

# Sex and Male Circumcision

## What every woman needs to know



**M**ale circumcision is a simple surgical procedure that removes the foreskin – a sleeve of skin covering the tip of the penis. Women are at much lower risk of disease if their male partner is circumcised.

By encouraging circumcision in lovers, brothers, friends or their own male offspring, women can help protect themselves, other women, and men. In western countries a mother has the legal right to authorize circumcision for her young son. Although infancy is the ideal time for a circumcision, many adult men and teens can be encouraged to seek circumcision for medical, health, sexual, cultural, religious, cosmetic or personal reasons.

### History

Circumcision has been performed for thousands of years as part of the culture of indigenous people who live in hot environments. Worldwide, approx. 30% of males are circumcised. The practice is almost universal in the Middle East, North and West Africa, as well as in the Pacific islands and various Asian countries. The rate is 91% for US-born white men and 66% for Australian-born males. In the latter countries, circumcision of newborns decreased in the 1970s-80s, but has now risen again following confirmation of the benefits by the latest medical research. In the USA, UK and Australia, higher socio-economic-educational ranking is associated with higher rates of circumcision.

### Benefits to women of male circumcision

Infectious bacteria and viruses that accumulate under the foreskin are delivered into the female genital tract during sex. Thus when the male partner is circumcised there is:

- A lower risk of *cervical cancer* (which is caused by human papillomavirus). If her male partner is uncircumcised and has had 6 or more sexual partners her risk is 5-times higher. If only 2 previous partners she is at twice the risk.
- A 2-fold reduction in her risk of genital herpes and bacterial vaginosis.
- A 5-fold reduction in risk of a woman being infected by *Chlamydia*, thus reducing her risk of *infertility*, *pelvic inflammatory disease*, and *ectopic pregnancy*.
- A reduced risk of other sexually transmitted infections such as HIV (the virus that causes AIDS), *syphilis*, *trichomonas* and *chancroid*, since it is less likely that the male partner has any of these.
- A *lack of* malodorous smegma and associated bacteria on the penis during sex.
- No need for concern that the man has phimosi. This condition makes it difficult to have sexual intercourse, because the 1 in 10 uncircumcised men with phimosi cannot get an erection, or experience difficulties and pain.
- Improved sexual pleasure, since women tend to prefer the circumcised penis for *appearance*, *hygiene*, increased penile-vaginal *contact*, *stimulation*, and marginally better staying power during sex. Any of these factors can increase the likelihood of the woman reaching an *orgasm*.

### Benefits to men and boys of circumcision

This is the topic of a separate brochure downloadable from [www.circinfo.net](http://www.circinfo.net).

A Guide for Parents is also available from this source.

Briefly, male circumcision:

- Eliminates the risk of *phimosi*, which is not only an impediment to sex, but makes cleaning under the foreskin and passing urine difficult and painful, as well as greatly increasing the risk of penile cancer and geriatric problems.
- Reduces the risk of *inflammation* and *infection* of the skin of the penis.
- Substantially reduces the risk of *urinary tract infections (UTIs)*, particularly in infancy.
- Almost completely eliminates the risk of *invasive penile cancer*.
- Reduces the risk of *prostate cancer*.
- Reduces the risk of being infected by *HIV*, the AIDS virus, by 3-8 fold.
- Provides substantial protection against *thrush*, *genital ulcers*, *papillomavirus*, *herpes*, *syphilis*, *trichomonas*, *chancroid* and *mycoplasma*.
- Eliminates the need for later circumcision for medical reasons.
- Does not affect sensitivity of the flaccid penis, penile sensation arousal, nor ability to get an erection. Sexual pleasure is the same or better.

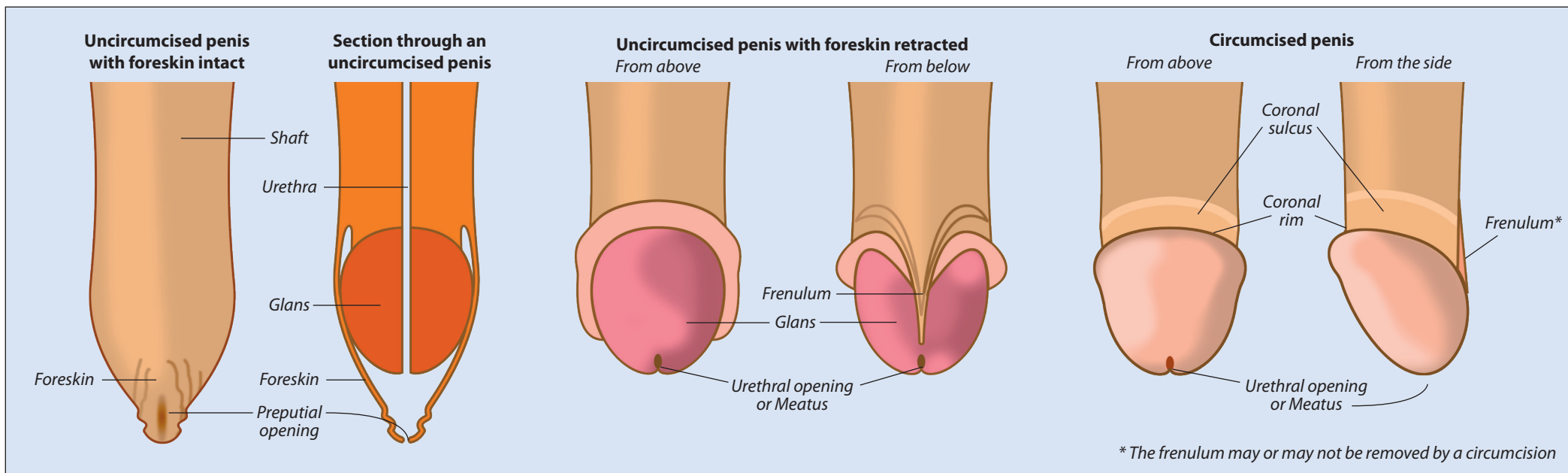
### Risks from circumcision

- These are virtually all quite minor and very easily treated.
- Pain is minimized by use of a local *anaesthetic* (plus a mild sedative for older boys and men).
- Sex must be avoided until healing is complete (approx. 4 weeks).

### In conclusion

*Circumcision of the male partner confers substantial sexual and medical benefits to a woman. A circumcised male reduces her risk of disease, suffering, medical treatment and premature death. If she is the care giver, as wife or mother, a woman will quite likely need to deal with problems in the uncircumcised male, 1 in 3 of whom develop a condition requiring medical attention at some time during their life.*

***Thus male circumcision provides a substantial benefit to public health and individual well-being of women.***



## Important, please note!

If your partner does decide to have a circumcision or you decide your son should be circumcised, you need to be aware there are some who oppose it. Some argue that it is unethical to make this decision on behalf of an infant – even though they support vaccination of infants where the arguments are very similar. Some have not yet caught up with the substantial research findings in recent years attesting to the wisdom of circumcision as a highly beneficial, safe prophylactic procedure. This includes some doctors.

Also, to make short term cost savings, many tax funded healthcare systems will not circumcise until a medical problem has arisen – contradicting their usual policy that ‘prevention is better than cure’. In some places you may therefore have to seek help in the private sector where you will usually find a more sympathetic response.

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## Further information

May be obtained from the following websites:  
<http://www.circinfo.net> (Brian Morris, PhD DSc)  
<http://www.circlist.com>  
<http://www.circumcisionaustralia.org>  
 (Circumcision Academy of Australia)

<http://www.circumcisionamerica.org>  
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