

Deciding About Circumcision

Parents usually have a number of questions when deciding whether to have their newborn son circumcised. You will need to consider both the risks and the benefits of circumcision when making your decision. Other factors — such as your cultural, religious, and personal preferences — will also affect your choice.

We offer circumcision as a service to those parents who, based on informed, thoughtful decision-making and discussion, have chosen the procedure. Talk with your baby's doctor about any concerns you have.

What is circumcision?

Circumcision is surgery to remove the foreskin of the penis. The foreskin is the skin that covers the head of the penis. In healthy infants, circumcision is usually done in the first few days of life. It is not medically necessary. The procedure takes about 15 minutes and a local anesthetic is usually used.

How do I decide whether or not to circumcise my son?

Think about any special reasons that affect your choice:

- Religious
- Medical
- Cultural
- Personal

Consider the risks and benefits of the surgery (see below).

Reasons you might not choose circumcision:

- It isn't usually medically necessary.
- It can be painful for your baby.
- As with all surgeries, there is some risk.
- The baby's father or other males in your family are not circumcised.

Reasons you might choose circumcision:

- Your religion or culture practices circumcision.
- The surgery might prevent some infections (bladder infections, infections under the foreskin.)
- The baby's father or other males in your family are circumcised.

What are the risks and benefits?

The surgical risks are very low. They include slight risks of:

- Bleeding
- Infection
- Scarring of the urinary opening
- Poor cosmetic results

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Potential medical benefits include:

- Slightly lower chance of urinary tract infections during the first year of life.
- Prevention of phimosis, an uncommon condition when a male is not able to pull back the foreskin. A small number of males will need medical treatment or circumcision for this later in life.
- Lower risk of getting cancer of the penis (a very rare cancer in both circumcised and uncircumcised males).
- Prevention of infection of the foreskin.
- Slightly lower chance of getting sexually transmitted diseases.

When and where will my baby be circumcised?

If you choose to have your son circumcised, it will either be done in the hospital before you and your baby go home or in the doctor's office sometime in your baby's first month of life. If you are planning to have a ritual circumcision for your baby, talk to your religious leader as soon as possible. Ritual circumcisions are usually done on the 8th day of baby's life.

Will Kaiser Permanente pay for circumcision?

Call Member Services at 1-888-901-4636 to see if routine circumcision is a covered benefit under your health plan.

How do I take care of my baby's penis?

If your baby is NOT circumcised:

You don't need to do anything special to care for your baby's penis until the foreskin can be pulled back easily. This happens by the time a boy reaches puberty, and can happen much sooner. When the foreskin can be pulled back easily, the penis should be gently cleaned with water during a bath or shower. Never force the foreskin back. It can be painful to the child and is not necessary.

If your baby is circumcised:

Caring for your baby's penis depends on the circumcision method your doctor used. Ask your baby's doctor or nurse to explain the best way to care for your baby's penis until it's healed. Once it's healed, regular baths are enough to keep his penis clean.

Resources: Where can I get help?

The **Kaiser Permanente Resource Line** can provide information on a variety of health topics. Call weekdays from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. toll-free 1-800-992-2279.

Visit the **Kaiser Permanente website** at kp.org/wa for more health information in our Health and Resources Wellness section.

The **Consulting Nurse Service** is available to Kaiser Permanente members with medical questions or concerns. Call 24 hours a day, toll-free 1-800-297-6877.