

A Green PERIOD

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Save money, your health, and the environment during that time of the month.

THIS IS AN ARTICLE THAT MEN may want to steer clear of. It deals with the oh-so-delicate and hush-hush topic of periods. No, not that little dot at the end of this sentence. I'm talking about the female menstrual cycle.

Surprisingly enough, some women may decide this article is not for them either. There are no doubt many reasons for this, but I have a feeling one of them is that we live in a world where menstrual blood is blue liquid poured from a vial onto a bleached white sanitary pad on television. If your period is red, and the media tells you that it's supposed to be blue, where do you go from there?

You go green.

While the big sanitary products companies today, such as Playtex, Tampax, Always, and Kotex, might love you to think that your period is a dirty time of the month that should be dealt with only the whitest of white disposable pads and tampons, you do have other options for managing your period.

Menstrual cups are not a new thing, although not many people have heard of them. (No joke, I once had to tell a gynecologist what they are and how they worked). The first menstrual cup was called the Tassette, and was created in 1937 by actress Leona Chalmers. Sadly, Chalmers was a woman ahead of her time. The rubber shortages of World War II and the fact that women were even more afraid of their genitalia than they are today didn't help the Tassette catch on.

The Keeper, a more widely known menstrual cup, was created 50 years later. There are many women who still use the Keeper today. In fact, you can buy one at <http://www.thekeeper.com>. But before you do, you might want to check out their newer model, the Mooncup, or another menstrual cup, the Divacup, which are both made from medical grade silicone. The Keeper, which is made from latex-rubber, can cause women to develop a latex allergy over long-term use, and therefore it is less popular today. Silicone cups also have an advantage in that they can be boiled and sterilized.

If you're still wondering what the term menstrual cup even refers to, let me break it down for you. They are bell-shaped cups

made out of silicone or rubber that are folded and inserted in the vagina. There, they create a seal and catch, rather than absorb, your period. Much like a tampon, once they are in, they can't be felt.

So why use a cup instead of a traditional pad or tampon?

First, they're cheaper. A menstrual cup costs about \$30, and can last up to ten years. That's only 25 cents a month. A box of 20 tampons costs around five bucks, and will likely last a couple of months, but over ten years, those tampons will add up to at least \$300.

Secondly, menstrual cups are better for your health. Dr. Joseph Mercola, a physician, health activist and author of *Take Control of Your Health*, says that most tampons are made of "synthetic materials [that] are so absorbent that they create a perfect breeding ground for Toxic Shock Syndrome (TSS)." TSS is caused by toxin producing strains of bacteria that can cause sometimes-fatal symptoms when a filled tampon has been inside your body for too long. There is no evidence that cups, which are made of solid silicone or rubber and contain no fibrous or absorbent material, can cause TSS.

Wearing pads can create warm, damp conditions that cause bacterial growth, which can lead to infection. Also, according to Mercola, those stark white pads and tampons often contain dioxins—known carcinogens—and bleach, which are not only harmful to put in or on your body, they can cause many women general discomfort "down there."

In addition, the combination of bleach and the absorbency of tampons can affect the vagina's natural acidity. Any gynecologist will tell you that disrupting this pH balance can make women more vulnerable to yeast and other infections.

Using a cup is also more convenient.

While tampons and pads should be worn for no more than eight hours, and are usually replaced every four, a menstrual cup can go unattended for 12. And, when inserted properly, cups users suffer significantly less leakage than when using a pad or tampon.

Finally, using menstrual cups is better for the environment. According to GreenLivingOnline.com, as many as 14 billion pads and tampons, plus their packaging, are disposed into landfills and sewage systems in America each year. The eco-footprint of feminine hygiene products is huge right now, and the use of reusable products will only decrease it.

For women still not feeling the cup, there are several other alternative methods for that time of the month.

Sea Pearls brand tampons are made from the skeletal structures of actual sea sponges and are washable and reusable for up to six months.

Lunapads are soft, comfortable, washable sanitary pads. Made from flannel and fleece with a waterproof lining, they come in a wide range of colors including polka dots and leopard print, are reusable, and like menstrual cups, will save you money over long-term use.

Disposable menstrual cups, called Instead Softcups, look like contraceptive diaphragms, and are inserted up around the cervix. While they won't save you any money, and aren't good for the environment, they have the same health benefits as reusable menstrual cups and pack a special bonus: it's possible to have sex with one in.

The Divacup, Sea Pearls, and Lunapads can all be purchased at <http://www.lunapads.com>.

Of course there will be some women who are not comfortable getting so up close and personal with their bodies; menstrual cups are not for them—and that is likely the least of their worries. ■

