

MYTHS & FACTS ABOUT CIRCUMCISION

MYTH: Circumcising baby boys is a safe and harmless procedure.

FACT: Surgically removing part of a baby boy's penis causes pain, creates immediate health risks and can lead to serious complications. Risks include infection, hemorrhage, scarring, difficulty urinating, loss of part or all of the penis, and even death. Circumcision complications can and do occur in even the best clinical settings.

MYTH: Circumcision is just a little snip.

FACT: Surgical removal of the foreskin involves immobilizing the baby by strapping him face-up onto a molded plastic board. In one common method, the doctor then inserts a metal instrument under the foreskin to forcibly separate it from the glans, slits the foreskin, and inserts a circumcision device. The foreskin is crushed and then cut off. The amount of skin removed in a typical infant circumcision is the equivalent of 15 square inches in an adult male.

MYTH: Circumcision is routinely recommended and endorsed by doctors and other health professionals.

FACT: No professional medical association in the United States or anywhere else in the world recommends routine circumcision as medically necessary.

MYTH: The baby does not feel any pain during circumcision.

FACT: Circumcision is painful. Babies are sensitive to pain, just like older children and adults. The analgesics used for circumcision only decrease pain; they do not eliminate it. Further, the open wound left by the removal of the foreskin will continue to cause the baby pain and discomfort for the 7-10 days it takes to heal.

MYTH: If I don't circumcise my son, he will be ridiculed.

FACT: Times have changed and so has people's understanding of circumcision. Today, although the popularity of circumcision varies across geographical areas, nearly half of all baby boys born in the U.S. will leave the hospital intact. Most medically advanced nations do not practice child circumcision. Three quarters of the world's men are intact.

MYTH: A boy should be circumcised to look like his father.

FACT: Children differ from their parents in many ways, including eye and hair color, body type, and (of course) size and sexual development. If a child asks why his penis looks different from that of his circumcised father (or brother), parents can say, "Daddy (or brother) had a part of his penis removed when he was a baby; now we know it's not necessary and we decided not to let anyone do that to you."

MYTH: Routine circumcision of baby boys cannot be compared to Female Genital Mutilation.

FACT: Rationales offered in cultures that promote female genital cutting – hygiene, disease prevention, improved appearance of the genitalia, and social acceptance – are similar to those offered in cultures that promote male circumcision. Whatever the rationale, forced removal of healthy genital tissue from any child – male or female – is unethical. Boys have the same right as girls to be spared this inhumane, unnecessary surgery.

MYTH: To oppose male circumcision is religious and cultural bigotry.

FACT: Many who oppose the permanent alteration of children's genitals do so because they believe in universal human rights. All children – regardless of their ethnicity or culture – have the right to be protected from bodily harm.

MYTH: Circumcising newborn baby boys produces health benefits later in life.

FACT: There is NO link between circumcision and better health. In fact, cutting a baby boy's genitals creates immediate health risks. Circumcision also diminishes sexual pleasure later in life.

MYTH: Male circumcision helps prevent HIV.

FACT: Claims that circumcision prevents HIV have repeatedly been proven to be exaggerated or false. Only abstinence or the use of condoms can prevent the spread of sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS.