

A Life-changing **up**

BY MELINDA MURPHY

This tiny little device can save you money, save you a hassle and save the planet. But is it right for you?

Menstrual cup. There, I said it. I don't know why those two little words make me blush, but they do. I don't turn red when I talk about tampons or pads, but perhaps I should. Red with anger. Tampons and pads are really terrible for the planet. Truly.

While you may think that tampon you're using is recyclable, it's probably not, not really. Just look in a trash dump (or even a beach) and you'll see them everywhere. Yes, a portion may be recyclable, but tampons have all sorts of bad stuff in them such as the chemical dioxin (a known carcinogen) that keeps them from being broken down. And, by the way, all those chemicals also aren't too good for your own body. I mean, putting something full of chemicals in your most delicate place just doesn't seem like a good idea.

Now let's think about the numbers, which are, quite frankly, astonishing. Just say a woman uses 20 tampons per period. That's 240 a year. On average, she'll get a monthly visit from Aunt Flo for 40 years. That's 9,600 tampons in a lifetime. Gulp.



According to the book *Flow, the Cultural History of Menstruation*, the total amount of pads and tampons ends up being approximately 120kg of trash during a woman's lifetime. Overall? That's about 0.5 percent of a woman's overall trash load during her menstruating years.

Wow. Multiply that by the number of the women on the planet (about 3.5 billion) and you start to see the problem.

Of course, many women don't have access to tampons – or any sort of feminine protection. It's just not available in poorer countries. Or, if it is, there are women who can't afford to dole out hard-earned cash for a box of tampons. That's good for the planet maybe, but not so good for the woman dealing with the consequences of no feminine protection.

An alternative option

So, what's a gal to do? How can you help save the planet one period at a time? How can these women without access be helped?

The menstrual cup is the answer. This small cup of flexible rubber or silicone is inserted just before your period begins and catches the blood rather than absorbs it. You put it in like a tampon without an applicator and it springs open and forms a seal. Every 12 hours, you need to remove it by pulling the little stem at the bottom. Simply empty it, wash it with soap and water and reinsert. At the end of your period, sterilise it in boiling water and the process starts all over next month.

At around \$50 or more, they aren't cheap, but here's the deal: they last for years. So when you compare it to spending at least \$6 for a box of tampons every month, menstrual cups aren't only good for the planet, but they're also good for your pocketbook. And the cool thing is if they're inserted properly, they won't leak, so no embarrassing accidents. You can exercise and swim. There's no smell. No stopping up a toilet. No toxic shock syndrome. No bad chemicals deep inside your privates. No more packing a bulky box of tampons or pads for a trip. You can even buy special ones so you don't have messy sex. The list of pros is long.



Some key questions

With all the reasons to use a menstrual cup, why haven't they caught on? After all, they've been around since the 1930s. Well, frankly, it takes a while to get the hang of using one and it's usually a few cycles before you feel comfortable. Plus, they're a bit icky. Washing them out in a public toilet is a little odd, right? Still, women who use them, swear by them.

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The key is to find the right size. Yup, just like women come in different shapes and sizes, so do menstrual cups and it may take you a while to find the right fit. But don't fret. You'll figure it out. Some brands sell only two sizes whereas other brands have an array of sizes and tell you how to measure. Also, going through childbirth may change the size you need.

When can a young girl start using a menstrual cup? Like tampons, she can use them as soon as she feels ready to try.

Which one is right for you? That's a very personal decision. Do your research, but note that some companies also donate a menstrual cup to women in need for every cup bought.

So, brave up! Give this little life-changing cup a try. Avoid chemicals. Save money and save the planet while you're at it. Finally, a way to feel good about your monthly flow. *a*