Having a circumcision – information for men

This leaflet aims to answer your questions about having a circumcision. It explains the benefits, risks and alternatives, as well as what you can expect when you come to hospital. If you have any further questions, please speak to a doctor or nurse caring for you.

What is a circumcision?
A circumcision is an operation to cut away the foreskin of the penis. The foreskin is the sleeve of loose skin that covers the end (head) of the penis.

What are the benefits?
A circumcision may relieve problems such as a tight foreskin that:

• is causing problems with passing urine and/or causing infections
• is causing pain during sexual intercourse.

It is important to speak with your doctor about why a circumcision is being recommended for you. If you decide not to have a circumcision or alternative treatment, you will continue to have symptoms such as those outlined above.

Are there any alternative treatments?
Under some circumstances, other treatments may be considered but circumcision remains the most common treatment option to relieve your symptoms. Alternatives to a circumcision include:

• **Frenuloplasty** – this is an operation to cut and lengthen your frenulum, which is the small tag of skin on the underside of your penis, between your foreskin and the shaft of your penis. If the frenulum is short or torn, you may have problems pulling your foreskin back.
• **Dorsal slit** – in this procedure the foreskin is cut to widen and loosen it, so it can be pulled back more easily.
• **Prepuceplasty** – this is a more minor procedure than a circumcision. The foreskin is cut and stitched to widen it.

Your surgeon can explain these treatments if they are suitable for you.
Giving my consent (permission)

The staff caring for you may need to ask your permission to perform a particular treatment or investigation. You will be asked to sign a consent form that says you have agreed to the treatment and that you understand the benefits, risks and alternatives. If there is anything you don’t understand or you need more time to think about it, please tell the staff caring for you.

Remember, it is your decision. You can change your mind at any time, even if you have signed the consent form. Let staff know immediately if you change your mind. Your wishes will be respected at all times. If you would like to read our consent policy, please tell a member of staff.

What are the risks?

There are risks associated with any operation. Your doctor will explain the specific risks for a circumcision to you before asking you to sign the consent form. Please ask questions if you are uncertain. Possible problems from a circumcision include:

- Heavy bleeding during or after the operation – this can cause bruising which may go away by itself or you may need another operation to drain the blood away.
- An infection at the operation site.
- Scarring and narrowing at the opening of the tip of the penis.
- Dissatisfaction with the appearance of the circumcised penis.
- With the removal of your foreskin, the end of the penis feels different. You may have less sensitivity at the tip of the penis.

What do I need to do before my surgery?

It is important that you attend your pre-admission appointment, which will be about two to four weeks before your surgery. Your appointment date will be sent to you in the post. At this appointment we will assess your suitability for a general or local anaesthetic. If you do not attend this appointment, we may have to cancel your surgery. If you have children or care for an adult, please arrange for someone else to help you with this after your surgery. If you think this will be a problem, please contact us before your procedure.

It is important that you stop smoking for at least 24 hours before your operation to reduce the risk of chest problems. Smoking can also delay wound healing because it reduces the amount of oxygen that goes to the tissues. We have a no smoking policy in our hospitals. For your safety, we cannot allow you to leave the department to smoke while you are recovering from the operation. For more information on giving up smoking, please speak to your nurse or call the NHS Smoking Helpline on 0800 169 0 169.

What happens during a circumcision?

Your operation takes about 20 to 30 minutes. You should be able to go home on the same day, although your doctor will confirm this with you at your consultation.

A circumcision is usually performed using a local anaesthetic. This is medicine that ‘freezes’ a specific area of your body so it is pain free. Sometimes you are also given a general anaesthetic, which puts you to sleep for the entire procedure.

The foreskin can be removed in several different ways. Your surgeon will talk to you about how he/she will do the surgery and what type of anaesthetic will be used before you sign the consent form. The aim is to cut away enough of the foreskin to leave the head of the penis uncovered but keep the skin that covers the length of the penis.
Will I feel any pain?
Before your surgery, you will be given an injection of local anaesthetic at the base of your penis. This will make your penis numb and pain free for eight to 10 hours after the operation.

You can expect some discomfort after the anaesthetic wears off and we will give you pain relief for this. It is important that you take this medicine on a regular basis for the first few days. When taken regularly, it is kept at a constant level in your body and will control your pain better. After a few days, you can gradually reduce the medicine until you do not need it any longer. Please contact the ward you stayed on or your GP if you find the pain difficult to control.

Any medicine given to you will be explained before you leave the hospital. If you are at all uncertain, please contact your ward or your GP for advice.

It is important that you do not exceed the recommended daily dose of any medicine you are given. Please make sure you read the label.

After your surgery
If you go home on the day of your surgery, a responsible adult must help you home and be with you for 24 hours after the procedure.

You might feel dizzy and tired when you go home after the operation if you have had a general anaesthetic. Please rest for the remainder of the day and the following day to help you recover from the general anaesthetic. It will take 24 to 48 hours to wear off completely but you do not need to stay in bed for the whole of this period. Gently moving around your home will help your blood circulation and help to prevent blood clots. You may also have:

- **Swelling** – you can expect a little swelling and bruising at the wound site. There may also be a bit of oozing yellow coloured fluid. This is normal and nothing to worry about, although it may take about three to four weeks for your wound to heal completely.
- **Stitches** – these will dissolve or fall out on their own about 14 to 21 days after the operation. Some of the last pieces may take four to six weeks to dissolve or disappear. They do not need to be removed.
- **Wound dressing** – you will have a dressing on the penis when you return to the ward following your operation. However this will be removed before you go home or you will be instructed to remove it later that day if there has been no bleeding form the wound site. You should not require a dressing after that.
- It is possible you may have some **bleeding** from the foreskin, although this is unusual. If bleeding does occur, use a clean cloth and press firmly on the area that is bleeding for 15 minutes. If the bleeding does not stop after 15 minutes you will need to go straight to the closest A&E department.
- **Glans sensitivity** – the glans (head of your penis) will feel extra sensitive for the first two weeks after the operation. This will then settle down and over time you will notice that the glans becomes less sensitive than it was before the operation.
- **Wound appearance** – in the initial six weeks after the operation, the head of the penis and the skin around the wound site may appear swollen but this will settle down and by six months post-operation will have returned to normal.
- **Sexual activity** – you should refrain from all sexual activity for four weeks after the operation.
Can I eat and drink as normal after the operation?
You can eat and drink as normal, but please avoid alcohol for two days after your surgery, because of the anaesthetic. You should not drink alcohol while taking certain medicines – please read the label or information sheet that comes with your medicine.

When can I return to work?
Every patient reacts differently to anaesthetic and there is no definite rule as to when you should return to work. Most people take a week off work, although this will depend on your recovery and the type of work that you do. If you work in an office, you should take at least two to three days off after your operation. If your job involves manual labour, please do not work for a week after your operation. Have some rest to help you to heal and to let the anaesthetic wear off properly. Please do not return to work until you feel ready to do so.

Please do not play any sports for two weeks after the operation.

Your GP can give you a medical certificate (Med3) if needed. If your GP does not receive your discharge letter in the post, please get him/her to contact the department.

When can I have sexual intercourse?
Please do not have sexual intercourse for four weeks after the operation. This will:
• help your wound to heal
• help to avoid infection
• help to lower the risk of bleeding.

When can I have a bath or shower?
It is important to keep your wound clean and dry – pat the wound gently when drying. Do not put creams or ointments on your penis until it has fully healed. This will help prevent any delay in the healing of your wound. Sometimes the head of the penis can be dry – you could use a small amount of Vaseline to keep it moisturised.

You can have a bath or shower as often as you wish, from the day after your procedure. You might feel dizzy at first, following the anaesthetic, so please have an adult around to help you if needed and keep the bathroom door unlocked.

Will I have a follow-up appointment?
You might need a follow-up appointment in the outpatient clinic. If you do, the Urology Department at Guy’s Hospital will post this to you. If you are not given follow-up but need help, call the Urology Department for an appointment.

What if I have a problem at home?
Please contact Florence Ward or Aston Key Ward (contact details on page 5) if you have:
• excessive pain
• persistent bleeding
• a high temperature (38°C/100.4F or above)
• difficulty passing urine
• redness, inflammation and pain at the wound site
• a large amount of swelling
• an abnormal colour at or around your wound site
• pus coming from your wound.
If you think it is an emergency, please go straight to your nearest A&E department.

**Contact us**
If you have questions or concerns, please contact Florence Ward on 020 7188 8818 or Aston Key Ward on 020 7188 0709.

Alternatively, you can contact your GP.

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit [www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/leaflets](http://www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/leaflets)

**Pharmacy Medicines Helpline**
If you have any questions or concerns about your medicines, please speak to the staff caring for you or call our helpline. **t:** 020 7188 8748 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday

**Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)**
To make comments or raise concerns about the Trust’s services, please contact PALS. Ask a member of staff to direct you to the PALS office or:
**e:** 020 7188 8801 at St Thomas’ **t:** 020 7188 8803 at Guy’s **e:** pals@gstt.nhs.uk

**Language Support Services**
If you need an interpreter or information about your care in a different language or format, please get in touch using the following contact details.
**t:** 020 7188 8815  **fax:** 020 7188 5953

**NHS 111**
Offers medical help and advice from fully trained advisers supported by experienced nurses and paramedics. Available over the phone 24 hours a day. **t:** 111

**NHS Choices**
Provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make choices about your health. **w:** [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)

**Become a member of your local hospitals, and help shape our future**
Membership is free and it is completely up to you how much you get involved. To become a member of our Foundation Trust, you need to be 18 years of age or over, live in Lambeth, Southwark, Lewisham, Wandsworth or Westminster or have been a patient at either hospital in the last five years. To join:
**t:** 0848 143 4017  **e:** members@gstt.nhs.uk  **w:** [www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk](http://www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk)

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