

CIRCUMCISION



Postpartum Parent Support Program

Information Sheet

Canada

Historically, circumcision has been practised by those of the Jewish and Moslem faiths for religious reasons. Circumcision for non-religious reasons has gone through various stages of favour and disfavour. A circumcision is the removal of the foreskin (a piece of skin that covers the head of the penis). There appear to be no medical reasons for circumcision of an infant.

The discussion of whether or not to have a male child circumcised usually results in varying opinions from family, friends and physician. You will likely find this both confusing and frustrating. The decision about circumcision will be made by you and your partner. If you are concerned about the boy looking different from other children or his father, remember that implications of circumcision or non-circumcision are no greater than other natural physical differences, such as hair colour, build and size.

Choosing Not to Circumcise

The advantages of choosing not to circumcise are mainly that the potential problems of circumcision as a surgical procedure, (i.e. bleeding, infection and surgical trauma, as well as the pain) are avoided.

At birth, the foreskin is tightly attached to the head of the penis and normally cannot be retracted or pushed back. The foreskin of many children spontaneously separates from the head of the penis (retracts) by five years of age, while the foreskin of others may not be retractable until several years later. Retractability or the separation develops naturally without any treatment. Pushing the foreskin back before it is ready and thus breaking the adhesions, may cause infection and could cause tightening of the foreskin around the head of the penis. The penis should be washed daily, without pushing back the foreskin. If your decision is not to circumcise, please ask for the Care of the Foreskin (i.e. the uncircumcised penis) information sheet.

Choosing to Circumcise

The procedure is performed by a physician and only takes about 10 to 15 minutes. Healing takes place in seven to ten days. The procedure is painful to the baby if no anaesthesia (freezing) or pain medicine is used. There are procedures or things that can be done to give your baby pain relief. Your doctor may order medication for pain relief which can be given just before or after the procedure. The use of local anaesthesia or freezing during the procedure is becoming more common and may be another option you can discuss with your doctor. The Canadian Paediatric Society (1996) states that appropriate attention to pain relief should be considered when circumcision is performed on a newborn infant.

Please indicate your decision to have your baby circumcised as soon as possible so that the necessary arrangements can be made.

If the foreskin has been removed surgically, care of the circumcised penis includes using petroleum jelly (Vaseline) on the front of the diaper to prevent excessive drying and to prevent the penis from sticking to the diaper. If the circumcised area sticks to the diaper, do not pull the diaper off. Soak it off. Check frequently for bleeding or any sign of infection.

If the Plastibell method of circumcision has been used, leaving a plastic ring on the foreskin, the baby can be bathed and diapered just as if he had not been circumcised. The ring will fall off by itself in five to eight days. If you notice any unusual swelling, if the plastic ring has not fallen off in eight days, or if the ring has slipped onto the shaft of the penis, notify your doctor immediately.

After the circumcised area has healed, normal bathing with soap and water is recommended.

Note: Frequent diaper changes will help to prevent irritation or infection of either the circumcised or uncircumcised penis.

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