surgically corrected.
- Some people believe that circumcision makes the tip of the penis less sensitive, causing a decrease in sexual pleasure later in life. This has not been proven by any medical or psychological study.

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