



The American College of
Obstetricians and Gynecologists

FAQ

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

FAQ039

LABOR, DELIVERY, AND POSTPARTUM CARE

Newborn Circumcision

- **What is circumcision?**
- **Is circumcision a required procedure?**
- **Why do parents choose circumcision?**
- **Why do some parents choose not to have circumcision done?**
- **Are there benefits to having circumcision done?**
- **How is circumcision done?**
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- **What special care is required after a baby has had circumcision?**
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- **Glossary**

What is circumcision?

Circumcision is the surgical removal of the **foreskin**, a layer of skin that covers the **glans** (head) of the penis. If it is done, it usually is done soon after birth.

Is circumcision a required procedure?

No, circumcision is an elective procedure. That means it is the parents' choice whether to have their son circumcised. It is not required by law or by hospital policy.

Why do parents choose circumcision?

Some parents have their sons circumcised for religious or cultural reasons. Muslims and Jews, for example, have circumcised their male newborns for centuries.

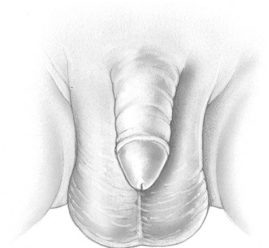
Some parents choose to have their sons circumcised because of hygiene. Smegma—a cheese-like discharge containing dead cells—can build up under the foreskin of males who are not circumcised. This can lead to odor or infection. A boy can be taught to wash his penis to get rid of smegma as a part of his daily bathing routine.

Why do some parents choose not to have circumcision done?

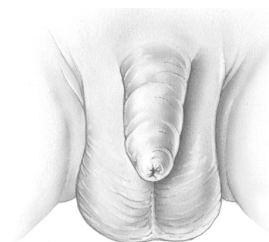
Some parents choose not to circumcise their sons because they are worried about the pain the baby feels or the risks involved with the surgery.

Are there benefits to having circumcision done?

Some doctors feel that circumcision lowers the risk of a man getting or passing on some **sexually transmitted diseases (STDs)**. Others feel that circumcision helps prevent cancer of the penis, a rare condition in uncircumcised men. Circumcised infants appear to have less risk of infections of the urinary tract than uncircumcised infants. However, the risk in both groups is low.



Circumcised penis



Uncircumcised penis

How is circumcision done?

Circumcision usually is done before the mother and baby leave the hospital. During the procedure, the baby is placed on a special table. An anesthetic should be used to lessen the pain. Various surgical techniques are used, but they follow the same steps:

- The penis and foreskin are cleaned.
- A special clamp is attached to the penis and the foreskin is removed.
- Ointment and gauze often are placed over the cut to protect it from rubbing against the diaper.

The procedure is done quickly. The baby will cry during and for a short while afterward.

What are the risks of complications from circumcision?

Complications from a circumcision are rare. However, every surgery carries some risk. The following complications can occur:

- Bleeding
- Infection
- Injury to the penis or urethra
- Scarring

In rare cases, the circumcision may need to be redone.

What special care is required after a baby has had circumcision?

If your baby is circumcised, a bandage with petroleum jelly may be placed over the head of the penis after surgery. In most cases, the skin will heal in 7–10 days.

Keep the area as clean as possible. Wash the baby's penis with soap and water every day. Change the diapers often so that urine and stool do not cause infection.

What special hygiene methods should be practiced with a baby who has not been circumcised?

Washing the baby's penis and foreskin properly is important. The outside of the penis should be washed with soap and water. Do not attempt to pull back the infant's foreskin. The foreskin may not be able to pull back completely until the child is about 3–5 years old. This is normal.

Teach your son to wash his penis, including under the foreskin after it has begun to retract. Once he learns to do this, it will become part of his daily routine.

Glossary

Foreskin: A layer of skin covering the end of the penis.

Glans: The head of the penis.

Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs): Diseases that are spread by sexual contact, including chlamydia, gonorrhea, genital warts, herpes, syphilis, and infection with human immunodeficiency virus (HIV, the cause of acquired immunodeficiency syndrome [AIDS]).

If you have further questions, contact your obstetrician–gynecologist.

FAQ039: Designed as an aid to patients, this document sets forth current information and opinions related to women's health. The information does not dictate an exclusive course of treatment or procedure to be followed and should not be construed as excluding other acceptable methods of practice. Variations, taking into account the needs of the individual patient, resources, and limitations unique to institution or type of practice, may be appropriate.

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