

# Circumcision

## Who gets circumcised?

Circumcision is performed on baby boys for a number of reasons, but mainly because it is demanded or requested by their parents, often for religious or cultural reasons. It is a routine ritual in some religions or cultures, but in other societies parents tend to be uncertain about the decision to circumcise and may worry a lot about it. Some parents want the operation so that the child can be just like his father. In older boys and some adults, circumcision may be necessary for medical reasons, but this is quite uncommon. Some people argue (and there is evidence from some African countries to support this) that it protects against the spread of HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases.

## Why are doctors generally against circumcision?

As a rule doctors advise against routine circumcision, mainly because it is unnecessary on medical grounds and any unnecessary operations should be avoided. Any operation carries a risk of complications and some, such as bleeding, can occur during circumcision. The foreskin has a protective function for the delicate glans (tip) of the penis, and many doctors see this as an important feature of the natural order of the human body.

## When can the foreskin be fully pulled back?

The foreskin of all newborn babies is tight. As time goes by the foreskin frees up so that by the age of 5 years it can usually be fully retracted. It is not worth trying too hard before this age. When it is pulled back, it is advisable to gently wash away the cheesy material that has built up. If

it is not possible to fully pull back the foreskin by the age of 10, it is worthwhile consulting your doctor. As a rule the foreskin should only be retracted by its owner!

## Who needs circumcision?

In some boys the foreskin may be very tight (this is called *phimosis*) and prone to infection. Sometimes an infection can cause the skin to become too tight. This leads to a very small opening, which can cause problems when passing urine (e.g. dribbling or spraying). Redness and discharge as well as pus when passing urine indicate infection. This may well mean that circumcision will be necessary. However, one or two attacks do not mean circumcision is essential. Rarely the foreskin cannot be pulled back easily (and may get stuck) in some older boys, and this may be a reason for circumcision.

## The decision to circumcise

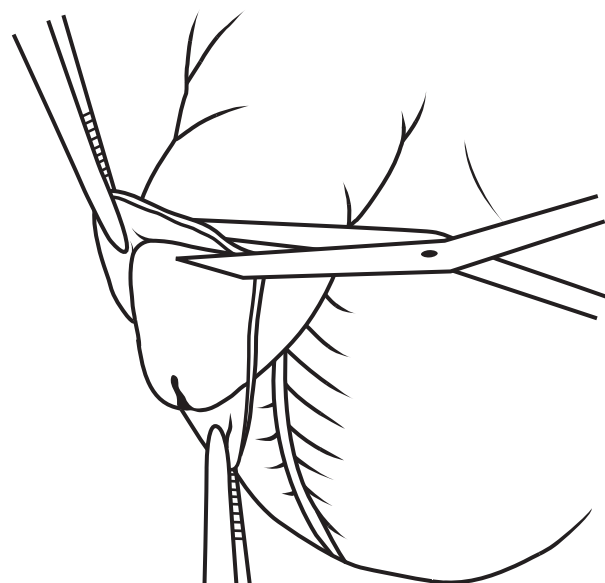
It is important to weigh up the pros and cons for circumcision and then discuss it with your doctor. Doctors usually advise against operating on newborn babies and point out that there is no hurry to operate because it is best performed when the baby is not wearing nappies.

### Key points

- Routine circumcision is not recommended.
- It is best avoided on newborn babies.
- It should be considered when there is:
  - very tight foreskin
  - recurring infection of the foreskin
  - difficulty in passing urine
  - foreskin that cannot be pulled back easily.



Tight foreskin



Method of circumcision