

## Topic Page: [Circumcision](#)

Definition: **circumcision** from *Philip's Encyclopedia*

Operation of removing part or the whole of the foreskin of the penis or of removing the clitoris. Male circumcision is ritual in some groups, notably Jews and Muslims, and is said to have sanitary benefits. Female circumcision is intended to reduce sexual pleasure and has no medical benefit.

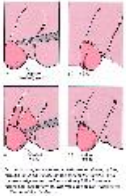


Image from:

[circumcision in The Royal Society of Medicine Health Encyclopedia](#)

Summary Article: **circumcision**

From *The Columbia Encyclopedia*

(sûr'kəmsīzh'ən), operation to remove the foreskin covering the glans of the penis. It dates back to prehistoric times and was widespread throughout the Middle East as a religious rite before it was introduced among the Hebrews. It is performed by Jews on the eighth day after the birth of the male child, unless postponed for reasons of health. It is also practiced among Muslims and by other peoples in many parts of the world.

Explanations of the origin of circumcision are entirely conjectural. It is related to rites of initiation. Among Jews it is considered to involve membership in the community and to be a sign of the covenant between God and humans. The decision that Christians need not practice circumcision is recorded in Acts 15; there was never, however, a prohibition of circumcision, and it is practiced by Coptic Christians. Despite some controversy, it also has been widely practiced in modern times, especially in the United States, as a sanitary measure believed to give some preventive advantage against penile cancer and sexually transmitted diseases (studies have shown it to be associated with a significant reduction in the risk of HIV transmission, particularly among heterosexuals).

Since 1971, when the American Academy of Pediatrics stopped recommending routine infant circumcision, the number of circumcised newborns in the United States has declined; the infant circumcision rate is now around 33%. In the early 21st cent., however, the benefits of circumcision in controlling the spread of HIV has led to a renewed interest in the practice, particularly in parts of Africa where heterosexually transmitted AIDS is common, and nonsurgical circumcision techniques have been developed for use on large numbers of adult men. These methods typically involve using elastic bands or plastic clamps to cut off the blood flow to the foreskin, which results in its dying, drying up, and being easily removed after a week.

So-called female circumcision, in the form of excision of the labia minora and clitoris (clitoridectomy) aimed at destroying sexual sensation, is known in Islam (although it is a cultural, not a religious practice) and in certain societies of Africa, South America, and elsewhere. Also called female genital mutilation, it is a controversial practice, but deeply rooted in local custom; there are movements toward prohibition in some countries. In the United States it is illegally practiced among some immigrant populations. In some instances women have sought asylum in the United States or other Western nations to prevent forced operations on themselves or their daughters. A World Health Organization study released in 2006, which involved more than 28,000 women in six African countries, found that the practice increased the risk of complications and death during and after childbirth for mothers and their newborns.

See study by D. L. Gollaher (2000).

**APA**

Chicago

Harvard

MLA

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circumcision. (2018). In P. Lagasse, & Columbia University, *The Columbia encyclopedia* (8th ed.). New York, NY: Columbia University Press. Retrieved from <https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/circumcision>

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## APA

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## Chicago

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## Harvard

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## MLA

"circumcision." *The Columbia Encyclopedia*, Paul Lagasse, and Columbia University, Columbia University Press, 8th edition, 2018. *Credo Reference*, <https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/circumcision>. Accessed 17 Sep. 2019.