



Have you been cut ?

All the health regions in Norway offer 'opening' operations

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This brochure has been prepared by the Norwegian Centre for Violence and Traumatic Stress Studies (NKVTS), working together with NAKMI. The online version is available from our website, www.nkvts.no

You can order printed copies from postmottak@nkvts.unirand.no,
Or by telephone: 22 59 55 00.

In connection with the Norwegian government's Action Plan against Genital Mutilation 2008–2011, the NKVTS has been requested to establish a national expert-level service against genital mutilation. NKVTS is to do research and spread information to professionals working in this field.

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Opening operation

If you have been cut or circumcised, you have the right to get help, no matter what kind of procedure has been performed on you, or when

All the health regions in Norway offer the 'opening operation' described in this leaflet.

If you are suffering from problems that you think come from your being cut/circumcised, you should get help as soon as possible.

An opening operation means just that – re-opening the labia, that is, the parts of your genitals that were stitched together when you were cut.

Advantages

Re-opening the labia has many important advantages:

- it does away with the pain and discomfort caused because you were cut
- it makes it easier for you to urinate (pass water)
- you won't be so vulnerable to infections 'down there'
- it helps to prevent cysts from forming
- it helps to prevent problems when you want to get pregnant
- when you have your periods the blood can pass freely, without blockage
- many women also say they find greater enjoyment in sexual relations.

Virginity

The operation does not affect your virginity at all. The hymen membrane is not involved in any way. You remain a virgin even if your labia are no longer sewn together

Your body belongs to you



What happens at the health clinic?

After her 16th birthday, any girl living in Norway can decide whether she wants to be re-opened. You can begin by contacting the women's clinic in your area (see list below), where they are sworn to confidentiality (taushetsplikt). Or if you prefer, you can ask your regular doctor (fastlege) to get you referred to a women's clinic. And if you want to bring someone along with you – that's entirely up to you.

Counselling

After you have got in touch with the women's clinic or your doctor has referred you, you can go there to find out more. Staff at the clinic will be happy to talk to you about why you want to be re-opened, what kinds of problems you've been having, and anything else you're wondering about.

You might be able to have the operation on the same day. But if you do have to wait, it usually won't be for more than two months after your first appointment.

The operation

This is where the doctors try to return your anatomy to the way it was before you were cut, and reduce your pain and discomfort.

They will try to re-open the area around the clitoris, if this is possible and that is what you want. In the more extreme types of circumcision it might be harder to re-constitute the body's normal anatomy. The doctors will discuss this and plan the operation with you.

A re-opening operation is done 'policlinically' – you are a day patient, and you won't have to spend the night at the hospital. You will be given a local anaesthetic (so you won't feel anything while they are operating), and the operation usually takes about 30 minutes.

Very young girls can receive a full anaesthetic.

If you have cysts or complications arise, the whole operation may take longer, maybe up till one hour.

After the operation, you can go home and rest. You will be given instructions about taking care of the operated area. You can also get a prescription for painkilling medicines, to use if you wish.



*An opening operation has many advantages
It makes it easier to pass water
Problems and discomfort 'down there' disappear
Your menstrual periods are less painful
There is less risk of infections*

After the operation

Painkillers

If you're in pain or feeling discomfort, the doctor can give you a prescription for painkilling medicines that you can use for the first few days.

Sick leave from work

You probably won't need sick leave from your job, but if the operation has been complicated, the doctor can give you a sick leave note for a few days. Ask your doctor about this.

If you wish, you can talk to a psychologist after your operation.

You can also get confirmation in writing about the operation carried out by the clinic or hospital.

The stitches

You won't need to have the stitches removed, they fall out by themselves, after two or three weeks. It is usually not necessary to go to any kind of post-operation check-up at the clinic.

Sexual relations

After the operation, there is a danger of infection in the genital area. That's why women should not have intercourse before about four to six weeks after the operation.

If you are pregnant

If your labia have been sewn together and remain that way during pregnancy, it can be difficult for health personnel to check on your baby's development. When the time comes, childbirth itself can also become more complicated. And if your waters go early you and are not 'open', it could cause problems.

Women who are pregnant should be re-opened well before they are due to give birth. The opening operation is recommended after the 16th week of pregnancy. The treatment involves only the outer parts of your genitals, and represents absolutely no danger for you or the baby.



*It is not dangerous
You remain a virgin
You get anaesthetics during the operation
and painkillers afterwards
You only need to take it easy for a few days
We have re-opened hundreds of girls
We have long experience
You only need to cover part of the costs,
about NOK 300.*

Sara Kahsay is a midwife at Oslo University Hospital, Ullevål.



Contact information

Every health region in Norway has a women's clinic (kvinneklinnikk). They have a special responsibility for helping girls and women who have been cut.

Clinic staff can arrange counselling, treatment and re-constructive opening surgery if that's what you want. You can contact the clinic yourself, or get a referral from your doctor, school nurse or a midwife. Staff are sworn to secrecy and can help you find answers to your questions. If you are at a school, just talk to your school's health services.

University Hospital in North Norway (UNN), Tromsø. Call 77 62 60 00 for the gynaecological outpatient department (kvinneklinnikk), antenatal outpatient department or maternity ward

Haukeland University Hospital, Bergen. Call the switchboard, 05300, and ask for the women's clinic (kvinneklinnikken).

St Olav's Hospital, Trondheim. Call 72 57 12 12 for the women's clinic

Stavanger University Hospital (SUS). Call 05151 for the women's clinic

Oslo University Hospital, Ullevål, has an open women's clinic every Friday. Direct telephone line is 22 11 98 44; contact person is Sara Kahsay, 93 89 89 03

Oslo University Hospital (Rikshospitalet). Call the switchboard, 23 07 00 00, and ask for the women's clinic

Drammen Hospital. Call the switchboard, 32 80 32 56, and ask for the maternity and antenatal outpatient clinic