

# Circumcision

Circumcision is a simple surgical operation to remove the foreskin, a piece of skin that covers the tip of the penis in boy babies. There's no official recommendation to routinely have male newborns circumcised. Circumcision may reduce the risk of certain medical problems later in life, but there is also a small risk of complications from the surgery. The final decision depends on your family's preferences.

## What is circumcision?

In newborn boys, the skin of the penis goes a little bit past the "tip" (glans) of the penis. This piece of skin is called the foreskin. Circumcision is a simple operation to remove the foreskin.

Sometimes there are medical reasons why circumcision should or should not be done. Research has shown that circumcision reduces the risk of certain medical problems later on in life. On the other hand, there is a small risk of complications from the procedure. For most parents, the decision as to whether or not to have their son circumcised depends on cultural, religious, or personal reasons.

## 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.

## Is circumcision safe?

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, there 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 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. 

## What are the advantages of having my baby circumcised?

- Boys who have been circumcised have lower rates of urinary tract infections during the first year of life. Being circumcised also reduces the risk of certain minor problems related to the foreskin in boys, such as infection or irritation.
- Circumcised males are at lower risk of developing cancer of the penis. (However, this cancer is rare even in uncircumcised men.)
- Circumcision may reduce the risk of some sexually transmitted diseases, including infection with human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), the virus that causes acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS).

## What are the disadvantages of having my baby circumcised?

Circumcision has some uncommon but possible complications. Not performing the circumcision avoids the risk of these complications (listed earlier) as well as the pain 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 your 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 done 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 the 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.