



NEWBORN CIRCUMCISION KNOWLEDGE

MOST AMERICANS HAVE NO IDEA WHAT HAPPENS DURING A NEWBORN CIRCUMCISION

In 2023, Intact America commissioned a survey of 542 U.S. men and women aged 18 and older in preparation for its *Skin in the Game* initiative. The survey controlled for many factors, including sex, age, race, education, and more, permitting numerous crosstab correlations. Distributions for sex, age, race, and education mirrored the national norm.

WHAT HAPPENS?

Q: What do you think happens during a hospital newborn circumcision? (check all that apply)

- He is taken to a special room
- He is restrained by strapping him to a board
- His groin is wiped with antiseptic
- A doctor uses a probe to separate his foreskin from the glans
- He cries in pain and thrashes at the restraint
- A doctor uses scissors to cut vertically down his foreskin
- A doctor uses a clamp to hold his penis and foreskin apart
- A doctor uses scissors or a scalpel to cut around his penis and ...
- He may or may not be given a local anesthetic
- A nurse may or may not be given him a sugar pacifier
- He may pass out from the pain
- He may vomit
- He may suffer internal injuries
- I don't know what happens during a newborn circumcision

Note: All of these actions can happen during the procedure, the first 8 of which happen during every circumcision. Think of this as an exam with 13 questions (excepting "I don't know..."). For the sake of discussion, a 'passing grade' for this exam was arbitrarily set at 7 correct answers.

The average score for all participants was 2.4, woefully shy of the passing grade of 7 right answers.

27.8% of participants did not know anything that happens during a circumcision.

Only 9% of all participants got a passing grade (they knew half of what can happen).

Only 1 in 9 mothers (11.5%) who circumcised their son (and presumably gave informed consent) got a passing grade.

Parents who kept their son intact were better informed at 1 in 4 (23.4%) getting a passing grade versus 1 in 12 (8.1%) for parents who circumcised their son.

DEMOGRAPHIC SCORES

Note: None of the demographic groups obtained a passing grade.

Average score for women (2.7) was higher than for men (2.1).

Age was associated with knowledge of what happens. (Average scores of correct answers) Age 18–34 (2.9), Age 35–54 (2.3), Age 55+ (1.8).

Level of education was positively correlated with knowing what happens during a circumcision. (Average scores of correct answers) Graduated degree (2.8), Bachelor's degree (2.5), High school degree (2.3), and Less than a high school degree (1.5).

There was some variation of average scores by race. Asian (2.1), Black (2.3), Latino (2.8), White (2.4).

Men who were intact (not circumcised) scored higher on average (2.6) than men who were circumcised (2.4).

Parents who kept their son intact were better informed on average (3.2) than those that circumcised their son (2.4).

KNOWLEDGE:

Q: What is your opinion of newborn circumcision? (check all that apply)

A: It is required (15%), It is up to the parents (59%), It is safe and beneficial (31%), Not sure what circumcision is (3%).

Note: Male child genital cutting (aka circumcision) is not required nor safe. It is unnecessary and harmful.

Q: What do you believe are the current circumcision/intact rates for newborn boys?

A: Not circumcised (24.3%), Circumcised for non-religious reasons (38.2%), Circumcised for religious reasons (32.8).

Note: The answer for not circumcised is close to the truth, but the answer for religious reasons is grossly exaggerated, the correct rate is about 2%.

Only half (51%) knew that circumcision has no benefit.

Almost one-third of men (31.1%) were mistaken or unsure if they were circumcised or not. This was even higher for Blacks at 41.2%.

Note: Other studies have also found that many men do not know if their penis is whole or not.

Q: Which part of the penis do you think is the most sensitive to touch?

A: The shaft (11%), The foreskin (14%), The glans (head of the penis (57%), I don't know (18%).

Note: The correct answer is the foreskin. The glans is the least sensitive part.

42% knew that there were anti-circumcision/pro-intact organizations.

Only 2% knew that the adult foreskin laid flat would be about 12 square inches in size. Almost half (45%) thought it was only 2 square inches.

SOLICITATIONS

Q: Concerning any circumcision discussion you had with your doctor or nurse-midwife regarding your (last) son, which applies to you?

A: Our doctor/midwife recommended circumcision (54%), Our doctor/midwife did not recommend circumcision (15%), Our doctor/midwife recommended against circumcision (2%), They did not mention the topic(29%).

Q: From whom, if anyone, did you feel pressure to circumcise your son? (check all that apply)

A: OB/GYN (7%), Pediatrician (13%), Doula (3%), Nurse-midwife (3%), Our/my religious beliefs (5%), Friends, (4%), Family members (9%), Spouse (8%), Not pressured (66%).

Note: One-third of parents felt pressured to consent to having their son's genitals surgically altered.

Almost half (46%) of mothers reported that the first time any doctor or nurse-midwife solicited them for circumcision was after the boy's delivery.

RESEARCH

More than half (55%) of parents did not research the surgery before consenting to it, they already knew they wanted their son circumcised.

DECISION

Q: Why did you choose to circumcise your son? (check all that apply)

A: Recommendation by doctor (31%), Persuasion by my nurse-midwife (2%), Persuasion from other nurses or hospital staff (4%), Everyone does it (19%), My religion requires it (7%), Medical benefits (23%), Hygiene (45%), Family tradition (18%), Advice from peers (4%), Personal reasons (20%), Other (9%).

Q: If you were to have a son in the future, would you choose to circumcise him?

A: Yes (71%), No (17%), Don't know (12%).

OBSERVATION

Q: Which of these best describes you witnessing your son's circumcision surgery?

A: I was not given the opportunity to observe it (56%), I observed it (24%), I chose to not observe it (20%).

COMPLICATIONS

Almost half (46%) stated that they knew of no circumcision complications.

Note: No surgery is risk free.

Q: Did your son experience any circumcision complications? (check all that apply)

A: None that I am aware of (86%), Excessive bleeding (5%), Glans (head of penis) injury (3%), post-operative pain (6%), Infection (3%), Meatal stenosis (narrowing of the urinary opening) (1%), Required a second circumcision or corrective surgery (1%).

Note: 1 in 7 (14%) of boys experienced one of more complications from circumcision.

1 in 10 (10%) of the men in this study who are circumcised are restoring their foreskin.

1 in 5 (20%) of the men in this study who are circumcised have experienced some type of complication from circumcision, including erectile dysfunction.