

Eco-friendly menstrual products

Adapted from an article by Sejal Parikh in the Alternative (August 3, 2013)

Menstrual cups

Although a relatively new concept in India, the menstrual cup is slowly gaining popularity. It is basically a ‘cup’ shaped reservoir made of medical grade silicon that collects the blood when kept inserted inside the vagina. It can be worn up to 12 hours, which is twice as long as you would normally wear a pad or tampon.

The blood collected by the menstrual cup stays inside the vagina, and doesn’t come in contact with outside air. Owing to this, menstrual cups are more hygienic than any other alternative. Moreover, there’s no foul smell of the blood, rashes or itchiness which are commonly linked to the use of disposable pads or tampons that often contain harmful substances such as chlorine.

SheCup is the only Indian brand available in the market and comes in two sizes. One cup costs ₹700 and can be used for two years. An average middle-class Indian woman spends approximately ₹1400 for disposable pads over two years. So though the investment in a cup may seem high, it is actually cheaper to use the cup than disposable sanitary napkins.



The Convenience Factor

Convenience is a massive advantage offered by menstrual cups. Remember the advertisements of disposable sanitary napkin companies showing ladies feeling a sense of freedom on using their product? Once you have used menstrual cups, you will realize what true freedom is. I have had some of my best holidays – getting totally drenched in waterfalls and beaches, etc. – during those first three dreadful days, all thanks to [SheCup!](#)

It’s easier to operate the cup than most people imagine. I took one menstrual cycle to master the usage, and used nappy liners in that cycle to avoid any leakages. One just needs a little patience in the beginning to master the trick of inserting and getting out the cup. A few girls who started using the cup found it difficult to get it out in the initial days. I asked them to hang in there for another month and later I received their messages saying they are now finding it pretty easy to work with! Once you get the hang of the operational tricks, using the cup is actually no harder than putting

on a disposable pad. So, my suggestion to all the ladies reading this is to just try it. Once you have given it a go for at least one cycle, I am fairly confident that you will be hooked to it for good.

Taboos

“Aw, I can’t touch that dirty blood!” – is a common response that I get from a lot of female friends. I have no straight answer to this question. How can the blood that nurtures and protects the developing

life (foetus or an egg) be dirty? Menstrual blood is actually just blood and tissue that is left unused and taken out of your body. There's absolutely nothing dirty in this blood! Some women I have talked to are not comfortable with the idea of inserting something inside their vagina. (Tampons too aren't used much because of the same reason). I believe it's high time we shed these inhibitions about something that is hygienic, cost-effective and so very convenient!

The Sustainability Quotient

Assuming that a woman needs a minimum of 12-14 disposable pads per cycle, an average urban middle class Indian woman generates at least **5000 disposable sanitary pads as waste** in her lifetime. Most of these disposable pads end up littering roadsides or getting burnt in huge trash heaps, releasing toxins. Some of them are eaten by street dogs or cows who choke on the plastic linings used. Moreover, there's also the ecological footprint stemming from packaging, manufacturing, transporting, etc. The health concerns reported are also many including adverse allergic reactions and rashes. In my mind, menstrual cups are an eco-friendly and healthy alternative worth exploring.
