

What if I choose not to have my son circumcised?

If you choose not to have your son circumcised, talk to your pediatrician about the proper way to keep your son's penis clean. This is important in order to avoid infection. When your son is old enough, he can learn how to keep his penis clean just as he will learn to keep other parts of his body clean.

The foreskin is easy to care for and the uncircumcised penis is easy to keep clean. The foreskin usually does not fully retract for several years and should never be forced. Gently washing the genital area while bathing is sufficient. Later, when the foreskin is fully retractable, boys should be taught the importance of washing underneath the foreskin every day to remove the smegma—a white cheese-like substance that is found under the foreskin. See the AAP brochure *Newborns: Care of the Uncircumcised Penis* for more detailed information on how to care for your son's uncircumcised penis. Contact your pediatrician if you notice any signs of infection such as redness, swelling, or foul-smelling drainage.

Circumcisions are often done for religious, social, and cultural reasons. The Academy suggests parents talk to their pediatrician about circumcision and make a decision after looking at all the facts.

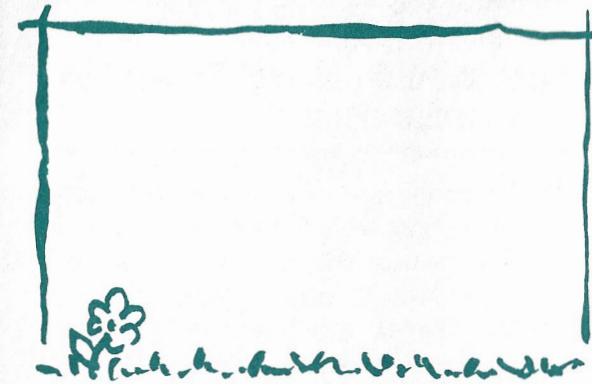
Female "circumcision"

Female genital mutilation, sometimes referred to as female circumcision, is a common practice in many cultures. It involves the removal of part or all of a female's clitoris. Sometimes the opening of the vagina is sewn almost completely shut. It is often done without any pain medicine. The purpose of this practice is to prove that a female is a virgin before she gets married, reduce her ability to experience sexual pleasure after marriage, and promote marital fidelity. There are several serious side effects, including:

- Pelvic and urinary tract infections
- Negative effect on self-esteem and sexuality
- Interference with a female's ability to have a normal vaginal delivery

The Academy is absolutely opposed to this practice in all forms as it is disfiguring and has no medical benefits.

The information contained in this publication should not be used as a substitute for the medical care and advice of your pediatrician. There may be variations in treatment that your pediatrician may recommend based on individual facts and circumstances.



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of Pediatrics



Circumcision: Pros and Cons

Guidelines for Parents



American Academy
of Pediatrics



Circumcision: Pros and Cons

Circumcision is one of the oldest known surgical procedures in medicine. Today, however, parents are weighing the pros and cons of circumcision before choosing what is best for their son. Many parents are asking questions such as the following: Are there any medical benefits? What will happen if my child isn't circumcised? Is it painful? This brochure answers common questions about circumcision and looks at the facts about this procedure. Parents are encouraged to use this brochure as a guide to help them decide what is best for their baby boy.

What is circumcision?

At birth, boys have skin that covers the end of the penis, called the foreskin. During a circumcision the foreskin is removed so that the tip of the penis (the glans) and the opening through which the baby urinates (the urethra) are exposed. Only lasting a few minutes, circumcision is usually done by a doctor in the first few days of life. In some Jewish families, a special religious person called a Mohel does the circumcision as part of a ceremony called a Bris held on the eighth day of life.

Can any infant boy be circumcised?

Most healthy, full-term infant boys can be circumcised. If your child is premature or has other health problems, ask your pediatrician if circumcision is okay for your child.

What should I expect for my son after circumcision?

After the circumcision, the tip of the penis may seem raw or yellowish. If there is a bandage, it should be changed with each diapering so the penis won't become infected. Petroleum jelly (Vaseline) may be used to keep the bandage from sticking. Sometimes a device called a Plastibell is used in which case your son will not have a bandage. The plastic rim of this device usually drops off 5 to 8 days after circumcision. It takes about 1 week to 10 days for the penis to fully heal with either type of covering.

Are there any problems that can happen after circumcision?

Problems after a circumcision are very rare.

However, call your pediatrician right away if:

- Your baby doesn't urinate normally within 4 to 6 hours after the circumcision.
- There is persistent bleeding.
- There is redness around the tip of the penis that seems to be getting worse after 3 to 5 days.

It is *normal* to have a little yellow discharge or coating around the tip of the penis, but this should not last longer than a week.

Circumcision – pros and cons

Most boys in the United States today are circumcised; however, it is far less common worldwide. Many parents choose to have their sons circumcised because “all the other men in the family were circumcised” or because they don't want their son to feel “different.” If you choose not to have your son circumcised, your son may notice

as he gets older that his penis looks different than some of the other boys. If your son seems concerned about this, you may need to talk to him about why he is not circumcised.

Reasons many parents choose circumcision

Research studies suggest that there are some good medical reasons why your son should be circumcised. These include:

- Circumcision lowers your son's chances of getting a urinary tract infection (UTI) in the first year of life.
- Although a rare condition, cancer of the penis is essentially eliminated in circumcised males.
- Research shows that males who are circumcised have a slightly lower risk of getting sexually transmitted diseases (STDs).
- Circumcision eliminates foreskin infections that occur at the peak age of 3 to 5 years.
- Circumcision prevents phimosis, a narrow opening that makes it impossible to retract the foreskin at a later age.
- Genital hygiene, which is particularly important in unsanitary conditions, may be easier after circumcision.

Reasons many parents choose not to circumcise

There are also good reasons why parents choose NOT to have their son circumcised. Circumcision may be more risky if done later in life, so parents should try to make a decision about circumcision before or soon after their son is born and not wait until later.

- As with all kinds of surgery, circumcision has some risks. Although uncommon, complications such as local infection and bleeding can

occur as a result of the circumcision. On rare occasions, the foreskin may be cut too short or too long, or the circumcision may heal improperly. Since many parents see circumcision as a cosmetic procedure, they choose not to have their son exposed to these risks.

- Many view the foreskin as an important part of the human body that is necessary for the protection of the tip of the penis. If the foreskin is removed, the exposed end of the penis may become irritated and cause the opening of the penis to become too small. This causes difficulty in urination and may need to be surgically corrected.
- Many also believe that the removal of the foreskin can desensitize the tip of the penis, causing a decrease in sexual pleasure later in life.
- Almost all uncircumcised boys can be taught proper hygiene that can lower their chances of getting infections, cancer of the penis, and sexually transmitted diseases.

Is circumcision painful?

Some parents worry about their child feeling pain. Infants who are circumcised without pain medicine (anesthesia) will feel some pain. They may have an increased heart rate and blood pressure. These symptoms usually disappear within 24 hours. They may also cry loudly; however, they usually calm down shortly after the surgery. A local anesthetic can be injected to produce a penile nerve block and has been shown to lower pain and stress in infants. Also helpful are having the infant suck on a sugar solution and using topical anesthetic ointments. Talk to your pediatrician about the availability of pain medicine and if it is appropriate for your son. Problems with using pain medicine are rare and usually not serious.