

# Menstrual Hygiene

## Pads, Tampons and Other Options

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Personal care products such as pads, tampons or menstrual cups offer a wide selection of options for dealing with the inconvenience of menstruation. The choice of which to use and when is a personal one with no 'right' answers. Many women choose to use different options at different times during the same period.

### What Options Are Available?

External menstrual pads are used to soak up the menstrual flow and are worn on the outside of the body. Tampons and menstrual cups catch the flow inside the vagina before it reaches the outside. Pads, tampons, and menstrual cups can be used at different times and some can be used at the same time. (For example, you can use tampons or menstrual cups on heavy-flow days with a pad for backup protection.) Some women like to wear tampons during the day and pads at night.

### How Do I Choose?

There are many types of pads, tampons, and menstrual cups available. External protection, in the form of pads, are simple and easy to use, but some women don't like the bulk, feel or risk of leakage they can present. The choice of a pad should be based on your body size, the amount of flow you normally experience, and what feels comfortable. Products with scents, perfumes, or other 'deodorants' should be avoided because these substances can be especially irritating.

Internal protection, most commonly tampons worn inside the vagina, are more secure and discrete but require that you are comfortable with their insertion. (Even girls who are not sexually active yet can safely and comfortably use tampons with just a little practice.) Like pads, tampons come in different sizes for heavier and lighter periods. When a woman is going to be more physically active (sports, swimming, etc.) or her flow is heavier, many choose to use internal protection, choosing pads for their lighter days.

Menstrual cups are a less commonly chosen internal method of catching the menstrual flow. These may be purchased in pharmacies or on-line and consist of a plastic, silicone or rubber cup that is worn in the vagina. It should be removed and emptied every 8 to 12 hours. Some menstrual cups are used only once and thrown away, while others can be washed and reused. It may take some practice to use a menstrual cup to get comfortable with it.

### When to Change?

No matter what form of personal care product you choose, knowing when to change is important. For external pads, they should be changed anytime you are uncomfortable with their feel or they are significantly soiled. Those that move moisture into the pad will be more comfortable and will provide less irritation to the delicate tissues surrounding the vaginal opening.

Even if your flow is light, you should change your tampon at least every 4–8 hours.