CIRCUMCISION: MAKING AN INFORMED CHOICE

“Informed choice” is the motto of many midwives and this includes choice about pregnancy and birth as well as baby care. The decision whether or not to circumcise your baby boy can be filled with tension, worry and concern, but it may also be a decision that is automatic. This handout is not an attempt to persuade you one way or the other, but it is an attempt to give you clear, precise information about the surgery you are considering for your baby. It is an intimate look at an intimate decision.

Reasons we have seen why people want to circumcise their boys.
• So he will look the same as Dad, brother(s) or peers
• Religious dictates
• It’s cleaner

Reasons we have seen why people do not circumcise their boys.
• God and Nature made us perfect which includes having a foreskin
• It’s painful for the baby
• Its medically unnecessary
• It may not be the choice the child would make as an adult

What is the function of the foreskin?
• Protection of the glans which keeps the surface soft, moist, warm, pH balanced, and clean.
• Immunological defense against viruses and bacteria. Foreskin produces lysozyme, which is the same antiviral and antibacterial protein found in tears and mother’s milk.
• The foreskin contains the most nerve endings of any part of the penis. It is as sensitive as your lips.
• The foreskin provides the necessary skin to allow the penis to expand during an erection. This skin glides freely, pleasurably and smoothly over the shaft and glans.
• The foreskin facilitates smooth and gentle movement between the mucosal surfaces of the two partners during lovemaking. The foreskin protects the vagina from abrasion and the woman is stimulated by a “moving pressure” rather than friction.
• The foreskin is self-lubricating which adds to the pleasure of both partners during intimate contact.

What is the rate of circumcision in the US and around the world?
The neonatal circumcision rate is 34.2% in the US and only 10-15% of the men around the world, most of whom are Muslim, are circumcised.
CIRCUMCISION: INFORMED CHOICE cont.

What is involved in the surgery?
The baby is strapped to a restraining board and given a local anesthetic. The foreskin is slit and peeled back from the glans, a cone is inserted between the glans and the foreskin, the foreskin is drawn up over the cone and the clamp is applied. Pressure from the clamp is maintained for 3-5 minutes and the foreskin is cut away.

Who should not be circumcised?
- Premature or compromised babies
- Babies with known bleeding problems
- Babies with hypospadias or epispadias.

What are the risks, complications and possible side effects of circumcision?
- Hemorrhage
- Infection including gangrene, staph infections, sepsis or higher rates of urinary tract infections
- Pain or difficulty with urination
- Adhesions, entrapment of the penis, separation of the edges of the circumcision
- Damage to the urethra
- Pain, discomfort, restlessness, disruption of feeding, disruption of maternal-infant bonding
- Circumcision makes the penis 25% shorter, removes as much as 80% of the penile skin, removes 3 feet of veins, arteries and capillaries, 240 feet of nerves and 20,000 nerve endings.
- The death rate is 1 in 500,000

Information compiled by Laurie Fremgen, CPM from Maternal Newborn Nursing by Sally Olds and The Case Against Circumcision by Dr. Paul Fleiss from Mothering Magazine Winter 1997 #85 pg 36.

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