Circumcision is a simple surgical procedure that removes the foreskin – a sleeve of skin covering the head of the penis. Parents have the legal right to authorize circumcision. In order to make an informed decision, they must carefully consider the benefits and risks.

Since the foreskin traps bacteria and other infectious agents, as well as accumulating malodorous smegma, its removal improves genital hygiene and reduces risk of diseases and other conditions over the lifetime for the boy and his future sexual partners.

Thus, benefits exceed moderate risks by over a hundred to one!
History

Circumcision has been performed for thousands of years as part of the culture of indigenous people who live in hot environments such as in Australia, the Pacific Islands, equatorial countries, the Middle East, Africa and the Americas. In the USA 80-90% of White and Black males are circumcised, mostly soon after birth. Although the rate is low amongst Hispanics this rises as subsequent generations adopt local American practices. The overall rate of newborn circumcisions in the USA has been increasing steadily every year since the late 80s, and this is seen in all racial/ethnic groups. In Canada the circumcision rate is around 35%.

Benefits of circumcision

- Eliminates the risk of phimosis, which affects 1 in 10 older boys and men. This condition refers to a tight foreskin that cannot be pulled back fully, so making cleaning under it, and passing urine, difficult. Phimosis also greatly increases the risk of penile cancer, and is the cause of foreskin and catheter problems in nursing homes.
- Reduces by 3-fold the risk of inflammation and infection of the skin of the penis. One in 10 uncircumcised men get inflammation of the head of the penis and foreskin. This rises to 1 in 3 if the uncircumcised man is diabetic. (Diabetic men also have other severe problems.) In contrast only 2% of circumcised men get this condition.
- Over 10-fold decrease in risk of urinary tract infections in infants. Whereas risk of this is only 1 in 500 for a circumcised boy, 1 in 50 uncircumcised male infants will get a urinary tract infection. This very painful condition is particularly dangerous in infancy, and in 40% of cases can lead to kidney inflammation and disease; blood poisoning and meningitis can also result.
- Over 20-fold decrease in risk of invasive penile cancer, which has a high fatality rate. One in 600 uncircumcised men get penile cancer, which often requires penile amputation.
- Uncircumcised men have 1½ – 2 times the risk of prostate cancer, which affects 1 in 6.
- Reduces by approximately 3-fold the risk of getting HIV (AIDS), during sex with an infected woman. HIV enters via the vulnerable inner lining of the foreskin of a healthy penis, but can also infect via sores anywhere on the penis (caused for example by genital herpes). In countries such as the USA that have a low prevalence of HIV the risk of a heterosexual man being infected with HIV sexually is generally low. His risk, especially if uncircumcised, will be much greater if he engages in unsafe sex with people of countries in which HIV abounds.
- Circumcision also affords substantial protection against sexually transmitted infections such as papilloma (wart) virus, syphilis and chancroid.
- Circumcision reduces by up to 5 times the risk of the man’s female partner being infected by chlamydia or getting cervical cancer (which is caused by human papillomavirus). The load of infectious bacteria and viruses that accumulate under the foreskin is delivered into the female genital tract during sex. Chlamydia has more than doubled over the past 5 years and can cause infertility (in both sexes), pelvic inflammatory disease, and ectopic pregnancy.
- If not circumcised soon after birth, up to 10% will later require one anyway for medical reasons.
- Credible research shows that most women prefer the appearance of the circumcised penis. They also prefer it for sexual activity. Hygiene is one reason.
- Most studies reveal no significant difference in sensitivity between a circumcised and uncircumcised penis.
- In general, sexual function is the same or better.