

Some Information about Circumcision

Debunking medical myths:

- Circumcision has no established health benefits. In 1999, the American Academy of Pediatrics reviewed 46 years of research and concluded routine neonatal circumcision is not recommended.¹
- The Australasian Association of Paediatric Surgeons released a 1996 statement that concluded, "**Neonatal male circumcision has no medical indication. It is a traumatic procedure** performed without anaesthesia to remove a normal and healthy prepuce."
- Circumcision **does not prevent penile cancer or reduce the risk of contracting HIV/AIDS** or any other sexually transmitted disease.²
- Circumcision does not reduce cervical cancer risk for the partners of circumcised men.
- Circumcision does not protect against urinary tract infection (UTI) in infants. Since the **foreskin tissue provides a protective immunological function**³, circumcision may actually increase the risk of bacterial infection and disease.

Social myths:

- Circumcision is not the norm. The U.S. is the only industrialized country where the majority of male infants are circumcised. **Worldwide, only 10-15% of men are circumcised.**
- Circumcision did not originate as a measure to promote physical hygiene. Instead, it was introduced to promote moral hygiene. In the U.S., the practice began around 1860, when sex and pleasure were considered unhealthy, and was recommended as a technique to discourage boys from masturbating.⁴

Function myths:

- **The foreskin is not just skin.** It provides physical protection and lubrication. Circumcision changes the penis from what was intended to be an internal organ to an external one. The exposed glans becomes calloused, causing problems with arousal for some men. The loss of the foreskin, which contains an estimated 10,000 nerve endings, 240 feet of nerves, 3 to 4 feet of blood vessels, and 12 to 15 square inches of skin, can **reduce a man's capacity to feel pleasure during sex.**
- The partners of circumcised men may have problems with stimulation, lubrication, and infection. One medical study found that **6 out of 7 women preferred sex with an uncircumcised man**, and women were able to reach orgasm twice as often with uncircumcised partners.⁵

Other health effects:

- Circumcision is painful and traumatic. It **hinders infants' attempts to breast-feed**, disrupts their sleep patterns, and interferes with the formation of the mother-child bond.⁶ It can alter infant pain response.⁷
- The complication rate of circumcision is estimated to be between **2% and 10%**.⁸ Complications include uncontrollable bleeding, infection, disfigurement, penile amputation, and death.

¹ Pediatrics **103**, 686-693 (1999).

² Laumann EO et al. *Circumcision in the United States*, Journal of the American Medical Association **277**, 1052-57 (1997); Van Howe RS, *Circumcision and HIV-infection: meta-analysis and review of the medical literature*, International Journal of STD AIDS **10**: 8-16 (1999).

³ Fleiss PM, Hodges FM, Van Howe RS, *Immunological functions of the human prepuce*. Sex Transm Inf **74**, 364-7 (1998).

⁴ Gollaher DL, *From ritual to science: The medical transformation of circumcision in America*, Journal of Social History **28**, 5-36 (1994).

⁵ O'Hara K, O'Hara J, *The effect of male circumcision on the sexual enjoyment of the female partner*. BJU International **83** Suppl 1, 79-84 (1999).

⁶ Marshall RE, et al. *Circumcision II: effects upon mother-infant interaction*, Early Human Development **7**, 367-74 (1982).

⁷ Taddio, A, Koren G et al, *Effect of neonatal circumcision on pain response during subsequent routine vaccination*. Lancet **349**, 599-603 (1997).

⁸ Williams N and Kapila L, *Complications of circumcision*, British Journal of Surgery **80**, 1231-36 (1993).

Notable Quotes About Circumcision

"There are no valid medical indications for circumcision in the neonatal period."

- Committee on Fetus and Newborn. Standards and Recommendations for Hospital Care of Newborn Infants, 5th edition. Evanston, IL: American Academy of Pediatrics. (1971). p.110.

"My own preference, if I had the good fortune to have another son, would be to leave his little penis alone."

- Benjamin Spock, MD

"Historians of the future will find it incredible that we mutilated babies by cutting off the end of their penises in the name of medicine. There are now serious concerns this routine procedure may actually **deprive adult men of a vital part of their sexual sensitivity.**"

- Dean Edell, MD - Radio and Television Medical Advisor

"...In response to circumcision, the baby cries a helpless, panicky, breathless, high-pitched cry!...[or] lapses into a semi-coma. Both of these states...are abnormal in the newborn."

- Justin Call, MD, pediatrician and child psychiatrist.

"Circumcision causes pain, trauma, and a **permanent loss of protective and erogenous tissue...**

Removing normal, healthy, functioning tissue for no medical reason has ethical implications:

circumcision violates the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 5) and the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child (Article 13)."

- Leo Sorger, to American College of Obstetrics and Gynecology: Stop Circumcisions, Ob Gyn News, (1 Nov., 1994). p. 8.

"Circumcision is not a medical decision. Preventing an improbably future infection is a spurious indication. The standard of care is antibiotics, not amputation."

- Eileen Marie Wayne, MD, Letters (Nothing to debate on circumcision), American Medical News, (27 July, 1998). P.27.

"Sight without color would be a good analogy-- only being able to see in black and white, rather than seeing in full color would be like experiencing an orgasm with a foreskin and without. **There are feelings you'll just never have without the foreskin.**"

- Paul Tardiff, circumcised at age 30.

"One of the **biggest mistakes of my life.** I feel damaged on every level. Sexual pleasure has been reduced by at least 70% both in intensity and range of sensations. . . For an adult male to be misled into circumcision is regrettable, but **to inflict irreparable damage on a non-consenting infant who will carry the physical and psychological scars all his life is tragic.**"

- William E. Krueger, circumcised at age 30.