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Ages & Stages

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Circumcision

Circumcision is a surgical procedure in which the skin covering the end of the penis is removed. Scientific studies show a number of medical benefits of circumcision. Parents may also want their sons circumcised for religious, social, or cultural reasons. Because 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. The following are answers to common questions about circumcision.



What Is Circumcision?

At birth, boys have skin that covers the end of the penis, called the foreskin. Circumcision surgically removes the foreskin, exposing the tip of the penis. 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.

Because circumcision may be more risky if done later in life, parents should decide before or soon after their son is born if they want it done.

Is Circumcision Painful?

Yes. However, there are pain medicines that are safe and effective. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that they be used to reduce pain from circumcision.

What Should I Expect For My Son After Circumcision?

After the circumcision, the tip of the penis may seem raw or yellowish. If there is a bandage, it should be changed with each diapering to reduce the risk of infection. Use petroleum jelly to keep the bandage from sticking. Sometimes a plastic ring is used instead of a bandage. This should drop off within 5 to 8 days. The penis should be fully healed in about 1 week to 10 days after circumcision.

Are There Any Problems That Can Happen After Circumcision?

Problems after a circumcision are very rare. However, call your pediatrician right away if

- Your baby does not urinate normally within 6 to 8 hours after the circumcision.
- Bleeding doesn't stop.
- The redness around the tip of the penis gets worse after 3 to 5 days.
- Yellow discharge lasts longer than a week. It is normal to have a little yellow discharge or coating around the head of the penis in the first week.

Reasons Parents May Choose Circumcision

There are a variety of reasons why parents choose circumcision.

Medical benefits, including:

- A markedly lower risk of acquiring **HIV**, the virus that causes **AIDS**.
- A significantly lower risk of acquiring a number of **sexually transmitted infections (STIs)**, including genital herpes (HSV), human papilloma virus (HPV), and syphilis.
- A slightly 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 all males.
- Prevention of foreskin infections.
- Prevention of phimosis, a condition in uncircumcised males that makes foreskin retraction impossible.
- Easier genital hygiene.

Social reasons:

- Many parents choose to have it done because "all the other men in the family" had it done or because they do not want their sons to feel "different."

Religious or cultural reasons:

- Some groups, such as followers of the Jewish and Islamic faiths, practice circumcision for religious and cultural reasons.

Reasons Parents May Choose Not to Circumcise

The following are reasons why parents may choose NOT to have their son circumcised:

- Fear of the risks. Complications are rare and usually minor but may include bleeding, infection, cutting the foreskin too short or too long, and improper healing.
- Belief that the foreskin is needed. Some people feel the foreskin is needed to protect the tip of the penis. Without it, the tip of the penis may become irritated and cause the opening of the penis to become too small. This can cause urination problems that may need to be surgically corrected.
- Belief it can affect **sex**. Some feel that circumcision makes the tip of the penis less sensitive, causing a decrease in sexual pleasure later in life.
- Belief that proper hygiene can lower health risks. Boys can be taught proper hygiene that can lower their chances of getting infections, cancer of the penis, and STIs.

What If I Choose Not to Have My Son Circumcised?

If you choose not to have your son circumcised, talk with your pediatrician about **how to keep your son's penis clean**. Keep in mind that the foreskin will not fully retract for several years and should never be forced. When your son is old enough, he can learn how to keep his penis clean just as he will learn to keep other parts of his body clean.

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