



HIS BODY, HIS CHOICE  
- SAY NO TO CIRCUMCISION!

Project Intact

# The intact penis

Before we talk about circumcision, let's get to know the foreskin and its purpose in the male body. Don't let the name fool you; it's much more than just skin. In fact, the foreskin is a perfectly normal and crucial part of the male anatomy. This soft and elastic double-layered structure consists of skin, mucosa, specialised nerves, blood vessels and muscle fibres. It has protective, sexual, sensory, mechanical and immunological functions.

The main function of the foreskin is to protect the glans of the penis from a lifetime of chafing against clothing and exposure to heat and cold. It also keeps the glans moist and sensitive, just as nature intended it to be. The foreskin's vast number of nerve endings and the unique gliding action it provides are a vital part of the male sexual apparatus.

## What is circumcision?

Now that we know what the foreskin is, we can better understand what it means to have this tissue removed. The word circumcision refers to the surgical removal of some or all of the foreskin using a knife or other instrument designed for this purpose. Male circumcision is usually performed before puberty. In this brochure, the term circumcision is used to refer to non-therapeutic circumcisions that are performed as a rite of passage or for religious reasons.

## What is lost in circumcision?

- The most sensitive part of the penis that contains thousands of nerve endings
- Half or more of the mobile skin area of the penis
- A high number of blood vessels
- The natural protective structure of the glans, which also keeps the glans moist and sensitive
- The gliding mechanism of the foreskin, which makes sexual activity more pleasurable for both the man and his partner

All surgical operations contain risks, and circumcision is no exception. Haemorrhage, inflammation, skin bridges, and the closing of the urinary opening are just a few of the complications of circumcision. In some cases, too much skin is removed to enable a normal erection. In the worst case scenario, circumcision can result in the loss of the glans or the entire penis – it may even result in the circumcised boy's death.

# Sexuality and the circumcised penis

The foreskin is often regarded as a tiny flap of skin, and circumcision is sometimes described as just a little snip. However, both of these ideas are common misconceptions. Circumcision adversely affects sexuality. Circumcised men may suffer from painful erections, a lack of sensitivity and low sexual desire. The partner of the circumcised man may also feel pain during sex because of the absence of the penis's gliding mechanism and the rough scar line. Many circumcised males also report a variety of emotional and psychological problems, including post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, feelings of shame and anger, low self-esteem, and the avoidance of intimacy. Clearly, circumcision can hurt in many ways and on a number of levels. It really is the unkindest cut of all.

## Human rights and the law

What could be more self-evident than our autonomy over our own body? What else could be more priceless and worth protecting? Let's give this a moment's thought.

Every boy is born with a foreskin – it is their birth right. All non-therapeutic circumcisions violate the child's bodily integrity. From the point of view of human rights, medical ethics and sexual ethics, circumcision is a harmful practice and a bodily violation.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) protects every child's bodily integrity and undisturbed development. Finland has also signed the biomedical agreement (2010), which forbids the removal of healthy tissue without the permission of the person undergoing the procedure.

## Alternatives to circumcision

Because of the risks and complications of circumcision, and the obvious violations of human rights, children's rights and sexual rights, alternatives to circumcision have been developed. Any ceremony in which genital cutting is replaced with a symbolic ritual that does not physically or mentally harm the child is a welcome step towards a world in which boys are protected from unnecessary, harmful and traumatic genital mutilation.

## **The non-therapeutic circumcision of boys is a violation of the rights of the child!**

In 2011, the Sexpo Foundation launched project INTACT, whose long-term aim is to reduce non-therapeutic circumcisions of male minors. The project provides education and advice on the risks, complications and ethical problems of circumcision.

This brochure is available in several languages.

Sexpo Foundation  
Helsinki, Finland  
[ehja.sexpo.fi](http://ehja.sexpo.fi)

