

Associated Specialists for Women's Health, P.A.

ROBERT A. BLOCK, M.D.
ROBERT H. DILKS, M.D.
GWENR BAILE, CNM

OBSTETRICS, GYNECOLOGY, INFERTILITY

4 REGULUS DRIVE
TURNERSVILLE, NJ 080
(609) 582-0010

CIRCUMCISION

If your baby is a boy, you will have to decide whether you want your little boy circumcised. Since to our knowledge, there is no good summary of the subject in the nonmedical literature we will attempt to summarize the literature for you to help you in your decision.

HISTORY: The majority of the males in the world are uncircumcised. The exceptions to this are Jews, Moslems, and North Americans.

The earliest accounts, which go back to ancient Egypt, suggest that the procedure was done mainly as a religious ritual or as a way of marking slaves. In the 1940's circumcision became popular in the United States because of the ease of cleaning the circumcised penis and the appearance of reports suggesting a lower incidence of penile cancer in circumcised males. This was reinforced by circumcision having to be performed in soldiers who were stationed in tropical areas in World War II where good hygiene was difficult. By the 1950's approximately 85% of newborn males in the United States were circumcised with no explanation of the pros and cons being given to the parents. By the late 1960's pediatricians, prompted by findings of ulcers on the penis and bleeding problems in newborn males, began to question the medical indication for circumcision. Studies also began to refute the association of cancer with uncircumcised men. As a result of this the American Academy of Pediatrics stated in 1970, "There are no valid indications for circumcision in the Newborn".

Over the next five years debate among physicians continued, so that in 1975 and ad hoc committee reviewed the data and reported that it could find no basis for ~~changing the statement previously made by the American Academy.~~

THE CONTROVERSEY:

1. **PHIMOSIS:** (The inability to retract the foreskin over the glans penis). Phimosis is given as an indication for circumcision in newborn males; however, this is a normal condition in the newborn period, and studies show that by age five 90% of foreskins will retract even if nothing is done to them. The incidence of true phimosis requiring later circumcision is stated to be between 2 and 10%. In those males who require circumcision at a later age, there are the disadvantages of anesthesia, cost and possible psychological disturbances. Since you cannot tell which little boy will have permanent phimosis by examining him in the newborn period, you must weigh the risks of 90% of newborns being circumcised unnecessarily versus the risks of 2 to 10% who will actually need the procedure at a later time, if circumcision is not performed initially.

2. **CANCER OF THE PENIS:** Published data confirms that cancer of the penis is prevented by circumcision. There is also good evidence that good hygiene confers as much protection. It should also be noted that penile cancer is very rare.

3. **CANCER OF THE CERVIX:** In partners of uncircumcised males was reported to be increased, however, this has been convincingly challenged in recent years.

4. **VENEREAL DISEASE:** There is no evidence that circumcision decreases the incidence of venereal disease.

5. **SOCIAL ASPECTS:** Many parents request circumcision so that their little boy will look like other family members and like his peers. This may be a valid argument. There is, however, very little information on the psychological effect of children being "different" from family members or peers.

HAZARDS OF CIRCUMCISION:

Bleeding and infection are possible, as they are with any operation. Death from circumcision is a rare complication, estimated to occur twice per million circumcisions.

Circumcision is possibly painful to the newborn, and some reports have shown disturbances in the sleep patterns as well as difficulty relating to their mothers for several days following circumcision.

No valid data exists that either confirms or denies difficulty with sexual function following circumcision.


VALID REASONS FOR CIRCUMCISION:

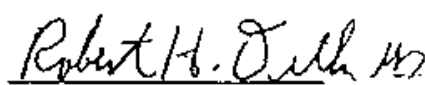
A select population who live in tropical climates or who live in conditions that deter cleanliness may well be better off circumcised.

Circumcision for religious reasons cannot be construed as unnecessary, because the spiritual and cultural benefits of circumcision outweigh the medical risks.

CONCLUSION:

As one reviews the available information, one reaches the conclusion that there is no absolute medical reason for routine circumcision of infant boys. A program of good hygiene offers all the advantages of circumcision without the surgical risks. At the same time, social and religious considerations must be taken into account. We hope that this summary will help you in your decision. If any questions arise after reading this, please do not hesitate to discuss them with us.


ROBERT A. BLOCK, M.D.


ROBERT H. DILKS, M.D.

