

Circumcision

Circumcision is a surgical procedure in which the prepuce is separated from the glans penis and is removed. Circumcision is the most frequently performed surgical procedure in the United States. There is great controversy over the practice of circumcision. This is a decision to be made by the family after careful consideration. Some Christians may believe that because circumcision is in the bible that they need to do it. Christians are no longer under the old covenant, but instead under the new. "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working through love." Galatians 5:6

How circumcision began

Circumcision was originally a religious rite of the Jewish religion. In Jewish ceremonies, the infant is held by the parent and given wine to drink before the ceremony. The practice is based on the "covenant of circumcision" or "Brit Milah" in Hebrew. It comes from the book of Genesis 17:10–13, when Abraham circumcised Isaac: "This is My covenant which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you; every male among you shall be circumcised. And you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and you. And every male among you who is eight days old shall be circumcised throughout your generations, a servant who is born in the house or who is bought with money from any foreigner, who is not of your descendants. A servant who is born in your house or who is bought with your money shall surely be circumcised; thus shall My covenant be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant."

This ritual is performed by a Mohel (who is specially trained to perform circumcisions). It is performed on the eighth day after birth. This actually is a very good time because clotting factors drop immediately after birth and return to prebirth levels by the end of the first week. Performing circumcision after the baby is a week old has a firm physiologic basis.

American history of circumcision

The practice of circumcision gained widespread cultural acceptance in the United States in the early 1870's. It was thought that masturbation was harmful and that removal of the foreskin would discourage it by making it less pleasurable. (It doesn't). Circumcision was also credited with preventing conditions such as epilepsy, syphilis, asthma, mental illness and tuberculosis. It is done very infrequently in many European countries. About 25% of the worlds population circumcise their males. Moslems also circumcise their males. In the 1980's, 80% to 90% of males born in traditional hospital settings were circumcised, while about 30% of males born in alternative birth settings were circumcised. Currently more than 50% of males are circumcised. In 1989 the American Academy of Pediatrics stated

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that "the newborn circumcision has potential medical benefits and advantages as well as disadvantages and risks. When circumcision is being considered the benefits and risks should be explained to the parents and informed consent obtained."

Reasons people circumcise

There are several reasons parents continue to circumcise. These include:

- * Tradition
- * Wanting the child to have a similar appearance to the father, other family members, or friends
- * Religious and cultural rites of passage into manhood
- * Desire to conform to the culture
- * Cosmetic appearance
- * Hygiene concerns
- * Perceived health risks
- * The concern of the procedure being needed later in life. It is estimated that 5% of males fall into this category because of phimosis, infections or other problems. Phimosis is a condition in which the foreskin remains tight as the child grows and can't be retracted. Phimosis can be extremely painful and sometimes interferes with erections. Studies have been done that say there is a ten times greater risk of urinary tract infections in uncircumcised males. Circumcision has also been associated with a decrease in the incidence of cancer of the penis among males in the United States. Evidence regarding the relationship of circumcision to sexually transmitted diseases is conflicting. Evidence is also conflicting regarding linking uncircumcised men to female cervical carcinoma. Circumcision may reduce the risk of infection of the penis, but careful attention to cleaning under the foreskin will also decrease the risk.

Reasons people don't circumcise

Some of the reasons people are choosing not to circumcise include:

- * The lack of medical necessity
- * Fear of bleeding and infection
- * Concern about the baby's pain
- * Wanting the child's appearance to be similar to that of the father, other family members or friends
- * A belief in the child's right to choose
- * To decrease risk of diaper irritation against the penis
- * Decreased penis sensitivity and decreased sexual enjoyment.

Care of the uncircumcised penis

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The foreskin and glans are two similar layers of cells that separate from each other. The separation process begins before the baby is born and is usually completed between three and five years of age. In one study, only 4% of babies had foreskins that could be retracted at birth. By the age of four 90% of them could be retracted. Physiologic preputial nonretractability is normal for babies. In the process of separation, cells build up between the layers. This buildup looks similar to the smegma that is secreted after puberty, and it is harmless. Occasionally during the bath time, parents can gently test for retraction.. If retraction has occurred, daily gentle washing of the glans is sufficient to maintain adequate cleanliness. The child should be taught how to do this as he begins to manage his own bath time.

Risks of circumcision

Potential risks of circumcision early on include:

- * Hemorrhage
- * Infection
- * Bruising of the penis
- * Difficulty in voiding
- * Discomfort, and restlessness.
- * Separation of the edges of the circumcision
- * Disfigurement

Later complications include:

- * The glans and urethral meatus can become irritated and inflamed from contact with urine
- * Ulcerations may develop
- * Adhesions
- * Entrapment of the penis and damage to the urethra.

These complications could require further surgery.

How circumcision is done

If circumcision is chosen, there are several techniques that may be used. Anesthesia is rarely used. The reason for this is the prevalent theory that circumcision is painless and the real reason the baby cries during the procedure is because he is being restrained. This is highly unlikely. A local anesthetic significantly minimizes pain and is easy to administer. One technique used is by making a slit in the prepuce and then applying a cone type clamp called a Yellen or Gomco clamp over the glans. The prepuce is drawn over the cone and the clamp is applied. Pressure is maintained for three to five minutes and then the excess prepuce is cut away. Another technique is done using a Plastibell.

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The bell is fitted over the glans. A suture is tied around the bell's rim and the excess prepuce is cut away. The plastic rim remains in place for three to four days until healing takes place. The bell may be allowed to fall off or may be removed if still in place after eight days.

Care of the circumcised penis

After the circumcision A and D ointment, petroleum jelly, or neosporin is placed on the penis the keep the diaper from adhering to it. New ointment is applied with each diaper change for 48 hours. The diaper should be changed at least every 4 hours. The penis is gently washed by squeezing water over it from a wet cotton ball. Diaper wipes and alcohol are avoided as they will cause discomfort. A fresh sterile petrolatum gauze is reapplied around the glans. The baby's voiding is assessed to make sure it is adequate. The baby may cry when he voids. If bleeding occurs light pressure is applied intermittently to the site with a sterile gauze pad. He may remain fussy for two to three days. The diaper should be loose for several days to avoid pressure on the tender penis. A whitish yellow exudate around the glans of the penis is normal and should not be removed as it aids in the healing process and removal is painful for the baby. Sometimes the baby will have a dark green stool after the procedure. Some doctors may leave a small amount of foreskin to attempt to do a more conservative type circumcision. This foreskin must be retracted and the glans cleaned underneath it, or the remnant of foreskin may form adhesions to the glans.

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