

North Carolina Women's Hospital

Circumcision: A Choice

If you have a son, making the decision about circumcision can be difficult. We at the North Carolina Women's and Children's Hospitals want to give you accurate and up-to-date information so that you can make an informed choice for your baby boy. The following are some frequently asked questions about circumcision.

What is circumcision?

Circumcision is a surgery to remove the *foreskin*. All newborn boys have skin that covers the end of the penis, called the *foreskin*. After the circumcision, the tip of the penis, called the *glans*, will be exposed. Before you come to the hospital in labor, you should talk with your health care provider about circumcision and decide if you want your baby boy to have the procedure.

Is circumcision recommended?

The American Academy of Pediatrics does not recommend routine circumcision. Some parents choose circumcision for their sons for cultural or religious reasons. Others choose circumcision because their family members are circumcised. Other parents decide to have their son(s) circumcised because of increasing research that the procedure protects men from some diseases during their lifetime.

Are there risks of circumcision?

There are risks to circumcision because it is a surgical procedure. The risks include:

- bleeding
- infection
- cutting the *foreskin* too short or too long
- poor healing

In addition, scarring can cause the opening of the penis to become too small which would make urination difficult. None of these problems happen often.

Does circumcision hurt?

Circumcision is painful but the pain can be reduced with numbing medicines and Tylenol. Your son will also have discomfort with urination and from the incision site rubbing against his diaper for several days. This pain may be decreased with a Vaseline dressing. Your nurse will show you how to apply the dressing.

How do I care for my son if I choose circumcision?

The tip of the penis needs special care. It may be raw and red or yellowish. Change the dressing with each diaper change to prevent infection. Apply Vaseline to the penis to keep the dressing from sticking. It takes about 7 to 10 days for the penis to heal after circumcision.

What problems should I look for after circumcision?

A yellowish discharge or coating around the top of the penis is normal, but this should go away within a week after the circumcision.

Call the baby's doctor right away if you see the following:

- the baby does not urinate normally within 6 to 8 hours after the circumcision
- the penis continues to bleed
- there is redness around the tip of the penis that gets worse after 3 to 5 days

How do I care for my son if he is not circumcised?

The uncircumcised penis is easy to clean by gently washing the genital area with mild soap. The *foreskin* is attached to the tip of the penis at birth. It should never be forced away from the tip. It will usually separate by the time the child is a teenager. When your son is old enough, he can learn to clean his penis just as he will learn to care for the rest of his body.

Adapted from The American Academy of Pediatrics' publication Circumcision: Information For Parents.

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