

Menstrual Cups Could Save Your Life – Here's What You Should Know

At first glance, the use of menstrual cups may appear to be the sort of radical hippie ritual that induces a sense of compromised hygiene and sound logic. Common sense would dictate that only the most dedicated and possibly unhinged earth mother would opt for such an unconventional method of dealing with menstruation. Indeed, the notion may be a deeply foreign and unappealing option when weighed against the familiar glint of modern sanitary products. However, upon closer inspection, and considered with an open mind, the numerous benefits of using of menstrual cups far exceed customary options.

What are They and How do They Work?

Measuring approximately 2 inches long, with a capacity of 30ml, these soft silicone cups collect your flow as opposed to absorbing it. Inserted vaginally, they effectively replace the need for conventional tampons or pads. By forming a gentle seal against the vaginal walls, the cup can be worn comfortably for extended periods without odor proliferation or spillages.

The cups have silicone stems connected to the bottom-most point. You may leave the stem long for effortless removal, or trim it as short as you please, according to what is most comfortable. No one way is incorrect.

Menstrual cups can be easily found and purchased online and are often found in health food shops.

Benefits

It is understandable that this process may be unappealing to the uninitiated, but the far-reaching benefits of using menstrual cups should be considered before dismissing this unconventional practice altogether.

Economical

The numbers speak for themselves. Because this amazing apparatus lasts up to ten years, the economy of a single purchase quickly, and in some cases, immediately, offsets the initial outlay.

- The average woman spends between \$5 and \$15 a month on sanitary products, which is somewhere between \$60 and \$180 per year (that's a potential \$600 to \$1800 over a decade)!
- Reputable menstrual cup brands can be purchased for \$15 to \$30.

Ecological

Throughout an average lifetime, tampon users are estimated to go through more than 10,000 of the brightly colored, floral scented, individually wrapped contraptions. Whether it's treated cardboard or pearlescent plastic, the cumulative contribution to landfill from applicators alone is staggering – not to mention all the additional packaging that accompanies these highly marketable products.

Due to the synthetic nature of most modern tampons, they are responsible for an increasing percentage of the world's waste crisis – and remain a long-term burden by not degrading efficiently.

With genetically modified organism use on the rise, tampons are no exception to the expansion of this controversial

science. Increasingly, manufacturers are choosing to use GM cotton (in addition to swathes of other dubiously artificial ingredients such as polyurethane and rayon).

...even if you do use an all-cotton tampon, it is as well to be aware of the increasing proliferation of GM cotton in the marketplace. Dr Ilya Sandra Perlingieri, author of The Uterine Crisis (1st Books, 2003), believes that more and more tampon manufacturers are using genetically modified cotton, which resists the effects of antibiotics. This is important since the rate of sexually transmitted diseases is on the rise. Bacteria exposed to GM cotton may inherit that resistance to antibiotics, making STDs increasingly difficult to treat.” – Pat Thomas

Comfortable and Convenient

Monthly menses enjoy the distinction of being inconvenient, uncomfortable, and downright annoying. However, menstrual cups offer unparalleled comfort and convenience at a time when a little respite is greatly needed. Irritation need not feature at the top of your list during your bleed week:

- Not only can the cup be used for 6-12 hours at a time, but once in, it melds with your body for a blissfully unobtrusive experience.
- You can engage in vigorous and dynamic movement with the cup in, without concern for leakage or the need for readjustment.
- Used correctly, you won't feel it.
- Additionally, the cup can be worn safely and effectively through the night.

Personal Safety

The safety considerations to make while using contemporary menstrual management methods are many and varied.

Tampons are associated with the following:

- Toxic shock syndrome (TSS) is a serious, potentially fatal condition associated with tampon use. High absorption products create the ideal environment for harmful bacteria to thrive. These organisms could ultimately convert into the toxin that induces TSS.
- Excessive absorption causes and exacerbates dehydration, fissures, and areas of acute irritation.
- Tampons leave behind fibers that interfere with the normal function and homeostasis of the vagina.
- Tampons are frequently filled with many synthetic compounds, additives, parabens, perfumes, chemical deodorizers, and bleaching agents. These are singularly capable of disturbing normal function and healthy vaginal flora – used in concert, they are highly disruptive.

On the other hand, menstrual cups provide many promising perks:

- There is no risk of developing TSS.
- They do not compromise vaginal health by intruding upon the delicate balance of beneficial microbes.
- Because that they catch the flow, rather than absorb it, cups do not dry out the mucosal membrane of the vaginal wall or leave behind any residue of any kind. This ensures the womb's continued efficiency at cleansing, detoxifying, and protecting.
- Conscientious brands such as *Mooncup* state that their product is: *"Made from soft medical grade silicone, the Mooncup is latex-free and contains no dyes, BPA, toxins or bleaches. It's also great for women with sensitive skin."* They also go on to state that: *"The Mooncup menstrual cup contains no bleaches, deodorisers, or absorbency gels."*

How to Use

Getting used to the idea of using a menstrual cup can be a little challenging. It does require a bit of a pioneering mindset and a confident approach, but by being informed and taking your time, you will quickly overcome the daunting uncertainty.

To insert:

- Positioning is important, and it may take some time to figure out what angle works best for you. Sometimes sitting, squatting, or standing with a leg on a raised surface can help.
- Pinch the lip of the cup together, making a “U” shape. Alternatively, you may choose to make more of a small “O” shape by collapsing one side of the cup down into the cavity and holding the top together with thumb and forefinger.
- Allow your anatomy to guide the process of insertion.
- You may find that wetting the cup with water beforehand eases the entry.
- Once in, you can allow the cup to expand. It is at this point that the seal naturally forms, but adjustments can be made by shifting the cup to best suit you.
- It is important to ensure the cup is fully inside and not interfering with the opening of the vagina. This would prove both uncomfortable and less effective.
- Should the stem be visible, trimming might be appropriate.

To remove:

- Pull on the stem, and slightly squeeze the base of the cup.
- Carefully ease down one side of the cup, then the other.
- Empty the cup.

- Either rinse or wipe it with a tissue before reinserting.

Additional Considerations

Size

There are two sizes of cup on the market:

- Size one is appropriate for women under 30 who have not given birth vaginally.
- Size two is more suitable for women over 30 and those who have given birth vaginally.

Normal Variations

Every body is different, and due to the intimate nature of this method, it is important to make adjustments that are right for you, based on your own experience.

- Depth of insertion may vary. This is okay, and, moreover, normal. Listening to your anatomy will allow you will ensure the best outcome.
- Trim the stem to a length that suits your comfort level; this may mean leaving it completely uncut, or entirely removing it.

Sanitation

Good hygiene is a crucial component of safe and successful menstrual cup use.

- Always wash your hands thoroughly before and after insertion.
- Though it is not recommended, if you do use soap to clean the cup between uses while on your period, make sure the soap is completely removed before re-use to avoid irritation to the delicate tissue.

- It is necessary to sanitize your menstrual cups after your period is over, and it is easy to do in an eco-friendly way by boiling it with vinegar for 5-7 minutes.

Staining

Over time, the cup may take on a darkened, stained appearance. The color change may range from brown to orange to yellow. This is perfectly normal and consistent with correct usage. Staining is not an indication of fault or uncleanliness. An eco-friendly option for removing the discoloration is to scrub it with a paste of baking soda and water.

Storage

To preserve the longevity and hygiene of your cup between uses, proper storage must be observed.

- Let the cup thoroughly dry after sterilization.
- Store in a breathable cotton bag. (Extra points for organic cotton!)
- Do not use a plastic bag, Tupperware, or sealed container.

Cons

It is important to bear in mind that adjusting to using menstrual cups may take some time and practice. Furthermore, they may not be appropriate for everyone.

- The use of cups may interfere with women who have an IUD or Nuva Ring fitted, as these devices may become displaced. Consent from an OB/GYN is strongly advised under these circumstances.
- This method may prove difficult to insert for some, particularly young girls who have never been sexually

active. Additionally, some bodies are less suited to cups and will have less success with them due to conditions such as a dropped uterus, a prolapsed uterus, or fibroids.

- Removal may also pose problems for new users. Though not uncomfortable, the process can be a little tricky to master and will take some practice.
- Especially compared to popular sanitary products, cups can involve more mess. Direct contact with the process of flow collection can be off-putting. In particular, use in public restrooms may prove less convenient.
- Long term maintenance requires proper sterilization and storage.

Final Thoughts

Doubtless, many will shy away from this alternative practice in favor of more contemporary methods that receive widespread support and media coverage. However, when all the facts are taken into consideration, it is increasingly difficult to justify the risks and compromises associated with those habits. This small change can change your health, well-being, and may even save your life.

Recommended Reading:

- How To Prevent and Treat Vaginal Infections Naturally
- How to Kill Fungal Infections
- *Candida, Gut Flora, Allergies, and Disease*
- Dying to Cut – Unnecessary Surgeries You May Want to Avoid, and ...
- Natural Remedies for PMS, Mood Swings, Bloating, Cramps, Etc.

Sources:

- *Behind the label: Tampons* – The Ecologist
- *About the Mooncup* – Mooncup

- *Tired of Tampons? Here are the Pros and Cons of Menstrual Cups* – Cleveland Clinic