

How did circumcision start?

Circumcision is thought to have started thousands of years ago in the Middle East or Africa, but historians are not sure. According to current historical evidence, it existed in Egypt before Judaism adopted the practice. Circumcision was introduced in the US during the 1870s by people who thought that desensitizing the penis would curb masturbation (which was thought to cause insanity and many physical ailments).

How common is circumcision?

In the US, circumcision rates were very high (90%) during the 1970s, but since then, circumcision rates have been decreasing. As of 2001, 50-60% of baby boys were circumcised in the US, and it varies by region. The circumcision rate in California, for instance, is about 33%. Circumcision is very rare (less than 5%) in most other modernized countries, including those of Europe. The vast majority (80-85%) of men in the world are intact (not circumcised). Many famous men were not circumcised, including Adam (The Book of Genesis), William Shakespeare, Beethoven, Frank Sinatra, Elvis Presley, three of the Beatles, and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. It's also interesting to note that every American President until the mid-20th century was not circumcised, including George Washington and Abraham Lincoln.

Can there be complications with circumcision?

Yes. While the procedure is generally considered "safe" if performed by an experienced medical professional, just like any surgical procedure, complications can and do occur. These complications include: tight circumcision (removing too much skin to accommodate future erections), infection, excessive bleeding, pain that interferes with the start of breastfeeding, adhesions or skin bridges (fusing of the glans and remaining foreskin), sexual dysfunction, and in very rare cases amputation of the penis and even death. However, the risks of the procedure should not be confused with the guaranteed consequences. Every circumcision results in detrimental changes to sexual function and reduction in sexual sensation.

How do I care for my son's intact penis?

A boy's intact penis needs very little care. The best advice is to simply leave it alone. At birth, the foreskin is normally attached or fused to the glans (like a fingernail to the finger), and slowly separates as part of normal development until the child reaches puberty. The foreskin should never be forcibly retracted before it has naturally separated. Until the foreskin can be retracted, cleaning under the foreskin is not needed. The penis should be washed in the same way a finger is washed. The first person to retract a boy's foreskin should be the boy himself and no one else. It is not necessary for anyone to check under the foreskin unless there is pain or difficulty with urination. Premature retraction of the foreskin can cause bleeding, infection, and even skin adhesions. Before the foreskin is retractable, gently wash the outside of the penis during normal bathing. Once the foreskin is completely retractable, your son should be taught to rinse under his foreskin with warm water during his shower or bath. Circumcised children should also be taught to wash their genitals. If you have medical questions, seek out a pediatrician who has a thorough understanding of the foreskin and intact male anatomy.

How can I learn more?

The following web sites contain useful information about circumcision, including medical facts and studies, anatomical diagrams, ethical considerations, sexual implications, descriptions of the circumcision procedure, and care of both intact and circumcised anatomy.

www.circumcision.org www.cirp.org
www.circumstitions.com www.NoCirc.org
www.DoctorsOpposingCircumcision.org

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Nebraska Circumcision Information
Resource Center
www.nenocirc.org

*The information in this pamphlet is not meant to replace
the care and advice of your pediatrician.*

Should your baby boy be circumcised?

Circumcision

Information for Expectant Parents



Circumcision Facts

Purposes of the Foreskin

American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) Recommendation

What is circumcision?

Circumcision is the surgical amputation of the foreskin of the penis.

Are there medical benefits to circumcision?

Some studies suggest that circumcision may produce a benefit on rare occasions, but these potential benefits do not outweigh the health risks of circumcision itself, including infection, excessive bleeding, and painful erections as an adult. Because of this, no medical organization in the world recommends infant circumcision, including the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) and the American Medical Association (AMA). The current policy of the AAP states 1) circumcision is not essential to a child's well-being, 2) it is an elective procedure, 3) doctors should not coerce parents into choosing circumcision, and 4) parents should make a fully informed decision that is in the best interest of the child (www.aap.org). The AMA endorses the AAP policy and calls circumcision "non-therapeutic." As mentioned before, some studies suggest that circumcision may produce a benefit on rare occasions. According to medical studies cited by the AAP and AMA, circumcision may reduce the already low chance of a boy developing a urinary tract infection (UTI) in the first year of life and may help prevent the extremely rare condition of cancer of the penis in elderly men. However, these studies indicate that on average only one in 100 to 200 children would experience a benefit from circumcision, while the complication rate of circumcision is likely between 0.2% and 2%. Of course, the loss of a functioning foreskin is a complication in 100% of circumcisions.

What is the foreskin?

The foreskin is a double-sided tube of skin, sexually sensitive nerves, and muscle that covers and protects the glans, or head, of the penis. The foreskin is mobile tissue, and by the time puberty is reached, it can be manually retracted or pulled back to expose the glans. The average adult male foreskin is about 15 square inches in size, roughly the same as a 3x5 index card. Diagrams of the foreskin and how it works can be found at www.cirp.org/pages/anat

What does the foreskin do?

First, the foreskin covers and protects the glans penis and the urinary opening, helping to keep the urinary tract sterile. Second, the foreskin is the most sexually sensitive and pleasurable part of the penis. A specialized ring of tissue near the tip of the foreskin called the "ridged band" contains thousands of erogenous nerve endings. This special ridged band provides intact (uncircumcised) men with the majority of their sexual sensation. *Circumcision amputates the entire ridged band and its erogenous nerve endings, resulting in a dramatic reduction in sexual sensation. It is a common misconception that the glans is the most sensitive part of the penis, because most adult men in America were circumcised at birth.* The sensations provided by the nerve endings in the ridged band are vital to a man's healthy sexual response. Third, the foreskin acts as a very effective natural lubricant for intercourse through its unique gliding motion. During intercourse, the penis glides back and forth inside the foreskin, greatly reducing the friction between the penis and vaginal walls. Because of this, most women report improved sensation and comfort with an intact penis. These facts become very important when one considers that a baby boy will grow up to be an adult. Be sure to learn about this special and beneficial part of male anatomy as part of your decision making process.

Is circumcision painful?

Yes. Circumcision is very painful. Studies cited by the AAP show that baby boys experience extreme pain during the surgery. Unfortunately, most infant circumcisions are still performed without any pain relief. The emotional and psychological impacts of such a traumatic experience on a young mind are not yet fully understood. According to the AAP, if circumcision is chosen, it is vital that pain relief be provided to your son.

What about hygiene?

Circumcision was once believed to improve male hygiene, but current medical information shows this is not true. Circumcision does not make the penis any cleaner or healthier. Contrary to myth, hygiene is simple and easy for intact men. Normal bathing and healthy hygiene are recommended for all men, intact or not.

Shouldn't a boy look like his father?

This is a common myth. Keep in mind that the father needn't have been circumcised in the first place. Still, a circumcised father may be concerned that his son will feel uncomfortable being "different" from his dad if he is not circumcised. Don't worry. Many circumcised fathers are raising intact sons without any feelings of awkwardness in father or son. If a boy ever notices and asks why his father is different, the reason is easily explained. A father should teach his son to appreciate and feel good about his own body. Good parenting is an excellent alternative to amputation.

Won't a boy be teased if he isn't circumcised?

Since circumcision is becoming less common in America, circumcised boys will soon be in the minority. Still, it is important that parents discuss the issue with their son before he may encounter such a situation. With positive reinforcement that his body is whole and healthy, he will be able to keep a healthy perspective.

What about religion?

It's important to consider that the religious beliefs of the parents are not necessarily the same as the beliefs of the child once he becomes an adult. Parents should always keep in mind that their baby boy will one day be a grown man, with his own faith and spiritual beliefs. The following information may be useful to address specific religious doctrines on this topic. Circumcision is not required by Christianity. The following passages in the New Testament firmly state that circumcision has no spiritual value and should no longer be practiced: Acts 15:1-31, I Corinthians 7:18-20, Galatians 6:15, and Colossians 3:11. Galatians 5:6 is very clear on the matter: "*For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.*" The only religions that officially support circumcision are Judaism and Islam. However, there are growing movements in both of those religions to end the practice (see www.JewishCircumcision.org)