



As young women we are taught little about our reproductive health. We hit puberty and are tossed an assortment of products to keep it all under wraps and under control. Have you ever considered the safety of the products you're using? The tampons, pads, birth control pills, IUD or other devices? I never did. Not until I started to learn about the world around me and what goes into all of the products I use on a daily basis. What I found was unsettling, but more importantly it empowered me to be in control of my life and my fertility. I hope to share that with you today. Let's get started!

## Feminine Hygiene Products

These products are going to fall into two categories - Disposable & Reusable - the similarities and differences go far beyond these labels. We'll start with what you know (disposables) and then move on to your other choices (reusables).

### So what's so bad about tampons and pads?

It starts with the products used to make them. Bleached wood pulp used to make rayon is a big problem as the bleaching process creates dioxin. We'll discuss dioxin in more detail later, but for now, know that is it a very serious **carcinogen** (on the EPA's list of the worst). In addition to dioxin, the non-organic cottons used are often grown using **pesticides and herbicides**, many of which are also known to cause cancer. If you wish to use tampons, choose a brand that is nonchlorine-bleached, rayon-free, and made of 100 percent-organic cotton.



Next up you have some synthetic materials like polyester and miscellaneous plastics. These provide a terrible atmosphere by limiting air circulation, which can contribute to infections (yeast and bacteria). This environment is also a contributing factor to Toxic Shock Syndrome, which can be fatal.

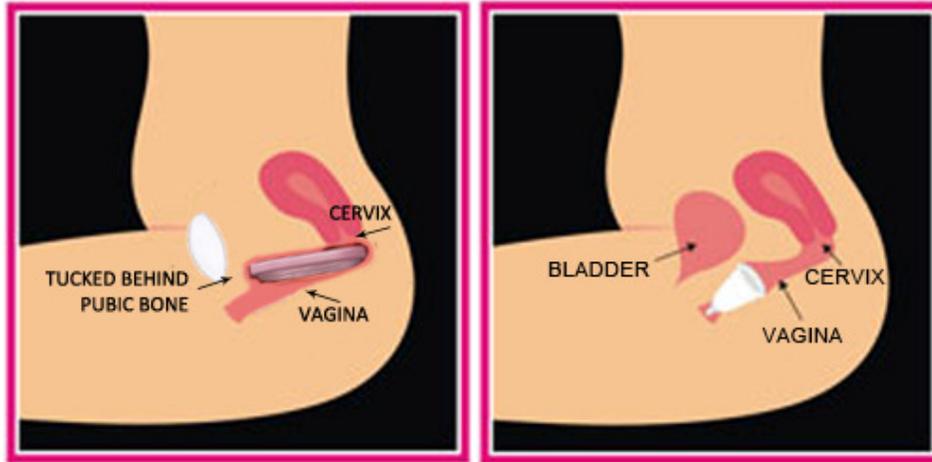
Something else to note about the fibers used to make up pads and tampons is that they are known to leave tiny cuts and ulcerations on the labia, cervix and vaginal walls. This is a big concern with tampons, especially during insertion and removal. The problem with the cuts is that it gives direct access for chemicals and bacteria to be absorbed into your bloodstream.

Another concern is **Sodium Polyacrylate** is a super absorbent polymer that becomes a gel when wet that can cause skin irritations and allergic reactions as bad as fever, vomiting, and even staph infection. This is found in pads. It was used in tampons until the early 1980s when it was revealed that the material increased the risk of toxic shock syndrome by increasing absorbency and improving the environment for the growth of toxin-producing bacteria.



If you are familiar with disposable infant diapers, the gel material that is inside of the diapers is this same material.

**Another disposable option is disposable cups.** Though there are reusable cups, don't confuse them with these disposable cups. They are quite different in how they are used. Disposable cups are larger and meant to fit up behind your cervix and tilt up just behind your pubic bone. When you remove the cup you must slide it out horizontally to avoid spillage. The image on the left shows the placement of a disposable cup and the image on the right shows the placement of a reusable cup.



These disposable cups have a firm but flexible rim with a thin, clear plastic collection cup. These cups can be worn for up to 12 hours, making them convenient. Because they are disposable, they are somewhat costly, and of course made from plastics. Though they are not reusable, they are a much better option than bleached and chemically treated disposable options.

## Let's go back to the Dioxin

I cannot stress enough how very dangerous dioxin is. It's not dangerous only to you, but also to your children, grandchildren and great grandchildren. Yep, you heard that right! Non-organic tampons and pads contain trace amounts of dioxin. Dioxin is a byproduct of the bleaching process that the absorbent materials go through (this is completely for aesthetics and is unnecessary). Dioxin is a very serious known carcinogen. The EPA says that there is **NO** safe level of Dioxin and that even trace amounts are a risk. Cancer is an obvious concern, but there's more.

In a 1996 Environmental Protection Agency study, dioxin exposure was linked with increased risks for Endometriosis, as well as the increased risks of pelvic inflammatory disease, reduction of fertility, and interference with normal fetal and childhood development.

**Dioxin affects your fertility**, but it doesn't stop there. According to a reproductive toxicology study published in 2010 at Vanderbilt University's School of Medicine by Bruner-Tran and Osteen, the effects of dioxin exposure last at least three full generations with some very serious results.

Scientists studied dioxin's effects on the fertility of female mice for three generations. Four separate groups of mice were tested. A control group (no dioxin exposure), a one dose group, two dose group and a three dose group.

The study found that even a single exposure in the womb reduced fertility - just more than half of the mice exposed once while in the womb were able to conceive when mated with normal (unexposed) males . Those that were able to get pregnant often delivered prematurely, and many of the pups died soon after birth. Those children went on to have similar fertility problems. None of the mice exposed to dioxin 3 or 4 times were able to conceive. In contrast, all of the control mice (no exposure) were able to get pregnant and deliver normally. You can read about the study in full at this link - <http://t.co/SkfX6D0>

With infertility and premature births becoming more common, it's alarming to think that the products we are introduced to as a young adult could cause such harm, not only to us, but to our children and beyond.

## Enough chemicals already! Let's talk about reusable products.

Reusable products come in a few forms and in addition to saving lots of resources and money, they are made from higher quality materials - resulting in non-toxic feminine care. Speaking of resources, did you know that the average woman uses more than 6,000 tampons in her lifetime?! That's enough to fill a bathtub! That number is much higher for pads.

That's a lot of waste and money in the trash!

So, you want to try something less toxic, more green and easier on your wallet. There are three main options, a cup (used internally like a tampon but it collects - it does not absorb), pads (just like disposables but much more comfortable and without the icky toxins) and sponges (these work just like tampons).



## First up we have the menstrual cup

These are generally made from a medical grade silicone and can be reused for years (some women have had their cup for as long as 10 years!). They cost around \$30-40, depending on what brand you get and where you buy it. One big perk of the cup is that there is **no dryness** & as a result, there is no reported link to toxic shock syndrome like tampons.

### How often do you empty it?/How long can you wear it?

They can be worn for up to 12 hours. If you have a heavier flow, you may want to do this more often. It can be worn overnight without issue.

### What about when you're out and about?

Since it can be worn for so long, chances are you won't need to change it. If you do and can't get to a sink, wipe off the rim and reinsert. When you get home, or to a more private place, give it a wash as usual.

### Is it comfortable?

Yes, most women can't even feel it. If the stem of the cup bothers you, cut it off. I cut mine off completely and have



no issues at all. If your cup is uncomfortable, make sure that it's in right, and if that doesn't work, perhaps try a different brand. You may want to wet your cup before inserting, I find that it helps get it in to position easier.

### **Is it sanitary?**

Yes, most of these cups are made from medical grade silicone. Just be sure to wash your hands and the cup when you empty it. After your cycle, be sure to clean it thoroughly. You can be boil it if you choose or simply wash and then sanitize with rubbing alcohol. Be sure to rinse it thoroughly and let dry.

### **Do they leak?**

If your cup is in properly, no, and they can be used with a tilted cervix. Be sure to choose the cup size right for you. Most of these brands offer multiple sizes and guidelines for what to choose. There also seems to be a bit of a learning curve to getting it in and sitting properly. If you're unsure, try using a liner until you get the hang of it. I recommend trying to use your cup before you actually need it. Practice makes perfect and you'll be much more comfortable when the time comes.

### **Is this good for an active lifestyle?**

Yes! Swim, run, dance, etc. The only limitation is sex. You cannot have sex with the cup in place.

### **What do I think?**

I love mine. No dryness, no running out of tampons and running to the store. No constant changes and worrying about leaks. I was fortunate and got the hang of it right away and I've been so pleased. I wish I had known about these long ago.

## **Cloth Pads**

Cloth pads function much like disposable pads except that they are reusable, pretty and comfortable!

### **How do you wash these? And where do you keep your dirty ones?**

A wet bag (waterproof bag) or wet pail is often used to store them in. A tiny flip lid trash can would work well. Most places I've seen recommend doing a cold soak with detergent before washing if you don't use a wet pail. These can be throw in with your regular wash if you like. Wash in cold water to help lift stains. No special detergents are needed, though I do recommend choosing an eco-friendly detergent for overall health reasons.

### **What about when you're out and about?**

I would recommend a small wet bag that fits in your purse or bag - like the one pictured to the right.

### **How many do you need?**

Anywhere from 6-12 pads is a good number. This is going to depend on your flow and how often you need/want to wash them. I would suggest using how many



disposables you go through as a rough guide. Because of the expense, I would start low and then buy more if need be.

### **Can they be used with a heavy flow?**

Yes. You can find these in any absorbency from a simple liner to postpartum heavy flow. Most pads are made with absorbent materials like organic cotton, bamboo or hemp. Most also use wool, microfleece or PUL as a protective and waterproofing layer.

PUL is polyurethane laminated fabric. It is typically used as backing on pads (just like the shell of modern day cloth diapers) as a waterproof layer. It's fantastic, but not as breathable as fleece or wool. I think this is one of those things that you need to find what works for you.

### **What about smell? Are these sanitary?**

Because these are natural fibers and breathable, there is far less odor than with disposables. That's good news!

### **Personal Opinion?**

I haven't personally used cloth pads (I'm a cup girl), but I know many people that do and they love them. If you are interested in this option, please ask me about brand recommendations!

### **Still stuck on tampons? How about a natural option?**

Try a sea sponge. A sea sponge works just like a tampon. It is worn in the same fashion and absorbs - but without all of the nasty chemicals and waste. A two pack can run you \$8-\$14 and last for at least 6 months.

### **So how do you use them?**

Though they are used like tampons, they do not have an applicator, so you will have to use your finger (like an o.b. tampon). Dampen the sponge and squeeze out the water and insert. When you change it (ever 3-6 hours, just as you would with a tampon) you can either rinse out the sponge with warm water, squeeze and reuse. You can also replace it with a fresh one while you wash the other to use next time.



### **How long do you wear it?**

You will change this approx. every 4-8 hours, the same as you would for a tampon.

### **How often do you have to buy new ones?**

They are said to last at least 6 months, and some say up to 12 months depending on how you care for them.

### **Does it leak?**

I haven't tried these, but from my reading they are as reliable as a tampon. It shouldn't leak unless left in for too long.

### **What if it's too big?**

Ahh, the beauty of a natural sponge. Get out some scissors and trim it! Do so in little bits, you don't want to get it too small.

### What about dryness?

As I said, I haven't tried these, but I'll offer my thoughts... while sponges are absorbent, they do not contain the same chemicals that cause most of the problems with dryness in tampons, nor the rough, chemically treated fibers that cause micro-abrasions. I would imagine that the sponge would be more dry than a menstrual cup, but less than a tampon.



### What about when you're out and about?

You could potentially wash and rinse as usual, however that might be difficult in a multi-stall bathroom. I would recommend buying a small wetbag like the right. Keep a spare in the dry pocket and dirties can go into the waterproof.

### How do you really clean and disinfect it after your cycle?

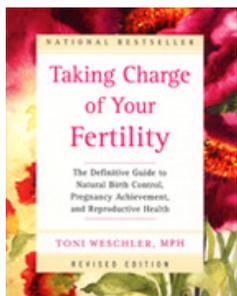
The brand seen below recommends soaking your sponge/s in a cup of warm water that contains either baking soda or apple cider vinegar (I would choose the ACV if it were me). S for about 15 minutes then rinse and let air dry.

### Still want a tampon?

Choose a brand that is 100% organic cotton like Seventh Generation, Organyc, Natracare or Maxim Hygeine.

### Last but not least, let's talk about birth control.

Birth control is tricky. People want easy, and medications deliver, but what most people never stop to consider is the health effects that hormonal birth controls have on our bodies (pills, IUDS, etc). I prefer more natural methods, and so does your body.



Whether you want to avoid pregnancy or get pregnant, charting is very helpful. I highly recommend that every women read the book **Taking Charge of Your Fertility**. There is even a program by the same name that will help you chart your cycle and predict ovulation. It's very easy to do and is highly effective when done correctly (read the book, it's really very simple!) If you are unsure of when you're ovulating, there are tests strips for that.

Along those lines is a method called the Standard Days Method in which a tool called Cycle Beads is used (there is even an app!) These are meant for women who's cycles are consistently between 26 and 32 days long. If you cycle is not **always** in this range, this is not the product for you.

There are non-hormonal IUDs, but I do not recommend them and would not personally use one. They can become lodged in the uterine wall, fall out and overall, I am not a fan of implantable devices.

### I think that's everything!

Feminine care is not a topic I ever imagined I'd be talking openly about, but I firmly believe that this is an important health issue. I hope that this class helps you take charge of your body. If you have daughters, I hope it helps you make the right choices for them and to all you share this knowledge with. If you're uncomfortable talking about it, send them my way or make them a copy of this handout.

Big thanks to these companies for donating samples for this class!

*Thank you for joining me today!*



**Lunapads**  
eco positive  
periods