Tampons and Menstrual Hygiene Products

Shibani Kanungo  
*University of Kentucky*

Hatim A. Omar  
*University of Kentucky, hatim.omar@uky.edu*

Follow this and additional works at: [http://uknowledge.uky.edu/obgyn_facpub](http://uknowledge.uky.edu/obgyn_facpub)  
Part of the [Obstetrics and Gynecology Commons](http://uknowledge.uky.edu/obgyn_facpub/4)

Repository Citation  
[http://uknowledge.uky.edu/obgyn_facpub/4](http://uknowledge.uky.edu/obgyn_facpub/4)


**TAMPONS AND MENSTRUAL HYGIENE PRODUCTS**

Shibani Kanungo, MD, MPH
Hatim A. Omar, MD

**BASICS**

**DESCRIPTION**

- Menstruation is a major stage of puberty in girls, usually starting at any age between the ages of 8 and 13.
- Women usually lose 1–4 Tbs (≤80 ml) blood during normal menstrual period.
- A wide variety of menstrual hygiene products are available. They are available in 2 major categories:
  - Reusable
  - Disposable
- Menstrual hygiene products include:
  - Menstrual pads
  - Tampons
  - Menstrual cup
  - Padded panties
  - Sea sponges
  - Minifront
- Menstrual pads are used as a protective cover outside the vagina, to absorb menstrual flow; available in a wide variety of sizes, shapes, and brands.
- Maxi pads are for heavy days and mini pads or panty liners for light days:
  - With wings:
    - Pros: Keeps pads in place
    - Cons: Can abrade inner thigh
  - Without wings:
    - Pros: Smells good
    - Cons: Can cause local irritation
    - Nondeodorant:
    - Pros: Odor indicates vaginal infection and shouldn’t be masked
    - Cons: No artificial smell
- Different sizes:
  - Regular maxi:
  - Super maxi: Longer than standard pad for extra protection overnight or for heavy flow days
  - Thin maxi: Thinner than typical pad
  - Ultra-thin maxi: Even thinner than thin maxi; may have absorbent gel; useful for lighter-flow days
- Tampons are finger shaped devices used inside the vagina to absorb menstrual flow, are also available in a wide variety of sizes, shapes, and brands.
  - They are considered as medical devices by the FDA and require label with absorbency standards.
  - Pros:
    - More comfortable than pads,
    - Cosmetically appealing and can be worn during activities such as swimming and gymnastics
  - Cons:
    - Risk of TSS
    - Requires changing every 4–6 hours
    - Can cause irritation/discomfort/dryness
    - Learning curve for insertion and removal can cause clogging of sewer if flushed down the toilet.
    - Incidence of UTIs reported in 1 study to be significantly higher among tampon users than among pad users.
  - Available with a choice of applicators:
    - Plastic
    - Cardboard
    - Assembly required
    - None
  - Absorptions as defined by FDA:
    - Light: ≤6 g of fluid
    - Regular: 6–9 g of fluid
    - Super: 9–12 g of fluid
    - Super Plus: 12–15 g of fluid
    - Ultra: 15–18 g of fluid
  - FDA guidelines for decreasing the risk of contracting TSS:
    - Follow package directions for insertion
    - Choose the lowest absorbency for your flow
    - Change your tampon at least every 4–8 hours
    - Consider alternating pads with tampons
    - Don’t use tampons between periods
    - Avoid tampon usage overnight when sleeping
    - Know the warning signs of TSS such as fever with chills, vomiting, diarrhea, dizziness
- Menstrual cup is a barrier, either inverted bell shape or diaphragmlike device, to collect menstrual fluid.
  - Pros:
    - Economical
    - Can be worn for 12 hours
    - Environmentally friendly
    - Comes in different sizes
  - Cons:
    - User must wash hands prior to use
    - Can be messy
    - Can leak
    - Needs proper cleaning and storage
    - Risk of TSS not well established, as product is not widely used
- Padded panties have washable absorbent pads, are economical, preferred alternative for allergies to synthetic materials used in disposable pads.
  - Not frequently used in US
- Sea sponges are ancient practical alternative to absorb menstrual flow.
  - Pros:
    - Cost effective
    - Intravaginal absorbent
    - Environmentally friendly
    - Easy to use
  - Cons:
    - User needs to wash hands prior to use
    - Need to boil prior to use
    - Can leak and be messy
    - Risk of TSS not well established, as product is not widely used
    - Needs proper cleaning and storage
MINI-FLO is a small pad designed to fit between the labia minora.

Pros:
- Small size
- Discreet
- For light days or tampon backup
- Risk of TSS not well established, as product is not widely used
- Company is exploring use for incontinence, and as a diagnostic testing mechanism for HPV

Cons:
- Absorbs small amount of fluid
- May be displaced during movement
- Needs frequent changing
- Costly
- Not widely available

Pediatric Considerations
- Choice of menstrual hygiene products is a matter of personal preference, and many young adolescents choose to learn to use tampons even with the 1st menstrual period.
- For more information on TSS and or menstrual TSS see Septic Shock and Toxic Shock Syndrome.

BIBLIOGRAPHY
The Museum of Menstruation and Women's Health.
http://www.mum.org
March-April 2000.

ABREVIATIONS
- FDA—U.S. Food and Drug Administration
- TSS—Toxic Shock Syndrome

PATIENT TEACHING
- Many girls are interested in using tampons from the onset of menarche.
- Mothers or other family may be concerned about tampons affecting virginity:
  - Reassurance
  - Assurances of normalcy

PREVENTION
- Inability to use tampons:
  - Anxiety and vaginismus vs. hymenal abnormality
  - A guide to 1st tampon use at:
http://www.youngwomenhealth.org
  - Wikihow:
    - How to know when you're ready to start using a tampon at: http://www.wikihow.com/
    - Know-when-You%27re-Ready-to-Start-Using-a-Tampon
  - How to use a tampon at: http://www.wikihow.com/Use-a-Tampon/
- Imperforate hymen should be noted in delivery room or neonatal nursery.
- Hymenal variants and abnormalities should be detected by primary clinician in prepubertal years.