

Circumcision: Information for Parents

What is circumcision?

Circumcision of baby boys is a surgical procedure to remove the layer of skin (called the foreskin or prepuce) that covers the head (glans) of the penis and part of the shaft. The role of the foreskin is to protect the delicate and sensitive skin of the glans. Circumcision is often done for religious or cultural reasons.

Circumcision is considered a “non-therapeutic” procedure, which means it is not medically necessary. For this reason it is not paid for by OHIP, and parents who want to circumcise must pay for this procedure.

The Canadian Pediatric Society does not recommend routine circumcision for newborn boys. According to the Canadian Institute for Health Information 9.2% of Canadian male infants were circumcised in 2005.

What are the medical risks and benefits of circumcision?

Circumcision is a surgical procedure. Problems from the surgery are usually minor. Serious complications are rare, but they can occur. Examples would be having too much skin removed or serious bleeding problems.

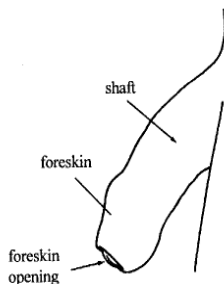
Of every 1000 boys who *are not* circumcised

- 7 will be admitted to a hospital for a urinary tract infection before they are one year old.
- 10 will have a circumcision later in life for medical reasons such as phimosis. Phimosis is a scarred and narrow opening of the foreskin.
- Older children and adults who need circumcision may need a general anaesthetic and they may have more complications than newborns.
- 3 of every million men who are not circumcised will develop cancer of the penis each year.

Of every 1000 boys who *are* circumcised

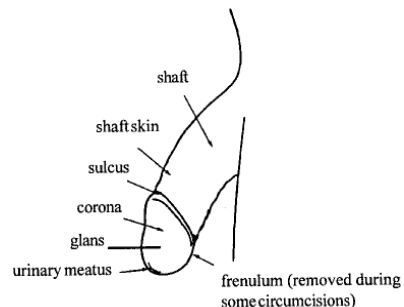
- 2 will be admitted to hospital for a urinary tract infection (UTI) before they are one year old.
- 20-30 will have a surgical complication like too much bleeding or infection.
- 2-3 will have a more serious complication such as more serious bleeding or having too much skin removed. Very rarely babies can die from serious bleeding or infections.
- About 10 babies may need to have the circumcision done again
- 1 of every million men who are circumcised will develop cancer of the penis.

Intact penis



(glans, urinary meatus and frenulum are under the foreskin)

Circumcised penis



Caring for an uncircumcised penis

- **An uncircumcised penis is easy to keep clean and requires no special care**
- At birth the foreskin covers the head or glans of the penis. Sometime in the first few years of life the foreskin will naturally separate from the the glans. When it can be pulled back it is “retractable”.
- Gently wash the area during his bath. **Do not try to pull back the foreskin.** Usually it is not fully retractable until a boy is 3 to 5 years old or even until after puberty. **Never force it.** Most boys will discover how to pull back their foreskin on their own.
- Skin cells under the foreskin will be shed as new cells develop and replace them. The dead skin cells will work their way down the penis through the opening of the foreskin. These skin cells may look like white, discharge and are called smegma. Do not force them out. Wipe the smegma away when it comes out.
- When your son is old enough, teach him to clean his penis as you teach him to clean the rest of his body. When the foreskin is fully retractable, teach your son to wash underneath it.

If you decide to have your baby boy circumcised

What happens during circumcision?

- Babies are put onto a restraining board and the penis is cleaned
- Pain relief is given. This includes local anaesthetic given by a needle into the penis. Anaesthetics do carry risks and the needle can cause bruising or swelling. Babies may also be offered a sweet solution to suck on to help relieve pain during the procedure.
- One of three techniques may be used to cut off the foreskin: Mogen clamp, Plastibell, or Gomco technique. The specific technique used will depend on the preferences of the physician.
- Babies may need acetaminophen (Tylenol) when the local anaesthetic wears off. It should be given for 48 hours or longer if he appears to have pain or seems uncomfortable.

Caring for a circumcised penis

- After the circumcision your baby will need to be comforted, and he should be nursed often.
- The penis will take 7 to 10 days to heal. The area may be red for a few days and you may see some yellow discharge. The amount of yellow discharge should decrease as the penis heals.
- Keep the area as clean as possible. Wash the penis gently with mild soap and water. Be sure to clean away bits of stool. Change his diaper often.
- After the circumcision is healed there is no special care required. When he is old enough, teach your son to clean his penis as you are teaching him to clean the rest of his body.

Call your midwife or the physician who did the circumcision if:

- **You see more than a few drops of blood at any time during the healing process**
- **The redness and swelling around the circumcision does not start to go down in 48 hours**
- **Your son develops a fever or seems to be sick**

*All of the above information was taken from the Canadian Pediatric Society at www.cps.ca
You can find more information on the arguments against circumcision at <http://www.infocirc.org>*

Further Considerations from your Midwives

- We have noticed in practice that the pain caused by circumcision can affect breastfeeding. We suggest that circumcision be delayed until breastfeeding is well established or until around one to two weeks of age.
- Normal, healthy babies generally lose weight after birth until about 3 days of age and then start to regain. We recommend delaying circumcision until your son shows evidence of thriving by regaining adequate weight (most babies are gaining well by two weeks of age)
- If you are planning to circumcise your son, we strongly recommend the Vitamin K injection (to prevent bleeding) that is part of routine newborn care.