

## Circumcision

Boys are born with a hood of skin, called the foreskin, covering the head (also called the glans) of the penis. In circumcision, the foreskin is surgically removed, exposing the end of the penis.

Approximately 55 to 65 percent of all newborn boys are circumcised in the United States each year. Parents who choose circumcision often do so based on religious beliefs, concerns about hygiene, or cultural or social reasons, such as the wish to have their son look like other men in the family.

Routine circumcision is usually performed during the first 10 days (often within the first 48 hours), either in the hospital or, for some religious ritual circumcisions, at home.

If you decide to have your son circumcised at the hospital, your pediatrician, family doctor or obstetrician will perform the procedure before you bring your baby home. The doctor should prepare you by telling you about the procedure he or she will use and the possible risks. Circumcision after the newborn period can be a more complicated procedure and usually requires general anesthesia.

In some instances, doctors may decide to delay the procedure or forgo it altogether. Premature babies or those who have special medical concerns may not be circumcised until they're ready to leave the hospital.

### Pros and cons

Circumcised infants are less likely to develop urinary tract infections (UTIs), especially in the first year of life. UTIs are about 10 times more common in uncircumcised males than circumcised infants.

Circumcised men also might be at lower risk for penile cancer, although the disease is rare in both circumcised and uncircumcised males. Some studies indicate that the procedure might offer an additional line of defense against sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) like HIV in heterosexual men.

Penile problems, such as irritation, inflammation, and infection, are more common in uncircumcised males. It's easier to keep a circumcised penis clean, although uncircumcised boys can learn how to clean under the foreskin once they are older.

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 none of these subjective findings are conclusive.

Although circumcision appears to have some medical benefits, it also carries potential risks — as does any surgical procedure. Complications of newborn circumcision although uncommon, can include minor bleeding and local infection, both of which can be easily treated by your doctor.

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends the use of anesthesia during circumcision and studies show that infants undergoing circumcision benefit from pain medicine. There are two main types of local anesthetic that are used to make the operation less painful:

1. a topical cream (a cream put on the penis) that requires at least 20 to 40 minutes to take its full effect
2. an injectable anesthetic that requires less time to take effect and may provide a slightly longer period of anesthesia

In addition to anesthesia, an acetaminophen suppository can be inserted into the baby's rectum. This helps reduce discomfort during the procedure and several hours afterward. Giving a pacifier dipped in sugar water also can help reduce a baby's stress and discomfort.

### Caring for a circumcised penis

Following circumcision, it is important to keep the area as clean as possible. Gently clean with warm water — do not use diaper wipes. Your doctor may recommend putting a dab of petroleum jelly on the baby's penis or on the front of the diaper for three to five days to ease any potential discomfort caused by friction against the diaper.

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 won't stick to his skin).

It usually takes between 7 to 10 days for a penis to heal. Initially the tip may appear slightly swollen and red and you may notice a small amount of blood on the diaper. You also may notice a slight yellow discharge or crust after a couple of days.

Call your doctor right away if you notice any of the following:

- persistent bleeding or blood on diaper (more than quarter-sized)
- increasing redness
- fever
- other signs of infection, such as worsening swelling or discharge, or the presence of pus-filled blisters

# Circumcision (continued)

- not urinating normally within 12 hours after the circumcision

With quick intervention, almost all circumcision-related problems are easily treated.