Pros and Cons of Circumcision

What is circumcision?

Circumcision is surgery to remove the foreskin covering the head of the penis. In the past, it was commonly done in this country. In recent years, it has become more controversial.

Should I have my baby circumcised?

This is a question only you can answer. Some parents do it for religious reasons. Others do it so their child will be like other boys.

Insurance does not always cover this surgery. Check with your insurance company if this is an issue.

Talk with your doctor about the benefits and risks of this surgery. Ask questions about anything you don’t understand. Ask for more details if needed.

What are some of the medical reasons for circumcision?

- May lower the risk of an infection. Such infections are rare and usually easy to treat.
- May lower the risk of cancer of the penis. This is a rare cancer, and proper care may work as well.
- May lower the risk later in life of getting or passing on sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV (the AIDS virus). But more studies need to be done on this.
- Will prevent certain problems that can affect the foreskin. These problems are rare.

What are some of the medical reasons against circumcision?

- The foreskin is not an accident of nature. It can help protect the tip of the penis against irritation and even scarring (though such scarring is rare).
- The surgery is painful. Pain medicine can be used, but there is a small risk of side effects.
- The surgery is permanent (cannot be reversed).
- The surgery, while mostly very safe, has some risks.

What are the risks of circumcision?

- As with any surgery, there is a risk of bleeding, infection and unforeseen problems. These risks are very small (less than 1%).
- In rare cases, too much or too little of the foreskin can be removed.
- In rare cases, a band of scar tissue may form on the penis.
- If you wait more than a couple of months after birth, your baby will need general anesthesia (medicine to make him sleep) for the surgery. This medicine involves more risk than a local painkiller.

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