Do You Want Your Son to Have a Circumcision?

It is good to think about this question before your child is born. This procedure is often done in the nursery by your baby’s doctor. You will be asked if you want the procedure done and you will need to sign a consent form to give your permission.

Talk with your baby’s doctor if you have any questions or concerns before you sign the consent form.

What is circumcision?

A circumcision is the removal of the piece of skin, called the foreskin, from around the end of the penis, called the glans. This is an elective procedure or surgery, which means you need to decide if you want it done on your son or not.

Some people decide to have circumcision done because:

- The father or other men in the family are circumcised
- Of cultural or religious beliefs

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Learn more about your health care.
There are some health benefits to the procedure so some children’s doctors recommend it. Most insurances will cover the cost of this procedure.
Your baby’s doctor may suggest the procedure be delayed if the baby:
- Is less than 4 pounds in weight
- Has other health problems
If you are not sure or not ready to make the decision, the procedure can be done at a later time. The procedure can be more complicated and have more risk for boys older than 2 months.

**Benefits of Circumcision**
- Lowers the risk of bladder, kidney or urinary tract infections
- Lowers the risk of cancer of the penis
- Lowers the risk of some sexually transmitted diseases, such as HIV
- Prevents some foreskin problems
These benefits are small over your son’s life.
If you decide not to have circumcision done and teach your son good hygiene and safe sexual practices, the risks of these problems also would be small. There is more about *caring for the uncircumcised penis* on the next page.

**Risks of Circumcision**
There is a very small risk or chance of problems with the procedure such as:
- Infection
- Bleeding
- Pain
- Injury to the penis
- Skin re-attaches to the head of the penis, called adhesions
- Differences in look of the penis where too much, or not enough skin is removed. This may require more surgery at a later date.
How is circumcision done?
The procedure itself takes about 15 minutes. The doctor injects a numbing medicine at the base of the penis, so the baby feels little pain. Drops of sugar water, called sucrose, are given to the baby with or without a pacifier for pain relief as well.

Your son’s legs will be held still during the procedure. A metal clamp is used around the penis and a piece called the bell is slipped under the foreskin. This protects the end of the penis. The skin is cut around the bell and removed, so the end of the penis can be seen. The penis is wrapped in a Vaseline gauze.

If needed, special gauze or stitches are used to control bleeding.

Care after the Circumcision
Your baby will be checked for bleeding for about an hour after the procedure. Many babies sleep for the first few hours after the procedure, but try to wake him to feed on schedule, especially if you are breastfeeding. He may seem uncomfortable when urinating after the numbing medicine has worn off. Holding and swaddling will often soothe the baby. You will be taught about other care needs until the skin heals. Healing often takes 10 to 14 days.

Care for the Uncircumcised Penis
If you decide not to circumcise your baby, care of his penis is fairly simple:

- You do not need to pull back the foreskin to clean it for the first year of life. Just wash the penis each day and when soiled.
- After 1 year of age, you can gently pull back the foreskin for cleaning. Never force the foreskin back. Gently pull it back and clean with soap and water each day. Rinse with clean water and pull the skin forward.
- When your child is about 5 years old, teach him to do this himself when he takes a bath or shower. After cleaning, the foreskin should be rinsed with clean water and pulled forward.

Sometimes the foreskin cannot be fully pulled back until your child is a teenager. This is not a reason to worry, as long as there have been no problems with swelling of the end of penis.