

Circumcision: The pros and cons and what parents need to know

June 5 2023, by Kirstie Ganobsik



Understanding circumcision can help you speed your baby boy's healing

process and be aware of any complications that may arise.

Here, professionals offer advice on what circumcision is, the pros and cons of the procedure, and what happens during a circumcision. Plus, they'll talk about how long the healing process is and what to expect afterwards.

What is circumcision?

Circumcision is the removal of the foreskin that covers the head of the penis, known as the glans. It's usually performed on newborn boys when they're a day or two old, although older boys and men can also be circumcised, according to the [Cleveland Clinic](#).

"There are cultural and religious considerations that are the reasons why some families feel it's the right choice for them," Cedars-Sinai pediatric urologist [Dr. Paul Kokorowski](#) explained in a recent Cedars-Sinai [blog](#) post.

The Cleveland Clinic notes that the practice of circumcision began as a religious rite. Today, Jewish and Muslim people still do the procedure for religious reasons. In the Jewish faith, specially trained professionals known as mohels perform the circumcision, known as a bris.

In addition to religious practices, there are also medical and cultural reasons for having a [baby boy](#) circumcised. Many of these procedures are done by a [doctor](#) in a hospital setting. In fact, it's estimated that about 60% of boys in the United States are circumcised.

Circumcised vs. uncircumcised: What's the difference?

A study recently published in [Cureus Journal](#) revealed that 63% of participants considered their child's ongoing health as an "extremely important" reason for circumcising their newborns. The study authors also noted that the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) guidelines stating that the health benefits of circumcision outweigh the risks helped parents decide to circumcise.

Still, these [health benefits](#) aren't enough for the AAP to recommend circumcision for all newborns, and the procedure is considered elective. This means that the circumcised versus uncircumcised decision is left up to the parents.

To help you better understand the pros and cons of circumcision, let's take a look at some of its benefits and risks.

Circumcision pros and cons

"There are some minimal benefits and some minimal risks [to circumcision]," [Dr. Andrew Freedman](#), a urologist at Cedars-Sinai said in a recent blog post. "There's not enough benefit to say that you must do it, and there's not enough risk to say you can never do it."

According to Cedars-Sinai, the **benefits** of circumcision may include:

- Reduced risk of developing a [urinary tract infection](#) in the first year of life
- Reduced risk of foreskin infections
- A lower risk of developing penile cancer
- Reduced risk of contracting sexually transmitted diseases
- Prevention of phimosis, which is the inability to retract the foreskin

The **cons** of penile circumcision include:

- Complications from surgery, such as bleeding and infections
- Loss of protection of the tip of the penis, which is the role of the foreskin
- Decreased sensitivity to touch

What happens during a circumcision procedure

When your baby is circumcised, he is laid on his back and has his hands and legs held while his penis is cleaned. Next, an anesthetic will be applied. [Mayo Clinic](#) says this is typically a numbing cream that's placed on and around the penis, so they don't feel pain.

Once the anesthetic takes effect, either a plastic ring or clamp is attached to the penis. Finally, the foreskin is removed.

Cleveland Clinic notes that a scalpel is used to remove the foreskin. Once this is finished, ointment and gauze are placed over the penis to help with healing. No stitches are necessary, and the procedure takes about 20 minutes.

According to the [University of Utah Health](#), adult circumcision is similar, but it may involve [general anesthesia](#) and an incision that requires stitches.

How long does circumcision take to heal?

Healing from circumcision usually takes about seven to 10 days, according to [Family Doctor](#). You can help your baby through the process by gently cleaning the area with soap and water after each diaper change and applying healing ointment to soothe any irritation.

[Dartmouth Health Children's Hospital](#) recommends placing a drop of Aquaphor, petroleum jelly or antibiotic cream on the penis or inside the

diaper for about five to seven days after circumcision. It also notes that you may see some white or yellow coating on the head of the penis as it heals.

According to [Nationwide Children's Hospital](#), you can also expect to see some swelling and bruising of the penis after circumcision. Soothing sponge baths two to four times a day can be beneficial. You can also talk to your doctor about using acetaminophen to ease your baby's discomfort while he heals.

To discover more about [circumcision](#), you can take a look at New York-Presbyterian's [Circumcision Health Library](#).

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