

View this article online at: patient.info/news-and-features/menstrual-cups-and-eco-friendly-period-products

Should you buy a menstrual cup? Eco-friendly period products

Disposable pads and tampons generate more than 200,000 tonnes of waste per year, dumped in landfills, clogging sewers and eventually ending up in the ocean. And it's been estimated that the average British woman spends as much as £18,450 on their periods over the course of their lifetime. We explore the environmentally friendly menstrual products that could be good for your wallet, as well as the planet.

Turning red

A [study](#) by girls' rights charity [Plan International UK](#) found that almost half of girls aged 14-21 are embarrassed by their periods, with 82% of participants admitting to concealing sanitary products and 71% saying they felt embarrassed even to buy them.

Gynaecologist Dr Karen Morton, from [Dr Morton's the medical helpline](#), points out that one advantage of trying alternative sanitary products, such as a menstrual cup, is that they can be a good way of getting to know your body.

"It amazes me, as a gynaecologist, how shy women can be about touching themselves, or exploring what the vagina and cervix feel like," she says.

Being comfortable with your body is the first step to ending any embarrassment you may feel about your period. If going to buy tampons feels more like a monthly walk of shame, switching to reusable products could potentially help.

What's out there?

Reusable menstrual cups

A menstrual cup is a small, reusable cup that is inserted into the vagina to catch the flow of blood. They're eco-friendly, a travel-light solution when on holiday and can save you money in the long term. A lot of people also find them useful when playing sports.

Kath Clements, company director of menstrual cup brand Mooncup says that a cup "holds three times more blood than a regular tampon, giving longer-lasting protection on heavier days".

Cups work for lighter period days too, she says, as they "collect your menstrual flow rather than absorbing it, [so] won't cause dryness or leave fibres behind".

Most cups are made from medical grade silicone and are latex-free. But others are made from natural sources. It's important to check the ingredients beforehand if you have allergies.

Reusable, washable, cloth pads

These look like your everyday sanitary pads and come in different absorbency levels. Instead of throwing them away, you pop them in the washing machine or hand-wash them before they're ready to be used again.

Morton sees no issue with reusable pads, "but a bit like reusable nappies, our throw-away culture is going to take a lot of changing before such products become popular," she says.

Organic cotton pads and tampons

These aren't reusable products. However, organic tampon brands, such as TOTM® and Kind Organic®, look just like what you're used to, but with some added eco-benefits.

Eco-friendly tampons are made with organic cotton which is better for the environment. And it means if you have sensitive or allergy-prone skin, these could be a good choice as there is no bleach, chlorine or any other chemical commonly found in conventional tampon brands.

It's important to note that, organic or not, a [forgotten tampon](#) is a breeding ground for bacteria and bad smells, so always remember to change yours regularly to reduce the risks of a rare but life-threatening condition called toxic shock syndrome (TSS).

Period-proof pants

'Period-proof' underwear looks just like a normal pair of pants, but it has absorbent technology so you can use it without a sanitary pad or tampon.

Such products, like the brand THINX®, cater for those who are often left out of the menstruation conversation such as trans men, non-binary people and women with sensory challenges or mobility issues.

Disposable bags

Even if you're not convinced by alternative menstrual products, hopefully your flushing days are behind you. Biodegradable products such as FabLittleBag® provide a discreet option for binning your waste wherever you are, preventing blocked drains and polluted rivers.

Are there any red flags?

A big drawback is that many of these alternative sanitary options are not accessible to some women due to higher prices. This particularly applies to organic pads and tampons, as often you pay more for less product. However, the cost of a reusable cup or pad will be much cheaper in the long run if you're willing to splurge initially.

Depending on how busy your schedule is, you will need to weigh up whether taking the time to rinse out your underwear or menstrual cup daily is realistic for you.

And it's always worth being mindful of toxic shock syndrome (TSS). One very recent [study](#) has linked menstrual cup usage to it.

However, Dr Vanessa Mackay from the [Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists](#), disputed the findings, saying: "Women who use menstrual cups are likely at a decreased risk of developing TSS [compared to those who use tampons], as menstrual cups are non-absorbent, do not irritate the delicate vaginal tissue and do not disturb the vagina's 'good' bacteria".

As long as you remember to change and wash your cup regularly, your risk is low.

What's best?

Mackay says: "Decisions around which type of period product to use should be based on whatever a woman feels most comfortable using. Women who have concerns about their menstrual hygiene or vaginal health should seek advice from their GP, practice nurse or pharmacist."

If your periods are causing problems and you'd rather experience them less often, Morton suggests: "An alternative would be to use a method of contraception which often stops periods altogether, like a [Mirena® coil](#)."

At the end of the day, do what feels right for your body. Period.

Disclaimer: This article is for information only and should not be used for the diagnosis or treatment of medical conditions. Egton Medical Information Systems Limited has used all reasonable care in compiling the information but makes no warranty as to its accuracy. Consult a doctor or other healthcare professional for diagnosis and treatment of medical conditions. For details see our [conditions](#).

Last updated by: Georgia Gallant 29/05/2018	
Peer reviewed by: Dr Sarah Jarvis MBE, FRCGP 29/05/2018	

View this article online at: patient.info/news-and-features/menstrual-cups-and-eco-friendly-period-products

Discuss Should you buy a menstrual cup? Eco-friendly period products and find more trusted resources at [Patient](#).



To find out more visit www.patientaccess.com
or download the app



Follow us

