

Circumcision

Cutting to the chase

by Dr Gerald Tan

CIRCUMCISION REFERS TO the surgical removal of the foreskin at its attachment to the base of the glans of the penis. It is perhaps the most common surgical procedure performed worldwide, with about one-third of the world's male population being circumcised.¹

not be performed when infant males have anatomical abnormalities of the urethral meatus (hypospadias or epispadias), curvature of the penile head (chordee), or ambiguous genitalia, as the foreskin will be required for definitive reconstructive surgery later on.

Circumcision is routinely performed in many countries at birth for religious or personal reasons. It is also performed in adults for various medical conditions such as:

- Phimosis, where the foreskin of the penis cannot be retracted without causing pain or bleeding
- Paraphimosis, where the retracted foreskin cannot be replaced and becomes swollen and painful
- Severe balanoposthitis, where the glans penis and the overlying foreskin are badly infected and swollen
- Tumours or cysts arising from the penile foreskin
- Recurrent urinary tract infections

Are there any health benefits to male circumcision?

In their policy statement on male circumcision, the American Academy of Paediatrics identified several benefits, such as the prevention of urinary tract infections, penile cancer, and transmission of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs).² In HIV-endemic countries in Africa, the incidence of HIV in sexually active heterosexual circumcised males is reduced by up to 66%, whilst the risk of acquiring herpes Type 2 virus is reduced by 28%.³

However, circumcision should

How is circumcision performed in hospitals today?

Circumcision is most commonly performed using either the dorsal slit or the sleeve techniques. The excess foreskin is divided down to the base of the glans penis and removed, leaving a cuff of healthy tissue around the glans penis. Bleeding points are controlled (usually with cautery), and the edges of the two layers are stitched together using absorbable sutures.

In certain centres, a CO2 laser is used to remove the excess foreskin. This is reported to result in less

bleeding during the surgery itself, shortening the duration of the surgical procedure. In newborns and children, circumcision is usually performed with the aid of a Plastibell device (a plastic ring that is placed onto the head of the penis).

Depending on the patient's (or parents') preference, the surgery may be performed under local anaesthesia, penile nerve blocks or general anaesthesia. In most uncomplicated cases, it should not take more than 30 minutes to complete.

What problems may occur after the circumcision?

More than 95% of all circumcisions heal uneventfully within a month. In the first two days after surgery, some patients may experience bleeding, resulting in swelling and blood clots underneath the wound. Whilst unsightly, this usually settles spontaneously without the need for revision surgery, in a matter of weeks. Other complications after circumcision may include infection of the wound, and having too much of the foreskin removed.

Will circumcision affect my sex life?

Most males do not complain of decreased libido, pain on penetrative intercourse or ejaculation, or problems with erection, ejaculation or orgasm after circumcision.⁴ As circumcisions are routinely performed with the penis in its flaccid state, it is sometimes difficult to judge how easily the remaining foreskin will stretch when the penis is fully erect. As such, some men may experience a sensation of tightness on full erection due to having too much foreskin removed. In most cases, this problem is short-lived and can be improved by applying topical medical creams.

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How long will it take to recover?

Patients are usually discharged home the same day of surgery with a course of antibiotics and painkillers. Pain over the wound site usually resolves after two to three days in uncomplicated cases, and adult patients can expect to return to work after a week. The use of absorbable sutures means that these will usually drop off once the wound has healed.

Penetrative sexual intercourse should be avoided until the wound has fully healed, around three to four weeks after surgery. In some patients with severe phimosis, the exposed glans penis may be very sensitive for a few weeks following circumcision, and topical anaesthetic creams may be required for this period. eh

In A Nutshell!

- Circumcision is one of the most commonly performed procedures around the world
- Benefits include prevention of urinary tract infections, penile cancer, and transmission of STDs
- Usually takes < 30 minutes and is relatively painless
- Possible post-surgery complications include bleeding, infection, and poor wound healing

References:

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