Male Infant Circumcision

Male circumcision is a surgical procedure in which the foreskin is removed from the penis.

Most often, infant boys are circumcised soon after birth. The procedure dates back to prehistoric times and today is both a Jewish and a Muslim religious ritual. People worldwide continue to circumcise their sons for hygienic, cultural, and religious reasons.

Procedure and Healing

Usually, infants are circumcised during the first few days of life, either while still in the hospital or shortly thereafter. The procedure takes only 15 to 30 minutes. Doctors recommend that babies be given pain medicine beforehand.

After the procedure, the caregiver should cover the tip of the penis with lubricated gauze. After 24 hours, only the lubricant is needed. Clean the area using a cotton ball and warm water. A soft yellow scab will form and then fall off. At first, there is likely to be some minor redness, swelling, bleeding, and discharge, but if any of these get worse or do not disappear, contact a doctor.

Risks and Benefits

Circumcision in infancy is very safe. When it is performed by a trained professional under sterile conditions, few babies have complications and these (bleeding, infection, scarring) are typically minor. There are no long-term studies of the health benefits of children who have been circumcised. Recent large studies of adults undergoing circumcision in the United States and Africa have provided important new data about circumcision. The findings support existing knowledge that male circumcision provides substantial medical benefits.

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) in 2012 reviewed all the evidence about male infant circumcision and concluded that the health benefits of circumcision are not great enough to recommend routine circumcision. The procedure's benefits are sufficient to justify access to the procedure for families choosing it. The benefits of circumcision are greater than the risks and families should receive information about circumcision early in pregnancies. Benefits include helping to prevent the following:

- Urinary tract infection
- Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) infection
- Transmission of some sexually transmitted infections
- Penile cancer

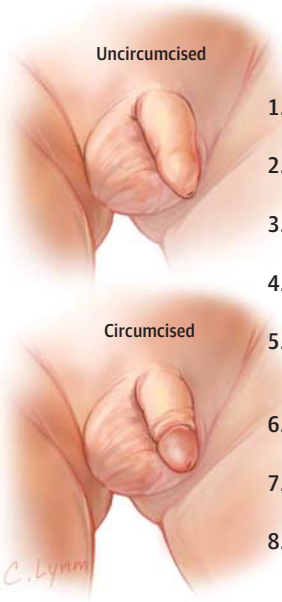
Male circumcision does not appear to affect sexual function, sensitivity, or sexual satisfaction. Female sexual partners of circumcised men also gain some protection from disease.

The latest studies led the AAP to state that

- Families should have access to circumcision.
- Health insurance should pay for circumcision.

The AAP also recommends that

- Doctors talk to parents about the health risks and benefits.
- Parents weigh this information together with their religious, ethical, and cultural beliefs and practices.



Questions to ask when deciding about circumcision

1. What are the possible health benefits of circumcision?
2. What are the possible health risks of circumcision?
3. How is circumcision performed and what is the recovery?
4. What is the care for an uncircumcised penis?
5. What are my religious and cultural beliefs about circumcision?
6. What are social reasons to consider?
7. What are my personal preferences and feelings?
8. What is in the best interest of my son?

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- National Library of Medicine
  http://vsearch.nlm.nih.gov/vivisimo/cgi-bin/query-meta?v%3Aproject=medlineplus&query=circumcision
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
  http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/malecircumcision/

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