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Routine Circumcision is Unnecessary

Tandavan, Doctor Circumcision is a surgical procedure that has become routine in the last 40-50 years in the United States. It is estimated that 60-80% of all boys born in this country have their foreskin removed. In the beginning this was strictly a religious rite of the Jews and Muslims. But it became a routine surgical procedure sometime in the thirties for all males regardless of their religion. It is true that for infants it is a very simple procedure; however, if not done properly there may be complications - even to the extent of having to remove the entire penis, though this is rare.

 In the early days there were many lower urinary tract infections in infant boys. Studies showed that there were fewer infections in the circumcised boys. Indeed it has been estimated that there are from 1-20 times fewer infections in the first year. It has also been shown that there may be 1.5-2 times fewer infections in the circumcised boys from one to fifteen years of age. Recent studies have shown, however, that when the hygiene was improved, there was very little difference in the reporting of lower urinary tract infections in infants or boys whether circumcised or not. So it seems that it is truly a matter of hygiene. The fear of infections, then, is no valid reason for the surgical procedure.

 It is said that the circumcised male has slightly less chance to acquire sexually transmitted diseases since the foreskin is susceptible to minor abrasions during sex. It is also said that the incidence of penile cancer is less in the circumcised male. There do appear to be very few circumcised males with venereal warts. Cervical cancer in females has some relationship to these warts. Thus, this may be one valid reason for the ritual.

 Some doctors say that it is a myth to claim that circumcision reduces penile sensation. This is no myth, as any man that was circumcised in adulthood will testify. There are those who claim that the trauma of circumcision to the new born is so slight that it can be ignored. I know of no studies that will confirm this and

only know of two cases in my own practice that seemed to have some symptoms traceable to this trauma.

 Adult circumcision is not a simple surgical procedure. It must be done under general anesthesia, and should only be done by a very experienced urological surgeon. There is a morbidity to the procedure that usually requires at least a week off from work. If it is indicated, it should be performed in spite of the cost and the time it takes to recover. Reasons for the surgical procedure in adults are fairly straightforward, with little controversy.

 The decision whether to not to have the infant male child circumcised should be an individual one for each child. If there is any degree of phimosis (tight foreskin), it is probably advisable. There are new techniques of anaesthesia for this procedure, so there is no reason for the child to suffer the trauma of the surgical procedure. The newborn usually heals rapidly after the procedure with few complications, if performed by an expert.

 The decision of the parents should take into consideration the child's anatomy, the home facilities for cleanliness, the projected lifestyle of the child and the advice of the pediatrician. If the decision is to have the surgery performed, be sure that it is done by an experienced person who will use anaesthesia. The day of blind acceptance of routine circumcision should be over.

 In addition to Dr. Tandavan's analysis, HINDUISM TODAY requested Reverend Swami Satchitananda to comment on circumcision:

 "There is no mention of circumcision in any Hindu literature, as least as far as I know. Personally, I feel circumcision is against nature. If God wanted that skin to not be there, it would have been very easy for God to not have put it there. If you believe in nature and in God, you must accept it. Otherwise God must be a fool, and we are more intelligent than God!"