

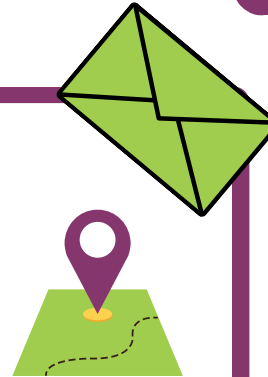
WHAT WE DO

We work towards better public and professional recognition of the consequences that can result from circumcision. This includes an appreciation of the long term psychological, physical, and sexual impacts that the procedure can have.

Not many people realise that circumcision can have harmful consequences, but the stories of men who write to us demonstrates how the disregarding of consent can affect them.

By raising public awareness, we hope to warn parents and medical professionals about the dangers associated with surgical genital intervention. And that those who have been negatively affected will have access to support services.

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Infant Circumcision

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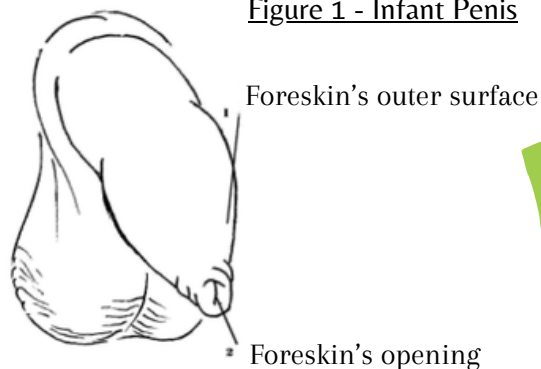
Information
for Parents

Introduction

The effects of circumcision are permanent and what is cut off cannot be replaced. Before you make a decision on behalf of an infant to have him circumcised, make sure that **you** know what is involved, and the effects that circumcision will have on **him** for the remainder of his life.

What is circumcision?

Circumcision is the surgical removal of the double layer of skin that normally covers the glans (head) of the penis. This tissue is often called the prepuce, but is usually known as the foreskin.



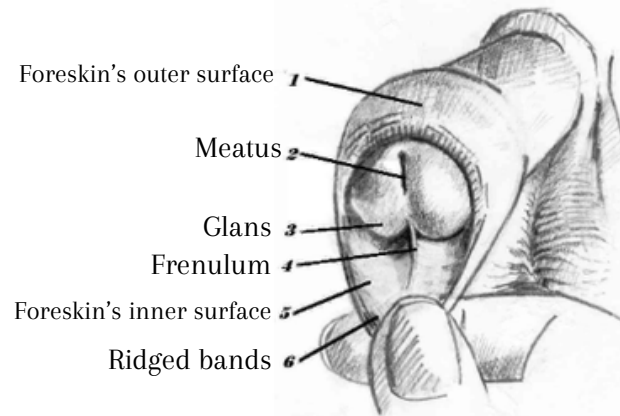
Structure of the Penis

The shaft of the penis is covered with skin that folds under itself, and is attached to the groove behind the glans where it is joined with the mucous membrane covering the glans.

The inner layer of the foreskin is not like normal skin. It is a mucous membrane, similar to the lining of the mouth. The foreskin contains many specialised nerves and blood vessels and is extremely sensitive.

On its underside it is held in place by a structure called a frenum or frenulum. This is similar to the web of mucous membrane that holds the upper and lower lips close to the teeth and gums. The frenulum is continuous with a specialised band of tissue (the ridged band) just within the tip of the foreskin where the inner and outer layers meet. The frenulum and ridged band are the most sensitive structures of all in the male genitals.

Figure 2 - Adult Penis



Purpose of the Foreskin

The foreskin consists of about half the total penile skin system and its functions are both protective and sensory. At birth and during the early years of infancy the foreskin is attached to the glans and protects it from faeces and abrasion from nappies. Within a few years the foreskin will normally separate itself from the glans, but throughout life the foreskin covers and protects the glans and keeps its surface soft, moist and sensitive. Without this protection, the glans becomes dry and desensitised from exposure and chafing, and this can lead to problems during sexual intercourse. The specialised nerve endings in the tip of the foreskin enhance sexual pleasure. The foreskin provides a skin tube through which the penis can glide, enhancing the pleasure of intercourse for both partners.

Why did doctors start circumcising babies?

Doctors in the English-speaking countries started circumcising babies in the mid-1800s "to prevent masturbation," which was blamed for causing many diseases, including epilepsy, tuberculosis and insanity. In fact, masturbation is perfectly harmless and normal.

Other reasons have also been given since then, but all of them, including the claim that circumcision prevents cancer of the penis, cancer of the cervix and venereal diseases have been disproved. We now know that the foreskin is a normal, sensitive, functional part of the body, and may have additional functions that are still not recognised or fully understood.

Is Circumcision Painful?

Yes; it is extremely painful. Most babies are circumcised without an anaesthetic, and the statement that a baby cannot feel pain is simply not true. Following this trauma the baby has less tolerance for pain for life.

Does Circumcision Have Risks?

Yes, the risks include excessive bleeding, infection and sometimes death. Many circumcised men suffer for the rest of their lives from extensive scarring, skin tags and bridges, tight painful erections and the feeling of having been mutilated. All circumcised men lose some or most of the sensitivity in their glans and all of the sensitivity in their foreskin.

What should I do if my doctor recommends circumcision?

You have the right to ask for a second opinion. You should ask to be referred to a paediatric consultant who is known to take a conservative view of treatment of genital problems.