Sustainable Period Products

BELLA's x Club Terra
Environmental Impact

“approximately 12 billion pads and 7 billion tampons are discarded each year”

- Tampons and pads use A LOT of plastic
- Tampon applicators can take up to 20 years to break down and in turn can be ingested by marine life causing health complications/death
  - The plastic in pads/ tampons (not including applicators) can take up to 800 years to decompose as well
- Tampon/pad processing also contributes to environmental harm
  - Creating plastic takes a lot of fossil fuel energy
The Story of Plastic | Tampons

Colorado-based general practitioner Earle Cleveland Haas patented the first tampon with applicator in 1933. By the time dome-tipped plastic applicators were introduced in 1973, tampons were used by more than 70 percent of U.S. women.

1933

2019

Usage
5.8 billion tampons were sold in the U.S. in 2018, a third of the global total.

Recycling
Although plastic applicators are recyclable, they are usually not accepted for sanitary reasons.

Did You Know?
Tampons flushed down the toilet can end up in the ocean when sewer systems fail.

TANIA YELIN; KELSEY NOWAKOWSKI
SOURCES: TAMPAX; EUROMONITOR; OCEAN CONSERVANCY; UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE
Financial Sustainability - Tampons

- 70% of women use tampons during their menstrual cycle
  - ~20 tampons used per cycle (4 a day/ 5 days a week)
  - ~465 periods in a woman’s life (between ages 13-51 on average)
  - $4 for a box of 18 tampons
  - $2,066.66 solely for tampons

  - This excludes other products such as underwear, birth control and heating pads which would be around $18,171
Financial Sustainability - Diva Cup

Diva Cup

- Replaced every 12 months - average
  - ~$20-40 per cup
  - 1/year = 38 cups
  - $1,520
- Replaced every 6 months
  - $3,040

*used with $40 per cup baseline but most diva cups found at target/cvs are closer to $28-30
Period Poverty

- For those in low-income communities, period products are too expensive
  - Especially w/ “pink tax”
- Period products are unable to be bought using food stamps
  - Women forced to use alternatives like paper towels, toilet paper, rags, or cardboard
- Lack of access to sanitary products leads to heightened risk for health problems
  - Urinary tract infections and bacterial diseases
before we get into alternatives...

*Period blood is NOT ‘dirty’*

- those who have periods have been historically shamed about them (stigma)
- leads to the implication that period blood and periods in general are ‘dirty’, which is incorrect
  - the misconception that period blood is dirty also leads to general hesitation towards using many reusable products
    - hesitation towards handwashing
    - just the implications of reusing products
Sustainable Alternatives

- If you prefer tampons:
  - Menstrual cups
    - Small receptacles that collect menstrual blood
    - The same cup can be reused for years
  - Menstrual discs
    - Similar to menstrual cups, but with a different shape
  - Period sponges
    - They're a naturally renewable resource & are biodegradable
    - There has been a bit of disagreement on their safety
  - Plastic-free applicators/reusable tampon applicators
    - If you feel more comfortable with tampons, cutting out plastic applicators is still incredibly helpful to the environment
Sustainable Alternatives

If you prefer pads:
- Reusable organic cotton pads
  - Can last for years
  - Some say that they are more comfortable than disposable pads
- Reusable period underwear
  - Just like regular underwear, but is very absorbent and able to catch menstrual fluid
- Biodegradable organic cotton pads
  - There are some disposable options that are made with biodegradable material, such as Natracare and Saathi
  - However, some say that these may not be as environmentally impactful as you’d think
Q&A About Product Care

- Cups + reusable applicators etc.
  - Rinsing
  - Can last a long time

- Cloth pads/ reusable pads:
  - Change multiple times a day
  - **Washing:**
    - Washing machine
      - Cold or warm, warm for sanitizing
      - By hand
    - Can also soak and pre-soak, using cold water before rinsing and/or scrubbing
    - All about convenience
  - **Drying:**
    - Air drying or tumble drying
Sustainable Products - FAQ

- **Menstrual Cups**
  - Q: Can I wear menstrual cups while doing physical activity, such as running, swimming, or performing exercise?
    - Yes!
  - Q: Is it painful to wear a menstrual cup?
    - No, it shouldn’t be.

- **Period Sponges**
  - Q: Can I use just any type of sponge for my period?
    - No, you cannot!!
  - Q: Can I sleep with my Menstrual Sponge?
    - Yes, you can!!
Sustainable Products - FAQ (cont.)

- **Reusable organic cotton pads**
  - Q: Are reusable pads safe to use?
    - Yes they are!
  - Q: Can anyone of any age use this product (ie. do I have to be a certain age to use these)
    - Yep, anyone of any age can use this!

- **Reusable period underwear**
  - Q: Do these reusable period underwear leak?
    - They shouldn’t.
  - Q: Is this sanitary to use?
    - Yes, it is!
  - Q: Are these products good for heavy periods?
    - Yes, they are!
Health Implications

- There has been a growing concern over the synthetic chemicals found in traditional period products.
- Sustainable menstrual products are no less healthy than disposable ones.
  - Some consider them to be healthier, due to the lack of synthetic fibers.
  - There is a smaller risk of **Toxic Shock Syndrome** from menstrual cups.
- Menstrual cups do not dry the vagina, preserving healthy bacteria.
Discussion

What are your feelings surrounding these sustainable alternatives? Are there reasons you haven’t made the switch?
Sources

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