The Cutting Edge

To halt HIV, off with their heads?

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Uncut males are more likely to get HIV due to the tissue-paper-like thinness of the foreskin, said Dr. Edgar Schoen, a pediatric consultant at California's Kaiser Permanente Medical Center. "The foreskin is delicate and the lining tears. HIV can enter [the macrophages] through that," he said, referring to roughly 30 reports, including a Seattle study of 300 gay men revealing that those with foreskins were one-and-a-half times more likely to contract the virus. Other studies show that circumcision can reduce the risk of penis cancer, and kidney and urinary tract infection. That extra little hood, Schoen said, is a magnet for bacteria. Anticircumcision groups and "natural man" fanatics slam the slicing process as barbaric and question the "half-cocked" medical evidence. And Schoen's has put out a heads-up for universal newborn circumcision. In Europe, only about 22 percent of men go under the knife; in the United States, about 70 percent get snipped.

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