

CIRCUMCISION INFORMATION

What is circumcision?

Circumcision is surgery to remove a fold of skin, called the foreskin, from the head (glans) of the penis. Boys are born with this fold of skin. In circumcision, the foreskin is removed, exposing the end of the penis.

How do I choose?

It is important for you to know that circumcision is neither essential nor detrimental to a boy's health. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) does not find enough evidence to medically recommend circumcision or to

argue against it. As a parent, you need to choose what is right for your child. For some families, the choice is simple because it is based on cultural or religious beliefs. But for others, the right option is not as clear-cut. Before you make a decision about circumcision, you should talk to your child's doctor and consider some of the issues.

About 1.2 million newborn boys are circumcised annually in the United States. Circumcision is much more widespread in the United States, Canada, and the Middle East than it is in Asia, South America, Central America, and most of Europe. Current estimates are that within the United States, white babies (81%) are more likely to be circumcised than black (65%) or Latino (54%) babies. Although circumcision seems to have some medical benefits, it also has potential risks— as does any surgical procedure. These risks are small, but you should be aware of the possible pros and cons, and risks, before you make your decision.

What are potential pros and cons?

- Studies show that circumcised infants are less likely to contract a urinary tract infection (UTI) in the first year of life. About one out of every 1,000 circumcised boys has a UTI in the first year, whereas the rate is one in 100 for uncircumcised infants.
- Circumcised men may also be at lower risk for penile cancer, although the disease is rare in both circumcised and uncircumcised males.
- Circumcision might offer an additional line of defense against sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), particularly HIV, but the results of studies in this area are conflicting and difficult to interpret.
- It's also easier to keep a circumcised penis clean, although uncircumcised boys can learn how to clean beneath the foreskin once the foreskin becomes retractable some time before age 5). However, some uncircumcised boys do end up with infected foreskins as the result of poor hygiene.
- Some people claim that circumcision either lessens or heightens the sensitivity of the tip of the penis, decreasing or increasing sexual pleasure later in life. But neither of these subjective findings has been proven.

What are potential risks or complications?

Complications of newborn circumcision are uncommon. They occur in between one in 200 and one in 500 cases. Of these, the most frequent are:

- minor bleeding
- local infection

Your child's doctor can easily treat both of these complications. Rarely, too little or too much skin is removed.

- If too little skin is removed, the circumcision may have to be repeated.
- If too much skin is removed, the penis can take longer to heal, or may require reconstructive surgery.

If you do opt for circumcision, it is best to perform the operation within the first 2 to 3 weeks of life, as circumcision can become more complicated as a child gets older. In some instances, the doctor may decide to delay the procedure or not to do it at all.

Premature or medically unstable babies are not circumcised until they are ready to leave the hospital.

Babies born with physical abnormalities of the penis that need to be corrected surgically are often not circumcised at all. This is because the foreskin may eventually be used as part of a reconstructive operation.

Children with certain conditions, such as spina bifida and Down's Syndrome, also may have additional considerations.

What about pain?

Newborn babies DO feel pain. Although the circumcision can be painful, local anesthesia can greatly reduce your baby's discomfort. If you decide to circumcise your son, talk with your child's doctor about anesthesia options.

Most doctors use one of three types of local anesthesia to make the operation less painful:

- a topical cream
- a nerve block injected at the base of the penis
- a nerve block injected under the skin around the penis shaft

How is circumcision performed?

Besides receiving anesthesia, your child is secured in a padded restraint device to help reduce his level of stress (and yours).

If the Gomco technique is used:

1. The Gomco device clamps the foreskin and holds it away from, and protects, the glans. This allows the doctor to quickly cut the foreskin.
2. The doctor then removes the device and covers the incision with an antibacterial ointment and gauze coated with petroleum jelly.
3. When you bathe your child, do not immerse him in a basin for 24 hours. A soft, yellow scab may be present for a couple of days. This is normal. Do not remove it, but do wash gently.
4. If your son has a bandage on his incision, you might need to apply a new one whenever you change his diaper for a day or two after the procedure (put petroleum jelly on the bandage so it will not stick to his skin). It usually takes between 7 to 10 days for a penis to heal.

How do I keep my son's penis clean?

Whether you choose circumcision or not, keeping your son's penis clean is important. Regardless of your son's circumcision status, wash his penis with soap and warm water when you bathe him. You do not need to use cotton swabs, astringents, or any special bath products.

With an uncircumcised boy, never forcibly pull back the foreskin to clean beneath it. Instead, gently tense it against the tip of the penis and wash off any smegma (the whitish "beads" of dead skin cells mixed with the body's natural oil). Over time, the foreskin will retract on its own so it can be pulled away from the glans toward the abdomen. This happens at different times for different children, but most boys can retract their foreskins by the time they are 5 years old. As your son grows up, teach him to wash beneath the foreskin by gently pulling it back from the glans, rinsing the glans and the inside of the foreskin with soap and warm water, then pulling the foreskin back over the head of the penis.

When should I call the doctor?

If your son was circumcised, watch for the following signs or symptoms that may need medical attention:

- persistent bleeding
- redness around the tip of the penis that gets worse after 3 days
- fever
- signs of infection such as the presence of pus-filled blisters
- failure to urinate normally within 6 to 8 hours after the circumcision

If you notice any of these signs or symptoms, call your child's doctor right away. With quick intervention, almost all circumcision-related problems are easily treated.