

What You Should Know About Newborn Circumcision

Deciding whether to circumcise your newborn boy is an important responsibility. While there is no compelling medical purpose for the procedure in most boys, circumcision may be chosen based on religious, hygienic, or sexual reasons; in rare cases, a medical condition requires it. In the United States today, more than 60% of male newborns are circumcised; worldwide, the rate is about 30%.

What is circumcision?

Circumcision is the surgical removal of the foreskin that covers the head of the penis. The clinician will numb the area with an anesthetic injection or cream. Then a special clamp is attached to the penis, and the foreskin is removed. Ointment and gauze are used to cover the area until it heals, within about 7 to 10 days.

This procedure is often done before the mother and her newborn leave the hospital; for Jewish boys, it is done when the baby is 8 days old. (Some cultures perform circumcision in older boys.) Circumcisions in the hospital are usually performed by an obstetrician but may be done by a pediatrician, urologist, or other clinician.

What are the reasons for circumcision?

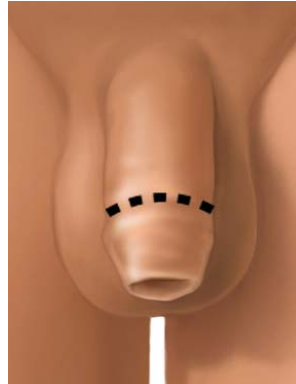
For centuries, circumcision has been practiced as a religious rite of infancy in the Jewish and Muslim traditions. This is still a main reason for circumcision.

In the early 20th century, circumcision was touted by the medical community as a means for a healthier society, and by the 1970s, about 90% of boys in the United States were circumcised. Since that time, the value of circumcision has been debated, and the procedure is no longer considered essential.

What are the pros and cons?

Some parents choose to have their sons circumcised for better hygiene; however, a boy can be taught as part of his daily bathing routine to properly wash his penis to remove the build-up of discharge.

Before procedure



Foreskin is cut
along dashed line.

After procedure



Foreskin is
removed.

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Studies have shown a lower risk for urinary tract infections (UTIs) in boys who were circumcised, but the rate of UTIs in boys is already low. A relatively small decrease in risk also has been noted for cancer of the penis, certain sexually transmitted diseases, and infection of the penis.

Some parents choose not to circumcise their son because of the pain the baby will feel or because of the risk of surgery. Some research has shown a more natural sexual response for men who are not circumcised.

Will it hurt my baby?

There is no doubt that circumcision causes pain until the area heals. For that reason, the penis is numbed before the procedure, and the baby is given pain medication before and afterwards.

Circumcision is a safe procedure, but as with any surgery, there are risks. Bleeding, infection, and injury to the penis are rare complications.

How do I decide what is best for my baby?

Discuss your questions and concerns with your health care professional while you are pregnant. Circumcision is an elective procedure, and you should make an informed decision.