

Parents' Guide to Bris Milah

Jewish Ritual Circumcision

by

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Tradition

Shalom

The *bris* (or *brit*) of a son should be a heartfelt and joyous experience; a *simchah*! As it is written: "May your mother and father rejoice; and may the one who bore you thrill with joy"(1). As Jews, we circumcise our sons because that's what we do. Circumcision is a common thread throughout the fabric of Jewish community. It may be the only *mitzvah* (commandment) purposefully observed by Jews of every affiliation; even by Jews with no other connection to the faith. As you will see, circumcision is an indelible sign of our covenant with God, of our sense of community, and of that which binds the two. Thus, with a ceremony known fondly as a *bris*, we joyfully circumcise our sons before God and in the presence of our community.

Walk Before Me and Be Perfect (2) -

An inquisitor once ask Rabbi Akiva: If God had intended man to be circumcised, would he not be born circumcised - is man's handiwork superior to God's? Rabbi Akiva answered by holding in one hand raw grain, as God had given it, and in the other hand baked goods, as man had perfected it (3). We learn that God gives us the raw gift of form and spirit, and endows us with the capacity and the responsibility to perfect it.

Sign of a Covenant

***Bris milah* literally means covenant of circumcision.** This covenant is between God and the Jewish people. The Torah tells of God saying to Abraham (4): "I will sustain My covenant between Me and you, and between your descendants after you ... this is My covenant which you must preserve between Me and you, and your descendants after you: every male among you shall be circumcised.

A Sign of a Covenant Between Me and You. -

A covenant between God and Abraham, who at the time was ninety-nine years old, is easy to understand. But how are we to understand a covenant between God and a baby who is only eight days old? It is said that they are like lovers on their wedding night. Before each has a chance to know the other, they passionately make a vow (a covenant) to be as one until the end of time (5). Of course, there will be times when he doesn't feel so connected with God, and times when God is not so enamored with him. Yet, until the end of time, they have vowed to be there for one another. We learn that, like a good marriage, the covenant is a binding partnership in this world and in the world to come.

It is important to understand that circumcision does not make a child Jewish by law; he is Jewish if his mother is Jewish (either by heritage or if she converted prior to his birth). When a male child is to undergo conversion to Judaism, he has a *bris* as the first step of conversion.

Abraham Circumcised His Son

Every Jewish father is obligated to circumcise his own son (6), just as Abraham circumcised his own son, Isaac (7). However, most fathers are not trained to circumcise. So we invite a *mohel* to serve as a stand-in for the father. A *mohel* is an observant Jew who has studied the texts and laws of *bris milah*; the anatomy, physiology, and pathology of the penis; and the techniques of circumcision.

The Eighth Day

Ideally a *bris* should take place on the eighth day. The eighth day is counted with the first day being the day of birth. Since the Jewish calendar starts at sunset, a baby born on Monday day will have his *bris* the following Monday. If the baby is born on Monday night, the *bris* is held the following Tuesday. Always consult your *mohel* before scheduling the *bris*. The *bris* may only take place during daylight; the earlier the better since we are eager to fulfill the *mitzvah*.

God said to Abraham: "...at the age of eight days every male among you shall be circumcised..."(4); and to Moses: "...on the eighth day, the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised..."(8).

From this our sages taught that *bris milah* can set aside even the prohibitions of *Shabbat*. That is, a *bris* may take place on *Shabbat* or other sacred holiday if it is on the eighth day. That said, there are situations when a *bris* may not take place on *Shabbat* or sacred holiday. Always consult your *mohel*. Likewise, we may not perform a *bris* before the eighth day and only certain circumstances justify its delay beyond the eighth day.

A common reason that may delay a *bris* is the health of the child. A child that is not well may not be circumcised - "It is possible to circumcise later, but it is not possible to restore life"(6, 9). The following are common health conditions that can delay a *bris*: low birth weight, elevated and/or rising bilirubin levels, congenital abnormalities, fever, and a variety of rashes. Always consult your *mohel* before scheduling the *bris*. If a *bris* is delayed for any reason, it may not take place on *Shabbat* or other sacred holiday (6).

All Are Welcome

For most parents, a *bris* is a great *simchah* to share with loved ones and community (and therefore, a *minyan* is preferred). All are welcome: male, female, Jew, non-Jew, young, old - everybody.

Many parents are concerned that a *bris* may be inappropriate for children. The fact of the matter is, children do just fine (usually better than their parents). Being forthright, honest, and upbeat will make the *bris* a *simchah* for our children as well.

Since attending a *bris* is, in itself, a *mitzvah*, no one should be excluded. Therefore, the *bris* should take place in a well-lit room that is large enough to accommodate all that are present. There are also good reasons for having the *bris* in a synagogue. A synagogue offers a special feeling of community and sanctity (as well as being larger than most homes). If a *bris* is on a *Shabbos* or a sacred holiday, always consult your rabbi about applicable customs and about what supplies and food must be brought to the synagogue in advance .

Announcing The Bris

It is important that you and the *mohel* establish a date and time before announcing the *bris*. Once established, it is proper to inform your friends and relatives of the time and place, rather than specifically inviting them. That is, attending a *bris* is in itself a *mitzvah*, and one should not have to refuse a *mitzvah* if unable to attend.

Ceremony

Many Beautiful Customs

***Bris milah* is possibly the oldest ritual in our nearly 4,000 year history** - it is rich with many beautiful customs. Every *mohel*, every community, and every family have their own special way of celebrating a *bris*. Here is a taste of what I do (Honors below, [labeled 1-7](#), should be given to loved ones - a space is provide to write in their names. Some honors require that the honoree be Jewish and are designated with a star. ☆ The specific requirements are discussed in the next section.):

The baby is sleeping in a back room while family, friends, and community are gathered. As guests look on, I don my *tallit* and check the instruments one last time. The ceremony begins with a friend or family member [\[1.\]](#) lighting a candle. This is followed by one or two loved ones [\[2.\]](#) bringing the baby to be circumcised. As the baby enters the room, everyone stands and joyfully greets him with the words *baruch hah-bah!* The baby is then brought to the Throne of Elijah; a chair set-aside for the prophet Elijah. While a loved one [\[3.☆\]](#) holds the baby on the Throne of Elijah, I recite a blessing that greets Elijah and requests God's assistance with the circumcision. The father then takes his son from the Throne of Elijah and places him upon the pillow for his *bris*. I tell of the custom where during a *bris* everyone closes their eyes and prays for the well-being of the child - we may also sing '*Eliyahu HaNavi*' to calm the baby and parents. While the *sandek* [\[4.☆\]](#) holds the baby, I recite the blessing of circumcision and perform the circumcision. The baby makes his blessing, in his own way, and the father recites the blessing of the covenant. The baby is diapered, then handed to his mother or a loved one [\[5.☆\]](#) to hold for his naming. The rabbi, *mohel*, or an honored guest [\[6.☆\]](#) proclaims that this child's name be called in *Israel*... We follow the naming with a blessing of speedy recovery for both mother and son. We sing, we dance, we break bread [\[7.☆\]](#), and we celebrate!

Candles

While its origin is uncertain, the sentiment of a lit candle is clear. The *Talmud* refers to the practice during a time when circumcision was prohibited; a lit candle in the window signaled the community where and when a *bris* was to take place(10). A more spiritual origin may be that a lit candle represents a spark of life, a new soul entering the Jewish community.

Honor 1: Light candle (no blessing is recited) _____

Bearers Of The Child

One or two people bring the baby to be circumcised - the *kvatter* & *kvatterin*. It is a common misconception, due to uncertain etymology, that *kvatter* (masc) and *kvatterin* (fem) are godparents - they are not. They are simply bearers of the child.

The first person carries the baby into the room, then hands him to the second person that carries the baby to the Throne of Elijah. As the baby is brought into the room everyone stands and honors him with the greeting, *baruch hah-bah* (May the one who has entered be blessed!). If more than one *bris* is to be held at the same time (e.g., in the case of twins), each must be done separately - each child is honored with the greeting of '*baruch hah-bah*' and a complete complement of blessings. Often the honor is given to the grandmothers or a set of grandparents, but it may be given to anyone.

There is a beautiful custom that couples seeking to have a baby be given this honor - for God rewards those likewise who partake in a *mitzvah* (12).

Honor 2: Brings baby to be circumcised _____

Throne of Elijah

We set aside a chair for the prophet Elijah known as the Throne of Elijah (or *Kisei Shel Eliyahu*). This tradition stems from the lore that Elijah, Angel of the Covenant, comes to every *bris* to ensure the well-being of the child and as God's witness that the Jewish people are still fulfilling the *mitzvah* of *milah* (13). To honor the Angel of the Covenant, there is a custom of decorating the Throne of Elijah. We then reserve its use for three full days as a daily reminder to pray for the speedy recovery of mother and child. A Jewish friend or family member holds the baby on the Throne of Elijah, while the *mohel* recites the words that greet Elijah and that requests God's assistance with the *milah*.

Honor 3: Holds baby on Throne of Elijah ☆ _____

Elijah, may he be remembered for good -

There is a story told about a young rabbi who arrived in a town on the day of a *bris*. The baby was there, the *mohel* was there - it seemed that all were there, but no one was in a hurry to do the *bris*. "What are we waiting for?" inquired the rabbi. Discretely, the rabbi was told that the child's father lie gravely ill in the next room. And, it was local custom to wait as long as possible so that if the father should die, the baby could be honored with his name. The young rabbi became furious. He took the baby into the father's room and demanded that the *mohel* circumcise the baby then and there! Not only was it a perfect *bris*, but to everyone's amazement the father immediately started a recovery. The news spread quickly about the new rabbi, the miracle worker. To which the rabbi admonished the community: I am no miracle worker - it was Elijah, Angel of the Covenant! He came to ensure the well being of the child and took pity on the ailing father(14).

Sandek

It is written that King David proclaimed to God; "With all parts of my physical being I serve you ... as sandek, I place children on my knees during their circumcision..."(15). The role of *sandek* (holding the child during the circumcision) is considered holy(6). And, the experience of passing the covenant from one generation to the next is for many extraordinarily spiritual. There is no greater honor at a *bris* than that of *sandek*. Usually, one of the grandfathers is chosen, but any Jewish male friend or family member may be chosen. In some communities, the rabbi or father is so honored. Like the emotional bond of a mother providing nutritional sustenance for her suckling baby, there exists an emotional bond of a *sandek* providing spiritual sustenance for the baby at his *bris milah*. Thus, the honor of passing the covenant from one generation to another is set aside for a Jewish male.

Honor 4: Holds baby for circumcision ☆ _____

Guests

One particularly heartfelt custom is that during the circumcision guests close their eyes and pray for the well being of the child(16). They may also pray for a loved one or for ones own well being. This separates us from the procedure of circumcision and spiritually connects us with the act of *bris milah*, the fulfillment of a *mitzvah*. A beautiful prayer which requests the speedy arrival of Meshiach (Messiah), and in essence well being for the entire world, may be sung:

Eli-yahoo Ha-na-vee
 Eli-yahoo Ha-tish-bee,
 Eli-yahoo , Eli-yahoo , Eli-yahoo ha-gee-la-dee.
 Bim-hay-ra ve-ya-may-nu,
 ya-vo eh-lay-nu.
 Im Mo-shee-ach ben Da-veed.(x2)

May the Prophet Elijah come soon,
 in our time,...

...with the Messiah, son of David.

Milah

Milah is the fulfillment of a *mitzvah*, a commandment of God; thus, only a Jew may perform *milah*(6). *Milah* itself has two requirements: uncovering the *atarah* (crown of the glans of the penis) and *dom bris* (drawing blood of the covenant). *Milah* (ritual circumcision) is not done for reasons of health, hygiene, or cosmetics as is a medical circumcision. It is done to fulfill a *mitzvah*.

If a circumcision is done as a medical procedure or without the proper intention to perform the *mitzvah* then a corrective procedure should be performed. That is, in these cases, *dom bris* was not fulfilled; thus, we perform *hah-tahfoss dom bris*, the drawing of blood (a drop from the site of the circumcision). This is also done for those converting to Judaism who are already circumcised.

There are four components of a 'kosher' circumcision (6):

1. *Chituch* - excision of the *orlah* (foreskin)
2. *P'riah* - uncovering the glans of its *or ha-p'riah* (outer mucous membrane layer)
3. *Metzitzah* - drawing blood from the wound
4. *Kavvenah* - the proper intention (doing the *bris* for the sake of a *mitzvah*)



Izmel -
Ritual
Knife

The father should publicly appoint the *mohel* to serve in his place(6). The father may also take his son from the Throne of Elijah and hand him to the *mohel*. And in some communities, the father hands the *izmel* (ritual knife) to the *mohel* as well. The *izmel* is the only instrument needed to perform a *bris milah*. The first reference to such an instrument was when Ziporah (Moses's wife) circumcised her son.

As a sign of reverence for the impending covenant, it is appropriate for the *sandek*, father, and *mohel* to each don a *tallis*(17).

Immediately before the *milah*, on behalf of the child, the *mohel* recites (in Hebrew) - "Blessed are You, Lord our God, Ruler of the universe, who sanctified us by Your commandments and commanded us regarding circumcision." Once the *mohel* completes the first step, *chituch*, the father recites his blessing "... to bring the child into the covenant of Abraham our forefather" (see below).

Those present then remind the parents of their responsibility to assist their child in the performance of mitzvot - we say: "Just as he has entered into the covenant, so may he enter into the study of Torah, the marriage canopy, and the performance of good deeds" (6).

Father's Blessing

<i>baruch ah-tah Ah-doe-noy</i>	בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ
<i>Eh-lo-hay-nu melech ha-o-lom,</i>	אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם
<i>asher kid-sha-nu</i>	אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ
<i>b'mits-vo-tov vit-see-va-nu</i>	בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצָנָנוּ
<i>l'hach-nee-so biv-ree-toe</i>	לְהַכְנִיסוֹ בְּבְרִיתוֹ
<i>shel ahv-rah-hom ah-vee-nu.</i>	שֶׁל אַבְרָהָם אֲבִינוּ

Naming

Immediately following *milah* (circumcision), a child is given his Jewish name - we proclaim: "Our God and God of our forefathers, preserve this child to his father and to his mother, and let his name be called in *Israel* ..."

Up to this point, the child has no Jewish name; only his parents need be privy to what it may be. There are many customs concerning the choosing of a name; consult a rabbi if you are in doubt. It is proper to wait until after the naming before one explains the origin of a child's name or offers words on the child's behalf. In most cases the *mohel* or your rabbi will name the baby, but this honor may be given to any Jewish loved one (who is familiar with the Hebrew). To symbolize the mother's integral role in the Covenant of Abraham, it is a custom of mine that she hold her son for his naming; but, this honor may be given to any Jewish friend or family member.

Honor 5: Holds baby for naming ☆ _____

Honor 6: Names baby (Hebrew blessing) ☆ _____

Blessing for a Speedy Recovery

It is written that God visited Abraham on the third day of his *bris*(18). We learn from this the *mitzvah* of *bikur cholim*, visiting the sick. We also learn that the discomfort of circumcision is akin to illness. Thus, the *mohel* or rabbi recites a blessing for a speedy recovery of the child as well as a continued recovery (from the delivery) for the mother: "He who blessed our forefathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, may He bless the tender infant who has been circumcised and send him and his mother a complete recovery..."

Celebrated with Joy

The Talmud states that because *bris milah* is a precept that Jews accepted with joy, it is celebrated with joy(19). We sing, we dance, but most importantly, we partake of a *seudos mitzvos*, a festive meal in honor of the *mitzvah*(6). This meal can range from the minimal *challah* and kosher wine to an elaborate feast. It is traditional to have sweets and other foods that are associated with a *simchah*. Of course, on fast days (e.g., *Yom Kipur*), we delay the *seudos mitzvos* until after nightfall.

Honor 7: Recites *Hamotzi* (Hebrew blessing) ☆ _____

Orlah (foreskin)

Before entering Canaan, Joshua circumcised the Israelites according to God's command. The Israelites buried their foreskins and blood of the circumcision in earth. Thus, once excised, the *orlah* is placed in a vessel containing soil(6,13). I personally use soil from Jerusalem so that our blood commingles with that of our ancestors. Following the *bris*, the *orlah* and blood of the covenant are packed for burial. The *orlah* may be buried anywhere. A beautiful custom is to bury the *orlah* under the roots of a young tree, then harvest branches from the tree for the child's *chupah* (marriage canopy). Though no blessing is recited, it is a good time for mother and father to reflect on the significance of their son's *bris* and his future place in the Jewish community.

Customs & Laws

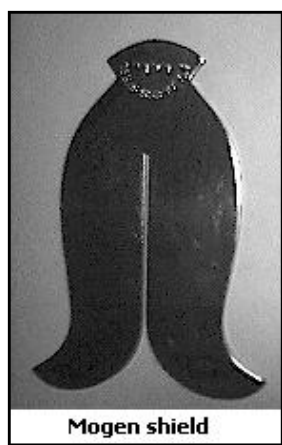
***Bris milah* is rich with many customs and laws** of which I have only scratched the surface. I encourage you to talk to your rabbi about specific customs followed in your community.

Circumcision ❧

Removal Of The Foreskin

Circumcision is a simple operation that involves the removal of the foreskin - the skin that sheaths the head of the penis. The entire circumcision (including bandaging and diapering) takes less than 2 minutes. The techniques used for ritual circumcision differ from those most often used in the medical profession. Most ritual circumcisions are either performed with a *mogen* (a simple shield) or a *mogen*-like clamp called the Mogen Clamp. The *mogen* techniques are most notably known for their quickness and safety. A few *mohelim* use only an *izmel* (ritual circumcision knife). Most rabbis find all three techniques (*izmel* only, *mogen*, and Mogen Clamp) acceptable. The Mogen clamp must be employed so that there is at least a small amount of blood flow. You should consult your rabbi as to acceptable techniques in your community.

Every mohel has his own style - this is what I do: Before the *bris*, in a private room, I will examine the child to determine that he is in good health and that he has no condition for which we would postpone the circumcision. I will also cleanse his genital area with an antiseptic solution and prepare the penis for circumcision. At this time I will administer the anesthetic injection. During the *bris*, as part of the ceremony, the foreskin is safely excised. The circumcised penis is then bandaged and the baby is diapered and swaddled. At this point, most babies have stopped their crying.



Pain Control ❧

Pain Control for Bris Milah

For most newborn babies, the 30 seconds it takes to perform ritual circumcision and bandaging is very well tolerated. Babies cry according to their personality at the appropriate time and most are easily and quickly consoled thereafter. Recent medical studies, however, have shown that babies do respond to the pain of circumcision in physiological ways associated with stress in addition to crying. It has been shown that common techniques of pain control can reduce these physiological changes. Thus, in 1999 the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) issued the following policy statement:

Considerable new evidence shows that newborns circumcised without analgesia experience pain and stress measured by changes in heart rate, blood pressure, oxygen saturation and cortisol levels. Other studies suggest that the circumcision experience may cause infants to respond more strongly to pain of future immunization than those who are uncircumcised.

In response to this data, the AAP policy states that analgesia has been found to be safe and effective in reducing the pain associated with circumcision, and should be provided if the procedure is performed.

Most rabbis support pain control for milah (including Orthodox rabbis; e.g., Rabbi Moshe D. Tendler; Professor of Jewish Medical Ethics, Yeshiva University) but you should always consult your own rabbi. Both parents should agree on the method, if any, used during the circumcision. I will outline the modalities that I routinely use:

- ~ **Sucking Response & Sugar Analgesia:** It has been found that a strong sucking response can produce some pain control. In addition, more recent studies have shown that this pain control is enhanced if the baby is sucking on sugar water (20). The trick then is to get the baby to latch on to a gauze soaked with sweetened wine (the traditional approach) or sugar water or nurse from a bottle of sugar water; whichever works best is the right approach for the baby. This technique works pretty good for most babies and can also be used in conjunction with the other techniques below.
- ~ **Systemic Analgesic:** It has been shown that systemic analgesics, for example *Infants' Tylenol* (Acetaminophen), while not helpful for relieving the pain of circumcision, is of moderate benefit for any post-circumcision discomfort. Many practitioners are recommending a single dose 1 hour before the circumcision and a single dose 4 hours after. If you decide to use a systemic analgesic then carefully follow the recommended dose (usually 40mg) provided by your child's physician. *Tylenol* should not be administered on the day following the circumcision as it may mask fever and infection.
- ~ **Topical Anesthesia:** It has been shown that topical anesthetics like EMLA Cream or liposomal Lidocaine (LMX-4) cream can provide some pain control if applied 30 to 60 minutes before the circumcision. These topicals are a good adjunct to the other methods mentioned here.
- ~ **Nerve Block Anesthesia:** It has been shown that significant pain control can be accomplished with a Dorsal Penile Nerve Block (DPNB). This technique involves an injection of a small amount of Lidocaine at the base of the penis. The DPNB is the method most often employed in the medical community and can be accomplished with little discomfort if administered by a skilled practitioner. The degree of anesthesia with a DPNB varies from very little in some cases to substantial in most cases.

Most newborn babies tolerate the pain associated with ritual circumcision using just the traditional "wine soaked gauze" method. That said, most physicians now recommend the use of a nerve block in conjunction with the other methods described above. Parents should discuss with each other, the *mohel*, their rabbi, their doctor, etc. and make an informed decision as to what is best for their child.

In Addition

Pidyon Haben

If both father and mother are Israelites (i.e., neither are *Kohen* or *Levi*) and this is the first ever opening of the mother's womb, you will want to have a *pidyon haben* (redemption of the first-born son) when your son is 31 days old. Please consult your rabbi for further information.

The Mohel's Fee

Performing a Bris is a mitzvah so the Mohel may not demand a fee. That said, it is a long held tradition to give the Mohel an honorarium to cover expenses and in recognition of his or her role in the Jewish community and at your son's bris. A Mohel's fee varies from region to region and can depend on the size of the event, travel time, preparation, equipment and supplies, and time spent. The fee can range from \$400 to \$800. Many families cannot afford the fee being young married couples or without a steady income. A Mohel should be able to accommodate any family's situation. Often, the grandparents will want to pay the honorarium. When this is offered, it should not be turned down, since it connects them to the mitzvah of the Bris Milah.

References

1. Proverbs 23:25; 2. Genesis XVII,1; 3. *Tanchuma, Tazria* 5; 4. Genesis XVII,7-12; 5. *Chasidos*; 6. *Yoreh Deah* 260-266; 7. Genesis XXI, 4; 8. Leviticus XII, 3; 9. *Yad, Milah* 1:18; 10. *Ketubot Yerushalmi* 1:5; 11. Proverbs 20:27; 12. *Bamidbar Rabbah* 14:2; 13. *Pirkei de Rabbi Eliezer* 29; 14. Story about Rabbi Shlomo Kluger; 15. *Tehillim* 35; 16. Bobover Chasidic custom; 17. *Minhag*; 18. Genesis XVIII, 1; 19. *Shabbos* 130a; 20. *Ann Pharmacotherapy* 2001;35:947-52.

Jewish Terms

Halachah - pl. *halachot*. Jewish laws that govern the proper way of observance.

Israelite, Levi, Kohen - The 3 patriarchal divisions of Judaism. Most Jews including all converts are Israelite's. *Levi's* are descendants of the tribe of Levi. *Kohen's* are descendants of Aaron, the older brother of Moses.

Laws of Shabbat - The Jewish codes that deal with what is and is not allowed on Shabbat (e.g., see *Mishnah Berurah*) and on the following sacred holidays: first two and last two days of *Pesach*; *Shavuot*; *Rosh Hashanah*; *Yom Kippur*; first two days of *Succot*; *Shemini Atzeret*; and *Simchat Torah*.

Minyan - A quorum of 10 adult Jews. Reform communities include women. Orthodox and many Conservative communities only count men.

Simchah - Hebrew term for a joyful occasion.

Medical Terms

Fever - Newborn: Any sustained elevation in axillary (underarm) temperature above 99.4°F (37.4°C) or rectal temperature above 100.4°F (38.0°C).

Hydrocele - A congenital condition characterized by a fluid filled membrane protruding into the scrotum that expands with activity and crying, and recedes during periods of rest. The waxing and waning of the scrotal size indirectly tugs on the circumcision and may perturb healing.

Hypospadias - A congenital condition where the urethral opening occurs along the underside of the penis (present in 1 out of 300 male births). Epispadias is where the urethral opening occurs along the topside of the penis (very rare).

Jaundice - A condition characterized by a yellowish appearance of the skin. It is a common, if not normal, condition in newborn babies between day 2 and day 11. Elevated bilirubin (a byproduct of red blood cells) produces jaundice. Severe jaundice or extreme bilirubin levels may indicate an abnormal condition which would justify the delay of a bris. Always consult your child's physician and *mohel* should signs of jaundice appear.

Low Birth Weight - Any full term birth weight less than 5½ pounds (2500 grams). In cases of low birth weight, the *bris* is delayed until we are convinced the baby is healthy and strong. Under no circumstance should a baby weighing less than 4 pounds (1800 grams) be circumcised.

Names to know

You should know the Hebrew and English names for each of the following relatives (Non-Jewish relatives will not have Hebrew names):

Your son _____
his father _____
his father's father _____
his father's mother _____
his mother _____
his mother's father _____
his mother's mother _____
his siblings _____

Be sure to inform the *mohel* if the father is a *Kohen* or *Levi*.

In Preparation

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NOTE: These instructions only apply to those using my services; each mohel will have his own set of instructions.

Preparing for the *bris milah* is easy despite the natural anxiety you might be experiencing. The more people you invite the better (Jews, non-Jews, young, and old); parents do better when they must worry more about their guests and whether the coffee is made. Don't bother rehearsing the *bris* - they always work first time, every time. Try to relax and enjoy this special day - this *simchah*.

Here's your to-do **checklist**:

- _____ Schedule day/time of bris with *mohel*, soon after your baby is born)
- _____ Contact your rabbi and discuss local *bris milah* customs. If you do not have a rabbi, your *mohel* can assist you; of course, now might be a good time to find a rabbi.
- _____ Decide what you will be feeding your guests
- _____ Have on hand a bottle of sweet *kosher* wine, a roll of Hallah bread, and a candle
- _____ If you are not using disposable diapers, obtain one week's supply (see Care page)
- _____ Let friends and relatives know about the *bris* - day, time (15 minutes early), and place
- _____ Choose a Jewish name for your son
- _____ Relax as best you can and eat normally before the bris
- _____ Finish feeding the baby one full hour before the circumcision if formula fed
- _____ _____
- _____ _____

Care Following Ritual Circumcision

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Name: _____

Date/Time: _____

NOTE: If you have any questions about your son's circumcision, call any time night or day. These care instructions apply only to those using my services. Please read this entire care sheet.

Following the circumcision:

Feed and burp your son as usual. Avoid burping your baby in sitting position.

Expect your son to be a little irritable the first day.

Disposable diapers better help promote healing by keeping the area clean and dry. It is strongly recommended that you use newborn size disposable diapers for the first week.

Avoid using pre-moistened baby wipes around the penis area for a few days as they can irritate the wound. A towel and warm water is preferred.

You may bathe your child after 48 hours.

Have your son examined by his physician in 7 to 14 days.

The first 24 hours after the circumcision:

Comfort Control – you may administer 40mg of infant strength *Acetaminophen* drops (e.g., *Infants' Tylenol*) immediately before and about 4 hours after the circumcision. A higher dose or additional doses may only be given with physician approval.

Keep your son snugly swaddled (especially his legs) – this is a more comfortable position.

Change your baby's diaper with each bowel movement or if it has been about 4 hours since the last change.

1. Wash your hands thoroughly.
2. Squeeze a mound of A&D ointment (the size of a quarter) onto the center of a sterile 3x3 inch cotton gauze square (only use the ointment and gauze that I supply).
3. Remove old diaper, clean any mess (except around penis), and place new diaper.
4. Remove old 3x3 gauze square by gently pulling up and out on each of its four corners.
5. Apply the new 3x3 gauze with the mound of A&D ointment placed directly over the head of the penis. Gently squeeze to spread out the ointment.
6. Close diaper (and relax).

Note: Expect the first couple of 3x3 gauze squares to be stained red. This is normal and represents only a drop or two of dried blood mixed with urine. If in fact there was bleeding, the penis would be covered with small globs of blood (but this is very rare).

Other bandaging:

There will be a ½ x 8 inch petroleum gauze wrapped around your son's penis. This bandage should fall off, on its own, during the first 24 hours. If it is still in place after 48 hours it will have to be removed. Bathe your son in a lukewarm bath for about 10 minutes. This should be sufficient to loosen the gauze so it can be un-wrapped.

Days 2 - 7 following the circumcision:

With each diaper change:

1. Wash your hands thoroughly.
2. Remove old diaper, clean any mess, and place new diaper.
3. Apply a very thin layer of A&D ointment over the entire penis (it should no longer be sensitive the day following the circumcision).
4. Close diaper.

Infection:

Infection is very rare. Common signs of an infected circumcision include: a pus-like discharge from the wound, a foul smell from the groin area, excessive swelling or redness in the groin area, or a fever. With any of these signs, call the mohel or child's physician without delay.

Bleeding:

Bleeding is rare but is the most frequent complication of circumcision. In all cases of fresh bleeding, call the mohel or child's physician at once for further instructions. If you see blood flowing from the wound area do the following:

1. Apply steady pressure for 2 minutes by grabbing the penis between your thumb, index finger, and middle finger (you can do this directly over the gauze). If you let up before 2 minutes, reapply pressure and start the 2 minute count over.
2. Inspect the area for 2 minutes. If bleeding persist, repeat step 1.

Healing is Rapid:

A circumcision is like any other cut and every child heals differently. For most babies, the penis should no longer be tender in a day, be essentially healed in a week, and look 'normal' in about a month.

Image 1 shows an uncircumcised penis. **Image 2** shows the same penis immediately following circumcision. You will also notice that the glans is red and glossy. This is because the skin covering the glans of an uncircumcised penis is mucous membrane – like the skin on the inside of your cheek. Once exposed, the mucous membrane will transform and in time take on a normal appearance – like the skin on the outside of your cheek. Within hours, maybe a day, the area just behind the glans, especially the underside, will become swollen and the glans will be covered in a yellowish coating (**Image 3**). In a day or two there are usually off-white or yellowish patches on the glans (**Image 4**). These patches are a type of scab and are associated with normal healing. The penis starts to take on a normal appearance within two weeks (**Image 5**).

Complications Are Rare:

Circumcision is associated with few and infrequent complications. The complication of bleeding and infection are discussed above. The most common concern of parents is related to how the penis looks after circumcision. It should be remembered that penises come in all shapes & sizes. While most penises 'look normal' within days of the circumcision, some do not take on a completely normal appearance until after the penis starts to grow (age 3 to 5 years). On occasion, a poor looking result occurs when too little or too much skin is removed, or when the cut edge of the skin attaches too high or too low along the length of the penis. In nearly all cases the penis will heal properly and in time take on a normal appearance. *Even though complications are rare, do not hesitate to consult the child's physician if you have any questions about the appearance of the penis or surrounding area.*

Circumcision Healing

1.



2.



3.



4.



5.



For New Parents

I am often asked what we as new parents can do to ensure our child's love of Judaism. The answer is easy; and some of these you may already do:

1. Place a mezuzah on your door so that your child will be reminded daily that this family is proud of their Jewishness.
2. Kindle the Shabbat lights to remind your child that each week we set aside a little time to remember who we are and how wondrous is our existence (see page 16).
3. Bless your child once a week so that they witness your inner love for them and your commitment to their Jewishness (see page 17).
4. Teach your child by example Hillel's wisdom of loving-kindness: What you wouldn't want someone doing to you, don't do to them.

Kindling the Sabbath Lights

Each Friday, just before sundown, a Jewish mother or father lights the Sabbath candles. Prepare your Sabbath candle set and light the candles (2 or more candles are customary). While not looking at the candle light, read the following blessing in English or in Hebrew. After you have read the blessing stare at the candle lights for about 30 seconds; think about how wondrous is the existence of you and your family. Those who hear the blessing say אָמֵן (*amen* - to affirm). This may be followed by saying *Shabbat Shalom* to family and friends.

Blessed are You Lord

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי

baruch atah Ah-doe-noy

our God, King of the universe

אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם

Elo-haynu melech ha-olom

Who has sanctified us with His commandments

אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו

ah-shair kid-shannu b'mits-vo-tov

and has commanded us to kindle the

וְצִנּוּנוּ לְהַדְלִיק

vit-see-vannu l'hod-leak

light of *Shabbat*

נֵר שֶׁל שַׁבָּת

nair shel shabbat

Blessing Your Children

Each Friday after the Sabbath lights are kindled, a Jewish father (or mother) blesses their children - from oldest to youngest. Place both hands on the child's head. Think about how amazing is this creation as you recite the following blessing in English or Hebrew.

START

HERE

FOR

BOYS

May God make you

יְשִׁמְךָ אֱלֹהִים

ye-seem-chah Elo-heem

like Ephraim and Menashe

כְּאַפְרַיִם וְכְמִנְשֵׁה

(Joseph's Sons)

ke-efry-yim v'chim-men-nosha

START

HERE

FOR

GIRLS

May God make you

יְשִׁמְךָ אֱלֹהִים

ye-seem-mech Elo-heem

like Sarah, Rivkah, Rachael, and Leah

כְּשָׂרָה רִבְקָה רָחֵל וְלֵאָה

(The four matriarchs)

ke-sar-ah riv-kah reh-chel ve-lay-a

CONTINUE

HERE

FOR

BOTH

GIRLS

&

BOYS

May the Lord bless you and protect you

יְבָרְכֶךָ יְיָ וְיִשְׁמְרֶךָ

yeh-var-rechah Ah-doe-noy
v'yish-me-rechah

May the Lord 's presence shine

יָאֵר יְיָ פָּנָיו

ya-air Ah-doe-noy pa-nov

on you, and be kind to you

אֱלֹהֶיךָ וְיִחַנְךָ

eh-lechah vee-hoo-nechah

May the Lord turn His presence to you

יֵשָׂא יְיָ פָּנָיו אֵלֶיךָ

yeh-saw Ah-doe-noy pa-nov eh-lechah

and establish peace for you.

וְיָשֵׁם לְךָ שְׁלוֹם

veh-ya-sem le-chah sha-lome