



INFORMATION
FOR WOMEN
WHO HAVE HAD

FEMALE
CIRCUMCISION



**WOMEN'S HEALTH
IN THE NORTH**

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“There are many cultural values and beliefs that lead to female circumcision, however there are **no medical reasons** for it and it may be **harmful** to the girl or woman.”



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REGULAR PREVENTATIVE HEALTH CHECK UPS

It is important to enjoy a healthy lifestyle by eating a nutritious diet and being physically active. Regular health examinations and tests can help find problems before they start. Talk to your doctor about having regular blood tests to check your iron level, vitamin D, blood sugar and cholesterol.

Cervical screening test

Most women who develop cervical cancer have not had regular cervical screening tests.

The cervical screening test should begin at 25 years of age and is recommended every five years. The test will find the HPV virus that causes cervical cancer. The test is a simple test performed by a doctor or a nurse. All women over 25 need to have a cervical screening test even if they have had the HPV vaccination.

If you are circumcised, it's very important to tell your doctor before you make a time for your cervical screening test because you might need to be referred to the African Women's Clinic at the Royal Women's Hospital.

To find a Cervical Screening Service near you, go to the PapScreen Victoria website (www.papscreen.org.au) and enter your postcode. You can find a service with a female doctor or nurse.

It is important to have your children immunised with the HPV vaccine when they are in year seven. This vaccine assists in the prevention of cervical cancer and many other cancers.

Breast checks

Breast cancer is the most common cancer diagnosed in women in Australia. Finding breast cancer early can greatly improve survival.

Be aware of the normal look and feel of your breasts. See your doctor if you notice any unusual changes. For women over 50 years old, a breast x-ray (mammogram) is the best way to find out if you have breast cancer.

If you are aged 50-74, it is important to have a free mammogram at BreastScreen Victoria every two years.

Women aged 40-49 and those aged over 74 can also be screened free of charge.

A doctor's referral isn't needed and your results will be mailed to you within two weeks. For more information or to make a booking call 13 20 50 or visit the website www.breastscreen.org.au

Breast Screen Services in the North are in Greensborough, Heidelberg, Epping and Broadmeadows.

FEMALE CIRCUMCISION

Traditional cutting, also known as female circumcision, is the removal of some or all of the external female genitalia. It is also called female genital cutting (FGC). There are many cultural values and beliefs that lead to female circumcision, however there are no medical reasons for it and it may be harmful to the girl or woman.

All types of circumcision are illegal in many countries including Australia. Anyone who performs the practice can go to jail for up to 20 years. It is also illegal to take someone out of Australia to circumcise them.

Short term problems

During circumcision, a girl can go into shock, have serious bleeding, damage to the area around the genitals and infection. Urine can also get trapped in the body.

Long term problems

Depending on the severity of the circumcision, ongoing complications can include scarring, vaginal abscesses and cysts, menstrual complications, urinary and kidney infections, chronic pelvic infection, chronic pain, infertility and difficulty during gynaecological examinations or surgery. Girls can also be psychologically affected by the trauma of having FGC performed on them. Women who have undergone circumcision can find sexual intercourse painful and traumatic, and experience difficulty with penetration as well as having decreased sexual enjoyment.

Pregnancy and childbirth problems

Circumcision may cause childbirth problems. If you are pregnant and circumcised, please inform the hospital on your first visit so they can give you the best information about options for birth choices.

PREGNANCY AND CHILDBIRTH CARE

Before pregnancy

Visit your doctor to get expert advice on planning your pregnancy. Your doctor will talk to you about folic acid, a type of vitamin that is important for the health of you and your baby. Your doctor will also test you for diseases like hepatitis B. If you are circumcised, ask your doctor to refer you to culturally appropriate services to make sure that you have the best care plan throughout your pregnancy.

Care whilst pregnant (antenatal care)

All pregnant women are encouraged to take part in an antenatal care program to get support, care and advice for herself, her family and her unborn baby during pregnancy and childbirth. If you are circumcised please tell your doctor and midwife on your first visit to the hospital, so that you get the best care plan during pregnancy. This might involve de-infibulation, a surgical procedure to reverse type 3 circumcision, which may be performed before or during pregnancy or childbirth.

Care after the baby is born (postnatal care)

The hospital will arrange a home visit from a maternal and child health nurse when you get home. The nurse will contact you and arrange a time to visit you and your baby. After that visit to your home, you will visit them at their clinic and they will provide a great support to you and information about your health and your baby's health, such as feeding, sleeping and immunisations. Talk to them if you have any concerns about your de-infibulation wound or any other concerns you have about your body due to the birth of your baby.

WHERE TO GET HELP AND INFORMATION

The Royal Women's Hospital's African Women's Clinic provides a free, confidential service for women who are circumcised. They offer de-infibulation services. The service is available to pregnant and non-pregnant women. Women using this service will be treated by experienced women's health nurses.

The African Women's Clinic and De-infibulation Clinic Bookings:
(03) 8345 3037

The Royal Women's Hospital also has circumcision support workers who can provide cultural support and advocacy to women affected by circumcision and their families: **(03) 8345 3058**

WOMEN'S HEALTH IN THE NORTH (WHIN)

WHIN provides education for women who originate from countries where circumcision is traditionally practised and health professionals who can work with these women. If you are circumcised and need any help, advice or referral, call or email WHIN on **9484 1666**, info@whin.org.au

Information can also be found at:
<http://www.whin.org.au/what-we-do/sexual-and-reproductive-health.html>





*The illustration used in this book
is of the Protea flower which
represents change and hope.*



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