Tampons and Menstrual Hygiene Products

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**TAMPONS AND MENSTRUAL HYGIENE PRODUCTS**

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**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
  - Miniform
- 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 pantyliners for light days:
  - With wings:
    - Pros: Keeps pads in place
    - Cons: Can abrade inner thigh
  - Without wings
  - Thong-shaped
  - Small, medium, large, hourglass shapes
  - Tube shape with straight sides
- Can be with:
  - Deodorant:
    - Pros: Smells good
    - Cons: Can cause local irritation
  - Nondeodorant:
    - Pros: Odor indicates vaginal infection and shouldn’t be masked
    - Cons: No artificial smell

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- 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 diaphragm-like 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
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**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
- Absorbencies 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

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**PROS AND CONS:**

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    - Can leak and be messy
    - Risk of TSS not well established, as product is not widely used
    - Needs proper cleaning and storage
+ Miniflex is a small pad designed to fit between the labia minora.
  - Pros:
    - Small size
    - Discrete
    - 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**


**ABBREVIATIONS**
- 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

+ Inability to use tampons:
  - Anxiety and vaginismus vs. hymen abnormality
  - A guide to 1st tampon use at: http://www.youngwomenshealth.org
  - Wikihow:
    - How to know when you're ready to start using a tampon at: http://www.wikhow.com/Know-when-You%27re-Ready-to-Start-Using-a-Tampon
    - How to use a tampon at: http://www.wikhow.com/Use-a-Tampon/

**PREVENTION**
+ Imperforate hymen should be noted in delivery room or neonatal nursery.
+ Hymenal variants and abnormalities should be detected by primary clinician in prepubertal years.