

SHOULD MY BABY BOY GET CIRCUMCISED?

The decision regarding circumcision can be a very emotional and difficult one for parents and will often require discussion and research. It is very helpful to think carefully BEFORE your baby is born so that you will have reached a decision before the emotional events surrounding labor and delivery happen.

What is circumcision?

Baby boys are born with skin that covers the sensitive end of the penis (glans). This skin is called the foreskin. Circumcision is a surgical procedure in which the foreskin is removed. After the foreskin is removed, the tip of the penis (called the glans) is uncovered.

What Are The Medical Benefits of Circumcision?

There are medical benefits to circumcision as described by the American Academy of Pediatrics. The benefits include:

1. Decreased risk of phimosis (a narrowing or obstruction of the opening of the foreskin)
2. Decreased risk of penile cancer. Many cases of penile cancer are associated with infection by the Human Papilloma Virus (HPV). Men who have been circumcised are much less likely to acquire infections with HPV, so their risk of developing cancer of the penis is markedly decreased.
3. Decreased risk of causing cervical cancer in female partner. Most cases of cervical cancer are caused by HPV, so women are less likely to acquire HPV infection if their partners are circumcised. There is a vaccine offered to adolescents and young adults that helps protect from the strains of HPV most likely to cause cervical cancer.
4. Decreased risk of a urinary tract infection. Baby boys during the first year of life are more likely to develop a urinary tract infection if they are uncircumcised. An uncircumcised male newborn is 7 – 10 times more likely to develop a urinary infection than a circumcised male. Urinary tract infections usually require treatment with antibiotics and sometimes hospitalization.
5. Decreased risk of some sexually transmitted diseases. Studies have shown HIV, HPV and syphilis are more easily acquired and transmitted in uncircumcised males.
6. Decreased risk of balanoposthitis; an infection of the glans and foreskin that usually requires antibiotic treatment.

How are circumcisions performed?

There are three common techniques used to perform circumcisions in the newborn period: the Plastibell, the Gomco clamp and the Mogen Clamp. Ask your pediatrician or obstetrician what technique he or she commonly uses. Analgesia (pain medicine) is available to help decrease the pain of the operation. The physician can use pain medicine that is applied topically to your son's skin or can inject a medicine to briefly block sensation. After the procedure, breast feeding will help reduce your son's pain. You can also ask your pediatrician whether your son can be given acetaminophen.

What are the medical risks of circumcision?

Since circumcision is a surgical procedure (an operation), there is a slight chance of complications. The most common complications are bleeding and infection, but in large studies of thousands of infants who were circumcised, these problems are quite rare. The overall risk of complications is 0.2% – 0.6%. Serious infections after circumcision occur 1:4000 times on average. There is also the possibility that the foreskin may be cut too short or too long or may heal improperly. Most of the cosmetic concerns are resolved as the child grows. There is an extremely small risk of more serious complications that might cause damage to the penis.

What if I decide against having my son circumcised?

That is a choice many parents make. There is no need to do anything special or different for your newborn son. Once you start bathing your baby, simply clean the penis like you clean the rest of your son's body. After he is about two years old, gently pull back the foreskin while you are bathing him, then clean the exposed glans. At first, not all of the glans will be visible. If you cannot pull the foreskin back, don't worry. This is perfectly normal and you can try again in a few months. By age five, most uncircumcised boys can pull back their foreskin and completely expose the glans.

How do most parents make this decision?

There are many factors that parents consider when deciding whether or not to circumcise their son. Some families choose circumcision for religious reasons. Other families choose circumcision so their sons will look like their fathers. Others choose circumcision for the medical benefits. This is one of the very first decisions you, as parents, must make together that will impact your child, so take the necessary time to talk together and come to a decision that feels comfortable for you.

Where can I find more information?

Ask your pediatrician or see the American Academy of Pediatrics statement on circumcision on the Internet.

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