

What is circumcision?

Circumcision is the surgical removal of the [foreskin](#) (the sleeve of skin that covers the end of the penis) to expose the glans (head of the penis).

Most of the circumcisions performed in Australia are on baby boys. About [1 in 10 baby boys get circumcised](#).

Before the 1970s, the majority of baby boys were circumcised, so it is [more common in older Australian men](#) than in younger males.

Reasons for circumcision

Circumcision is performed for medical, cultural and religious reasons.

Medical reasons for circumcision include ongoing problems with [urinary tract infections](#) and foreskin problems, such as [phimosis](#).

Circumcision reduces the risk of some [sexually transmitted infections](#), including herpes simplex virus (HSV), human papillomavirus (HPV), syphilis and human immunodeficiency virus (HIV).

Circumcision appears to reduce the risk of STIs by removing the main tissue targeted by the virus during sex, and also by reducing inflammation.

It's important to know that circumcision is not effective protection from all STIs. Proper use of condoms is best for that.

Health effects of circumcision

Circumcised males are less likely than non-circumcised males to have urinary tract infections, phimosis, paraphimosis and [balanitis](#), or to [develop penis cancer](#). However, many uncircumcised males never experience these problems.

If you have recurrent problems with your foreskin, circumcision is often an effective treatment. Circumcision is a common and usually straightforward surgical procedure, but it's not without complications. As for any medical or surgical procedure, the potential benefits of circumcision need to be weighed against possible harms. These include surgical accidents, complications from anaesthetics, and infection after surgery.

Circumcision is a [less complicated operation in baby boys](#) than it is in older boys and men. Complication rates are also lower if circumcision is done to prevent disease, rather than to [treat an existing problem](#).

Circumcision does not seem to result in any [benefit or disadvantage when it comes to sexual function](#).

What to do about circumcision

If your doctor has recommended circumcision for an existing health problem, there's probably a good reason for the suggestion. You should talk with your doctor about any concerns you may have.

Whether the preventive benefit of circumcision is worthwhile for newborn babies is a decision for parents, with the guidance of medical care professionals.

Questions to ask your doctor about circumcision

- What are the pros and cons of circumcising our baby?
- How long will it take me to recover from adult circumcision?
- What alternative treatments to circumcision are there that might be suitable for me?

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