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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
  - Mini form
- 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:
    - 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

- Different sizes:
  - Regular maxi
  - Super maxi
  - Light maxi
  - Ultra-thin maxi
  - Thin maxi
  - 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:
    - 0 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 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
    - Needs proper cleaning and storage

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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.

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

PREVENTION

• Inability to use tampons:
  — Anxiety and vaginismus vs. hymenal 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.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.