Let's Talk About...

Circumcision and penis care

What is circumcision?

Circumcision is a surgery to remove a fold of skin (the foreskin) from the head (glans) of the penis. Boys are born with this fold of skin. In circumcision, the foreskin is removed, exposing the head of the penis (the glans).

How do I decide if my son should have a circumcision or not?

It is important for you to know that circumcision is not necessary but it's also not harmful to a boy's health. The American Academy of Pediatrics (the organization of children's doctors) does not recommend for or against circumcision. As a parent, you need to choose what you feel is right for your child.

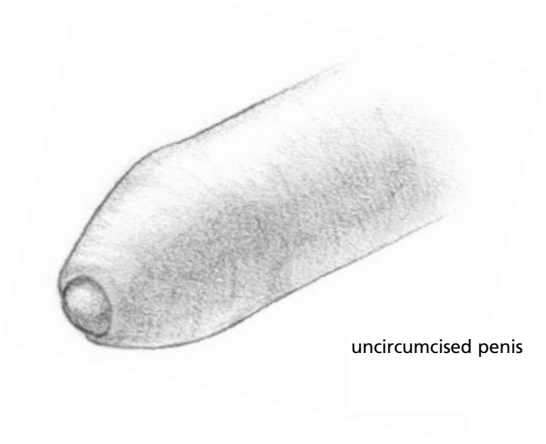
For some families, the choice is simple because of their culture or religion. But for others, the right option is not as clear. Before you make a decision about circumcision, you should talk to your child's doctor and consider some of the issues.

About 1.2 million newborn boys are circumcised in the United States every year. Circumcision is much more common in the United States, Canada, and the Middle East than in Asia, South America, Central America, and most of Europe. In the United States, white babies (81%) are more likely to be circumcised than black (65%) or Latino (54%) babies.

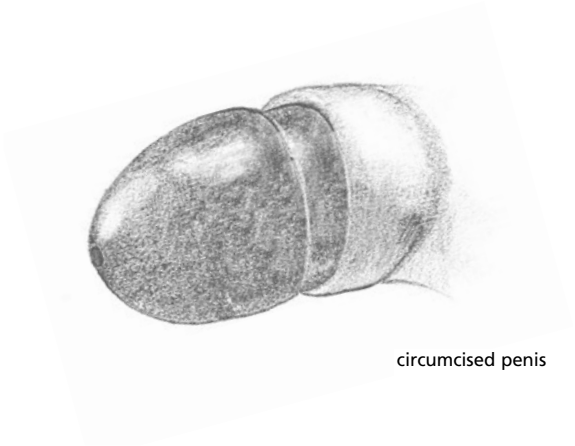
Although circumcision has some medical benefits, it also has some risks, just like any other surgery. These risks are small, but you should know the pros and cons, and risks, before you make your decision.

What are some pros and cons about having my son circumcised?

- Circumcised infants are less likely to get a urinary tract infection (UTI) in the first year of life.
  - About one out of every 1,000 circumcised boys has a UTI in the first year.
  - About one out of every 100 uncircumcised boys has a UTI in the first year.
  - After the first year, the UTI risk is about the same for circumcised and uncircumcised boys.
- Circumcised men may have less risk for cancer of the penis. But this cancer is rare in both circumcised and uncircumcised men in the United States.
- Circumcision probably helps defend against getting sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), particularly HIV, which causes AIDS.
- It is easier to keep a circumcised penis clean
  - Uncircumcised boys can learn how to clean beneath the foreskin when the foreskin becomes retractable (able to slip back over the head of the penis toward the body). The foreskin becomes retractable usually before the boy is 5 years old.
  - Some uncircumcised boys have foreskin infections because of poor hygiene.
- Does the circumcision make the tip of the penis more or less sensitive?
  - Some say that circumcision either decreases or increases sensitivity of the tip of the penis, decreasing or increasing sexual pleasure later in life.
  - There is no proof that circumcision makes the tip of the penis more or less sensitive.
  - There is no proof that circumcision either decreases or increases sexual pleasure later in life.



uncircumcised penis



circumcised penis

What are the possible risks or complications of circumcision?

Complications of newborn circumcision are not common. They happen between one in 200 and one in 500 circumcisions. The most frequent complications are:

- Minor bleeding
- Local infection

Your child's doctor can easily treat both of these.

An important preventable problem is re-adherence of the circumcision site to the tip of the penis. You can prevent this by:

- Gently retracting the remaining skin for 2–3 weeks after the circumcision
- Putting petroleum jelly into the groove just beneath the tip.

In rare cases, too little or too much skin is removed.

- If too little skin is removed, the circumcision may have to be repeated.
- If too much skin is removed, the penis can take longer to heal, or may require reconstructive surgery.

If you decide to have your child circumcised, it is best for your son to have the operation in the first four weeks of life. Circumcision is more complicated as a child gets older.

In some cases, the doctor may delay the procedure or decide not to do it at all.

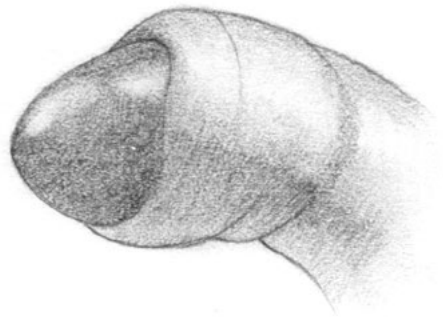
- Premature or medically unstable babies are not circumcised until they are ready to leave the hospital.
- Babies born with physical abnormalities of the penis that need surgery are often not circumcised. This is because the foreskin may be needed for the reconstruction surgery.
- Children with certain conditions, such as spina bifida and Down Syndrome, may not be circumcised.

What about pain?

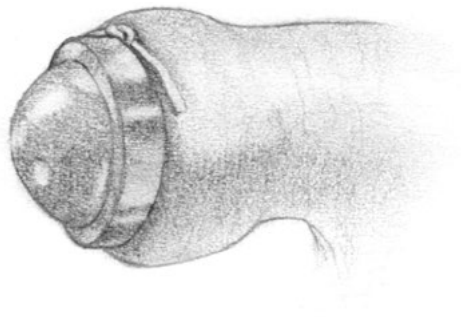
Newborn babies feel pain. Circumcision can be painful, but pain medicine (local anesthetic) given to the surgery area can greatly reduce your baby's discomfort. If you decide to circumcise your son, talk with your child's doctor about pain management.

Most doctors use one of these local anesthesias to make the operation less painful:

- A numbing cream put on the skin of the penis
- A nerve block injected at the base of the penis (pain medicine that numbs the nerve to the penis for a short time)
- A nerve block injected under the skin around the penis shaft (pain medicine that numbs the nerve to the penis for a short time)



Gomko technique



Plastibell technique

How does the doctor do the circumcision and how do I care for my child?

Your child may be given a sugar-dipped pacifier to help relieve pain and reduce his level of stress (and yours). He will also be secured in a padded restraint device. Used together, these can decrease discomfort by more than half.

If your child has the Gomco circumcision device technique:

How does the doctor do the circumcision?

- The doctor clamps the Gomco device to the foreskin. This holds the foreskin away from the glans (the head of the penis) and protects the glans during the procedure.
- The doctor removes the foreskin.
- Then the doctor takes the Gomco device off and covers the incision with an antibiotic ointment and some gauze coated with petroleum jelly.

How do I care for my child at home?

- Do not put your child in a bath for 24 hours.
- Your child's penis may have a soft, yellow scab for a few days. This is normal. Do not remove the scab, but wash it gently.
- It is important to keep petroleum jelly all over the tip of the penis and in the groove just beneath the tip as it starts to heal. This will help prevent skin from the shaft of the penis getting stuck to the tip and help it heal properly.
- You may need to gently push the skin of the penis toward the body so that the tip pops out and is easily seen.
- If your son has a bandage on his incision, you might need to put a new one on with each diaper change. Do this for a day or two after the procedure. Put petroleum jelly on the bandage so it will not stick to his skin.
- It usually takes seven to 10 days for the penis to heal.

If your child has a Plastibell:

How does the doctor do the circumcision?

- The doctor puts the Plastibell device on the penis. The Plastibell device clamps the foreskin edge as it heals then slowly detaches the foreskin from the penis.
- Your child will go home with this plastic cap in place, with a string tied around it to secure it in place.

How do I care for my child at home?

- The string and cap will normally fall off by itself in five to eight days. Call your doctor if it has not fallen off in 10 to 12 days.
- One section of the cap may become detached before the other section. This is okay. If this

happens, gently place the bell back over the penis until it falls off completely.

- Sometimes, the string holding the foreskin to the plastibell will fall off. If this happens, look for signs of bleeding and call your doctor.
- Bathe your child as usual.

How do I keep my son's penis clean?

Whether you choose circumcision or not, it is important to keep your son's penis clean. Whether he is circumcised or not, wash his penis with soap and warm water when you bathe him. You do not need to use cotton swabs, astringents, or any special bath products.

With an uncircumcised boy, never forcibly pull back the foreskin to clean beneath it. Instead, gently tense the foreskin against the tip of the penis and wash off any smegma (the whitish "beads" of dead skin cells mixed with the body's natural oil). Over time, the foreskin will retract on its own so it can be slipped back over the glans toward the body. This happens at different times for different children, but most boys can retract their foreskins by the time they are five years old.

As your son grows up, teach him to wash beneath the foreskin by gently pulling the foreskin back from the glans, rinsing the glans and the inside of the foreskin with soap and warm water, then pulling the foreskin back over the head of the penis.

When should I call the doctor?

If your son was circumcised, watch for the following signs or symptoms that may need medical attention:

- Persistent bleeding- A spot larger than a 50 cent piece or if the blood drips like a nose bleed, is not OK. (Smaller blood spots in the diaper are OK.)
- Redness around the tip of the penis that gets worse after three days.
- Fever.
- Signs of infection such as the presence of pus-filled blisters.
- Not being able to urinate (pee) normally by six to eight hours after the circumcision.
- Skin edges that are separated more than ¼ inch.
- If the skin from the shaft of the penis seems to be sticking to the head and you can't easily push it back and see the entire head of the penis.

If you notice any of these signs or symptoms, call your child's doctor right away. Almost all circumcision-related problems are easily treated if they are taken care of right away.

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