

## Go Green With Feminine Hygiene

Why women should consider safer feminine hygiene alternatives.

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**W**omen have plenty of choices when it comes to feminine hygiene, but do they understand how much this decision can affect their health and the environment?

The feminine hygiene products on drug store shelves contain harmful chemicals and synthetic materials, which can become a main source of vaginal discomfort during a woman's cycle. There's also the environmental impact to consider, especially as consumers make a more concerted effort to restrict their contact with synthetic chemicals (1). And for some women, the idea of filling landfills with disposable products could use some revision.

Therefore, it is important to promote safer alternatives to products that could harm women's bodies and the planet.

### Avoid Health and Environmental Risks

Those pure-white bleached tampons and pads may look clean and sanitary, but there's a darker side to the story. Chlorine bleach, commonly used in drug store feminine hygiene products, creates dioxin. This carcinogen is linked to health problems such as cancer and endometriosis. At Tokyo University Hospital in Japan, Osamu Tsutsumi (a professor of gynecology) conducted a test in 1999 that found high levels of dioxin in women with endometriosis (2).

Several eco-friendly feminine hygiene products were developed as a direct response to health concerns involving chlorine bleaching and synthetic materials. To protect women's health, some eco-friendly manufacturers use an alternative method called totally chlorine free (TCF) bleach (3). The process uses hydrogen peroxide and destroys any bacteria in cotton or pulp that ends up in tampons and pads. From here, the material is safely "rinsed thoroughly and monitored until the correct pH is achieved" (3).

Another problem are synthetic materials used in mainstream feminine hygiene products to absorb fluid during a woman's menstrual cycle. Synthetic material was once allowed to be so absorbent that it caused severe health risks such as toxic shock syndrome (TSS) (4). Other infections are still a concern today. Harsh synthetic materials cause micro-tears in the vaginal wall, leaving a woman susceptible to bacteria entering, accumulating and causing infection.

Also of concern is tampon shedding. Some absorbent synthetic materials such as rayon fibers leave remnants on the vaginal wall, and can lead to infections and overall discomfort (5). To avoid fiber loss, eco-friendly tampon makers use organic cotton that has an interlocking pattern, making it difficult for fibers to shed (4).

Some mainstream companies also use synthetic fragrances and dyes in their feminine hygiene products. These chemicals are

known to cause irritation, discomfort and even infection. In addition, most mainstream sanitary pads and liners contain a polyethylene plastic, which produces a pollutant that harms the environment (5). In landfills, substances found in synthetic disposables can seep into groundwater, streams and lakes, causing environmental and personal health concerns (5).

Natural products avoid these synthetic add-ins, which is important since vaginal tissue is especially absorbent. Organic cotton used in pads and liners also wicks away moisture from the skin, keeping it dry and comfortable. Last, tell women there are safer options to synthetic lubricants. Natural, water-based options are available that are comfortable, non-irritating and long lasting.

### Don't Refuse to Reuse

Some women may be hesitant to try reusable products that are available for menstrual care. However, reusable products provide benefits in regards to health, cost and efficiency.

An alternative to purchasing tampons or pads every month is a reusable menstrual cup that must be replaced once a year or pads that last five years or more. The cup should be emptied, washed and reinserted several times daily (6) and washable sanitary pads should be changed every two to six hours (7). These products eliminate landfill waste and are said to save money over time.

Caring for these products is pretty simple. Manufacturers recommend that women thoroughly wash or boil the reusable cup (6) and suggest "safe" plant-based laundry detergents and natural enzyme stain removers for cleaning pads (7).

Although women have a range of needs when it comes to menstrual care, it is important to give them product options that will provide a sense of comfort. **WF**

### References

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