About Circumcision

The benefits of this procedure far outweigh the risks.

December 2, 2019 By Kate Ferguson

For parents of a newborn boy, a key decision to make prior to taking the infant home is whether to have him circumcised. (Circumcision entails surgery to remove the foreskin from the penis.) Some parents decide not to have the common medical procedure done—often for ethical, religious or social reasons. But a number of health benefits are associated with the operation.

A major advantage of circumcision is a decreased risk of penile problems, such as irritation, inflammation and infection, which may affect uncircumcised males later in life. Another plus is that circumcised infants are less likely to develop urinary tract infections, especially during their first year of life.

In addition, some findings show that under certain circumstances, circumcision may protect men and women from contracting or transmitting HIV.

But as with any surgery, the procedure carries some risks. Parents should watch for problems that may arise after the procedure, such as persistent bleeding and increasing redness or swelling, or signs of infection, such as discharge that worsens or pus-filled blisters. Additionally, if an infant isn't urinating normally within 12 hours after being circumcised, he should be taken back to the hospital.

Moms and dads who worry whether the procedure will hurt their son shouldn't be overly anxious. Doctors routinely use anesthesia—either a topical cream is applied or an injectable anesthetic is administered—so the operation isn't too painful for the child.

Experts suggest that anxious parents ask doctors—in advance of the procedure—which methods they plan to use for pain prevention both before and after the surgical procedure.

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