

Frequently Asked Questions

About Reusable Menstrual Cups

Can a menstrual cup get lost or stuck inside me?

The vagina, the space in between the vaginal opening and the cervix, is 3 to 6 inches long (Though the cervix can lift up higher when sexually aroused, and lower during menstruation). Blood comes down from the uterus through the cervix from a tiny, tiny hole - this means that nothing can go past the cervix. Because the average menstrual cup is about 2.5 inches tall, it will never be more than 3.5 inches away to reach. This being said, it can definitely feel like it's getting lost or out of reach!

Is using a menstrual cup, cloth pads, or period underwear messy?

It is definitely possible to remove a menstrual cup without spilling any blood on the way out. There will always be a tiny bit of blood on your fingers just from reaching for it, but people generally get used to this, and you can always wipe your fingers with toilet paper before washing your hands at the sink. It is perfectly safe for you to touch your own menstrual blood, though just like the rest of the blood in your body, could pose risks for other people. You do not come into contact with blood on period underwear or cloth pads unless you wash them by hand. If you fold them up to keep the blood on the inside, then your waterproof bag will stay clean and dry.

Will a menstrual cup cause pain or discomfort?

When a cup is in the right position, you shouldn't be able to feel it at all. Inserting and removing a menstrual cup might feel weird, but it should never ever hurt. It is recommended to become comfortable with tampons before trying a menstrual cup. If it does hurt, it may mean that your vaginal muscles are really tense. Insertion is a lot smoother when you are calm, and those muscles are relaxed. Also, it could mean the cup you are using is too firm or big, or you pushed it too hard against your cervix. If the stem of the cup is causing poking or chafing, either you could push the cup up a bit further, or trim the stem to a better length. Some people do report that using a menstrual cup caused more cramps, and some say that it decreases their cramps. If either of these happen to you, you're not alone.

Can I lay down, do cartwheels, swim, and play sports with a menstrual cup in?

A menstrual cup, when positioned the right way, will not leak even if you are laying down, upside down, swimming, running, or anything! This is because the flexible rim conforms to your body and forms a seal. And since the bottom of the cup is resting on the pubic bone, it is almost impossible for a cup to ever fall out. Also, it is impossible for blood to ever go back through the cervix, so don't worry. And in addition to not being able to feel the cup inside you, you definitely will not feel the blood in it "slosh around" even if you lay down or do a handstand.

Some people who have very strong pelvic muscles do say that doing certain activities, their muscles can squeeze the cup too hard and cause a leak. A firmer cup can prevent this.

How do I wash my menstrual cup?

There are no real rules for how often and how much to clean your menstrual cup, but most people wash it completely with mild, unscented soap and clean water at least once a day during menstruation (the other times you empty it, you can just wipe it out with toilet paper and then reinsert). Most people also disinfect their cup every few cycles. This is usually done by boiling it for 5-10 minutes in a pot, while making sure it does *not* touch the hot bottom of the pot. A cool hack is to put the cup inside of a submerged metal whisk. You can also use denture or baby bottle disinfecting tablets in water. Check the instructions of your cup for information on if it is safe to microwave the cup in water. Never use anything oil based or alcohol based (like hand sanitizer) to wash your cup, and avoid strong chemicals like dishwashing soap or bleach. After a while, it is natural that your cup will have some stains, especially if it is a light color. To prevent this, many people will occasionally rinse with diluted vinegar or scrub very gently with a bit of baking soda.

How do I wash my cloth pads or period underwear?

As soon as you change out a pad or underwear, or as soon as you come back home with a used one, you should put it in cold water to soak, ideally in a designated bucket or large tupperware. This will help prevent stains, if you care about that. You can handwash them and air dry, or simply toss them in with the rest of your laundry in the washing machine and dryer, preferably a lower heat setting. If you don't have very many pads or undies, you might have to wash them every day to keep up with your cycle.

What are the risks of TSS with reusable menstrual products?

There is a slight risk of Toxic Shock Syndrome when leaving anything inside of the vagina (or a wound), because of two types of bacteria that can grow and create toxins that cause severe reactions. The more absorbant the item is, and the longer it is left in can increase the risk. Because menstrual cups do not absorb blood, they are much less of a cozy home for potential bacteria, but it is still important to be aware. This is why it is recommended to take out and wash your cup at least every 12 hours, even if it is not full, and to sterilize it every so often. These are the TSS warning signs: sudden high fever, vomiting, diarrhea, dizziness, fainting, sunburn-like rash on hands and feet, aches, redness in eyes and mouth. If this happens to you or someone you know, get medical help immediately! If you have a history of TSS, you should stick with disposable or reusable pads.

Why is my menstrual cup leaking?

If it is not overflowing, then it likely is not positioned under the cervix, or the rim is folded in somewhere instead of being fully opened. For the first scenario, you might want to try different angles, or position it lower down so the opening can't get tucked in front of or behind the cervix. For the second scenario, try running a finger all along the edge of the cup, to feel for folds or gaps. If you do find a fold, try to push on it or under it to get the rim to fully pop open. If that

doesn't work, perhaps twisting the cup or pushing it in further and then tugging it back down to a comfortable place will encourage it to open fully, since the vagina might be more spacious higher up. If that doesn't work, it might be a good idea to take it out, relax, and try again, perhaps with a different fold. This being said, it is very normal for it to take a few cycles with your menstrual cup before you get the hang of it enough to not have leaking, so be sure to use either disposable or cloth pads or liners underneath when starting out.

How long before I get the hang of a menstrual cup and it stops leaking?

This varies for everyone, but it can take a few cycles! If you're really having difficulties and can't find a solution, the cup might be too soft or too small for you. If your leaks always happen when you're working out, for example, try a firmer cup that won't be as affected by lots of movement or muscle clenching. If it's a consistent leak, try one with a wider circumference that will create a better seal.

What about yeast infections?

Some people report getting yeast infections less after making the switch to a reusable product, and some report getting them more. Do be sure to thoroughly wash and disinfect your products well. Most people recommend not using your menstrual cup until the infection is healed, and wearing very breathable underwear with disposable or cloth pads. Especially do NOT use a menstrual cup if you are using creams or ointments to treat it, because they might damage the material.

What about urinary tract infections (UTI)?

A menstrual cup may cause higher chances of a UTI, potentially due to trapping small amounts of urine by pressing on your urethra (the tube from your bladder that pee comes out of) or if you insert your cup without washing your hands first. If this is happening to you, remember to always wash your hands, or consider trying a softer or smaller cup that will not press as much.

What about endometriosis, tilted uterus, or prolapsed uterus?

You may be able to safely use a menstrual cup with any of these conditions, but be sure to talk to your doctor first. With a tilted uterus, you should pay special attention to how high your cervix is, to get a suitable cup, and about the angle of insertion. With a prolapsed uterus, you may need a very short cup, such as the MeLuna Shorty cup. Remember - using a menstrual cup should never cause pain or discomfort while inserting or while in your body. If it does, it might not be in the right position, or it might not be a comfortable option for your body.

Where do I get more information?

Look at the website of your cup's brand - they often have FAQ's and instructions specific to their products. For more information, check out the FAQ's and instructions from other brands' websites. If you're having trouble with menstrual cup folds, look up folding tutorials on Youtube. If you're having trouble with understanding the anatomy, look up diagrams or reproductive/sexual health websites. If you're looking for more troubleshooting help or firsthand

accounts, there are a lot of review websites out there, and the infamous:
<https://menstrual-cups.livejournal.com/>

What about cloth tampons or sea sponges?

Yikes! Because of TSS risks, these are definitely not recommended, although they are reusable options that some people like to use. For health reasons, please do not offer these or recommend them to people!

How do I disinfect my menstrual cup?

Always follow the instructions of the cup company itself!

Generally, you can put it in boiling water (do NOT let it touch the bottom of the pot!) for several minutes, use a disinfecting tablet (for dentures, retainers, or baby bottle nipples), and for some cups, using a microwave.

How long will my menstrual cup last?

Generally, about 8-10 years! But if you notice any tears, rips, scratches, or serious warping, you should get a new one. Also, if you accidentally burn or melt part of it on the bottom of a pot while boiling it, you need to get a new one. If it gets a darker color and stains over the years though, that is perfectly safe and does not mean you need to replace it!

How long can I keep my menstrual cup in?

Generally, you can leave it in for up to 12 hours.

What happens if I leave my menstrual cup in for too long?

Aside from leakage and slightly increased risk of TSS, there is nothing unhealthy about leaving it in for longer than the suggested amount of time. It is a body safe material, and it does not affect your vagina. The blood may start to smell different though. Bottom line: if you forget about your cup for more than the recommended time, don't worry, but try not to do it again.

How do I know what size menstrual cup to get?

Generally, start with a small or medium cup if you've never given birth or are under 30 years old, and a larger cup if you have given birth or are 30 or older. This will work for the majority of folks! If you think you might have an especially low or high cervix, you can also estimate how tall of a cup you should get by reaching a finger into your vagina and measuring how many inches away your cervix is. That is approximately how many inches your cup length plus stem length should be, though remember that you can always trim the stem. If you couldn't reach your cervix at all, then you probably have a high cervix and should get a taller cup. <https://putacupinit.com/> has the breakdown of all the cup and stem dimensions!

What brands are out there?

There are surprisingly a ton of brands of menstrual cups, period underwear, and cloth pads! <https://putacupinit.com/> and <https://menstrualcupreviews.net/> are amazing resources for comparing brands. Amazon.com has a lot of offerings all in one place, and Etsy has a ton of

cloth pads! The more established brands will be more expensive. For menstrual cups, if you're just giving it a trial run, feel free to get a really cheap one off Amazon.com, but if you're getting one to keep for 10 years, look out for ones that specify that they are made of medical grade material, and are FDA approved. Also, for shipping prices, be aware that many menstrual cup companies are based in Europe!

What about camping or traveling?

As long as you'll have access to clean water and soap (and for cloth pads and undies - a way to dry them), it's a go! In fact, traveling or camping can be so much more convenient with reusable products because you don't have to worry about bringing enough, restocking, or where to dispose of used products.

Is it unsafe to touch period blood?

For your own period blood, just like bloody-nose-blood or popped-pimple-blood etc, it is perfectly safe to touch! But remember that there are health risks to touching other people's blood, so be sure to wipe your cup fully with toilet paper before washing it in the sink, to keep everyone safe.

What about IUD's?

You can definitely still use a menstrual cup with an IUD, as long as the strings are not long enough to get caught in between your cup and the vaginal wall, and you are confident in removing the cup without risk of pulling on the strings. Do not push the cup in all the way to your cervix, and always be gentle. You may want to consult your doctor about this.

What if I'm a virgin?

Virginity has many different meanings to many different people and cultures. What's most important is to decide how you feel about putting something inside your vagina, and if that feels fine, then to figure out if it will be physically comfortable to insert something. The hymen is a thin layer of skin that most people are born with, fully or partially covering the opening of the vagina. Everyone's hymens are different. If you menstruate, there must already be at least a small opening that the blood comes out of. Even if you have not had penetrative sex or masturbation before, your hymen is likely already open enough to insert a tampon or folded menstrual cup, just from movement, exercise, and time. Before you try out a menstrual cup, make sure it is comfortable to insert one finger, and then make sure it is comfortable to insert a tampon. If not, then a menstrual cup might not be comfortable to insert either. You can always try again in a few months.

What are menstrual cups made out of?

Either medical grade silicone or medical grade thermoplastic elastomer (TPE). The Keeper Cup is made out of natural latex rubber, which makes it very firm.

What are pads and tampons made out of?

Pad and tampon companies are not required to list their ingredients! Yikes! However, most are made out of cotton, rayon (a synthetic fiber made from wood), and other synthetic fibers for absorbency (some are petroleum-based), and then bleached with chlorine dioxide. Especially recently, people are becoming very concerned about the health impacts of putting these materials in and around our bodies, because of the likely presence of dioxin and other carcinogens, and because of the presence of cotton pesticides. Because of this, many companies are offering organic (no pesticides) cotton and chlorine-free disposable products. Some types of plastics in tampons applicators could also be of concern.

What's wrong with tampons and pads?

Tampons and pads are relatively convenient, safe ways to manage menstrual flow and people deserve full access to them. However, there are some concerns about them. The chemicals and materials in them can cause allergic reactions, irritation, or dryness of the vulva or vagina in some people. Also, their synthetic ingredients, bleaching, and potential pesticides within the cotton may have health impacts. Because they are disposable, they create a need to constantly buy more and more, which can be inconvenient and expensive. Lastly, their production and disposal end up creating a lot of waste and pollution (including tampon applicators).

Will a menstrual cup affect peeing or pooping?

Because your vagina is in between your bladder and rectum, the menstrual cup may push against them. Depending on your body, this might make you have to pee more often, or make it feel weird, slower, or uncomfortable to pee or poop. If this happens to you, you may want to try to softer cup that won't press as much, and if that doesn't work, you may want to remove your cup before pooping.

Can I have sex with a menstrual cup in?

Yes, you can have lots of kinds of manual and oral sex with a menstrual cup in! However, your menstrual cup does take up a few inches of space in the vagina around the cervix, and so pressure of someone's penis might be uncomfortable for both of you. If you're curious about having this kind of sex with a menstrual cup in though, check out the Ziggy Cup. For a non-reusable option, check out SoftCup or FlexCup.

Note: menstrual cups should NEVER be understood as a form of contraception because it will NOT protect from anything.

What if my menstrual cup starts to smell bad?

This is perfectly normal especially if you leave it in for a long time, and does not make your cup less safe! Try boiling it, and if that is not enough, try washing it with diluted vinegar and a bit of baking soda, rinsing it, and then letting it air out.

What if my menstrual cup has dark stains?

This is perfectly normal and does not make your cup less safe! If you would like to try to prevent or remove stains though, wash it with cold water right when you remove it, boil it more

frequently, and you could try using diluted vinegar and a bit of baking soda to wash it once in a while. You can also leave it to air out in a safe place.

How can I get more involved in the menstrual equity movement?

Here are some organizations to look into, beyond your school or local organizations! PERIOD, The Cup Effect, Bloody Good Period, Sustainable Cycles, Knotty Vibes, Free the Tampons, and Period Equity. Find articles online and do your own research. Check out the book [Periods Gone Public: Taking a Stand for Menstrual Equity](#), and investigate any local policy or legislation about menstruation. See if you can attend a PERIOD conference or a Society for Menstrual Cycle Research conference. Get in touch with a local domestic violence or homeless shelter, and ask if they could use some menstrual products, and which kinds. If so, start fundraising, or host a community collection drive. Order reusable menstrual products with a big group of friends to get a discount bulk price. Share information about reusable menstrual products and menstrual equity on social media or by putting up posters in bathrooms. Talk openly about menstruation and challenge the taboo! Whatever you end up doing, thank you for being a part of this work.