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Guide to Circumcision

A layer of skin, the **foreskin**, covers the **glans** (head) of the penis. Circumcision is the surgical removal of this foreskin. If it is done, it's usually done soon after birth. Whether to have your son circumcised is your decision. This pamphlet will:

- Discuss how circumcision is done
- Explain how to care for your newborn boy
- Help you decide if circumcision is right for your son

Making the Decision

Circumcision is an elective procedure. That means it is the parents' choice whether to have their son circumcised. In most cases, there is no medical reason for a circumcision. It is not required by law or by hospital policy.

Although many newborn boys in the United States are circumcised, it is much less common in Northern Europe and other parts of the world. Some parents have their sons circumcised for religious or cultural reasons. Moslems and Jews, for example, have circumcised their male newborns for centuries.

Some parents choose to have their sons circumcised for the sake of hygiene. Smegma—a cheesy discharge containing dead cells—can build up under the foreskin of males who are not circumcised. This can lead to odor or infection. A boy can be taught to wash his penis to get rid of smegma as a part of his daily bathing routine.

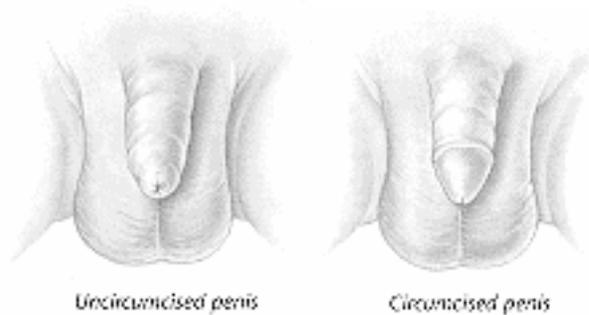
Some parents choose *not* to circumcise their sons because they are worried about the pain the baby feels or the risks involved with the surgery.

Some doctors feel that circumcision lowers the risk of **sexually transmitted diseases** (STDs). There is no proof of this, however. Others feel that circumcision helps prevent cancer of the penis, a rare condition in uncircumcised men. Circumcised infants appear to have less risk of infections of the urinary tract than uncircumcised infants. However, the risk in both groups is low.

The Procedure

Circumcision is done before the mother and baby leave the hospital. During the procedure, the baby is placed on a special table. The doctor may use **local anesthesia** to lessen the pain. Various surgical techniques are used, but they follow the same steps:

- The penis and foreskin are cleaned.
- A special clamp is attached to the penis and the foreskin is removed.
- Ointment and gauze often are placed over the cut to protect it from rubbing against the diaper.



The procedure is done quickly. The baby will cry during and for a short while afterward. The skin will heal in about 7-10 days.

Risks

Complications from a circumcision are rare. However, every surgery carries some risk. Complications that can occur are:

- Bleeding
- Infection
- Injury to the penis or **urethra**
- Scarring

Caring for Your Newborn

Circumcised Infants

If your baby boy is circumcised, a light dressing such as gauze with petroleum jelly may be placed over the head of the penis after surgery. Keep the area as clean as possible. Wash the baby's penis with soap and water every day. Change the diapers often so that urine and stool do not cause infection.

With one type of circumcision, a plastic ring is left on the penis. This ring will slip off when the edge of the circumcision is fully healed.

Uncircumcised Infants

Washing the baby's penis and foreskin properly is important. The outside of the penis should be washed with soap and water. Do not attempt to pull back the infant's foreskin. The foreskin may not be able to pull back completely until the child is about 3-5 years old. This is normal.

Teach your boy to wash his penis, including under the foreskin after it has begun to retract. Once he learns to do this, it will become part of his daily routine.

Finally...

Deciding whether to circumcise your newborn boy is an important choice for parents. Remember, circumcision is elective—it is your choice whether to have it done. If you have any questions or concerns, talk with your doctor about them during your pregnancy so you have enough time to make an informed decision.