

Women Beware: Most Feminine Hygiene Products Contain Toxic Ingredients

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By Dr. Mercola

The issue of what kind of [feminine hygiene products](#) you use is rarely if ever discussed. Yet it's clearly an important topic for every woman out there.

Your skin is the largest organ in your body, and also the thinnest. Less than 1/10th of an inch separates your body from potential toxins. Worse yet, your skin is highly permeable — especially the skin around your vaginal area, not to mention inside the vagina itself.

This is why attention needs to be paid to the ingredients used in tampons and sanitary pads. Most items that come in constant contact with your skin will end up in your bloodstream and distributed throughout your body. This is why I'm so fond of saying "don't put anything on your body that you wouldn't eat if you had to." Putting chemicals on your skin may actually be worse than eating them. When you eat something, the enzymes in your saliva and stomach help to break it down and flush it out of your body. However, when chemicals come in contact with your skin, they are absorbed straight into your bloodstream without filtering of any kind, going directly to your delicate organs. And once these chemicals find their way into your body, they tend to accumulate over time because you typically lack the necessary enzymes to break them down. In my opinion, the realm of feminine hygiene can be likened to a "ticking time bomb." Because when you consider your exposure over the course of a lifetime, it really adds up; the average American woman uses up to 16,800 tampons in her lifetime — or as many as 24,360 if she's on estrogen replacement therapy. And that's just tampons... Many women use countless sanitary pads in place of, or in addition to tampons. When this same 'average' woman has a baby, she may also use maternity and nursing pads.

What's Really in Those Sanitary Pads and Tampons?

In the featured article¹, Andrea Donsky, founder of Naturally Savvy and co-author of *Label Lessons: Your Guide to a Healthy Shopping Cart*, reveals just how little we are allowed to know about the ingredients used in feminine hygiene products.

In fact, manufacturers of tampons and sanitary pads are not required to disclose the ingredients used because feminine hygiene products are considered "medical devices."

When Andrea called Procter & Gamble directly to find out what's in their Always Infinity pads, the only ingredients the service reps could give her were: foam and a patented ingredient called Infinicel² — a highly absorbent material that can hold up to 10 times its weight.

In the above video, she demonstrates what happens when you burn an organic versus a conventional sanitary pad. The 100% organic cotton pad, made by Natracare, burns slow and clean, leaving virtually no sooty residue at all. The Always Infinity pad on the other hand, with its mostly undisclosed ingredients, create lots of black smoke and thick residue — indications that the pad may contain dioxins, synthetic fibers and petrochemical additives. In fact, according to her research, each conventional sanitary pad contains the equivalent of about four plastic bags! With everything we now know about the hazardous nature of [plastic chemicals](#), this alone is cause for concern. For example, plasticizing chemicals like [BPA](#) and [BPS](#) disrupt embryonic development and are linked to heart disease and cancer. [Phthalates](#) — which give paper tampon applicators that smooth feel and finish — are known to dysregulate gene expression, and [DEHP](#) may lead to multiple organ damage. Besides crude oil plastics, conventional sanitary pads can also contain a myriad of other potentially hazardous ingredients, such as odor neutralizers and [fragrances](#). Synthetics and plastic also restrict the free flow of air and can trap heat and dampness, potentially promoting the growth of yeast and bacteria in your vaginal area.

The Price You Pay for 'Clean' White Tampons and Pads

Furthermore, to give tampons and pads that pristine, "clean" white look, the fibers used must be bleached. Chlorine is commonly used for this, which can create toxic dioxin and other disinfection-by-products (DBPs) such as trihalomethane. Studies show that dioxin collects in your fatty tissues, and according to a draft report by the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), dioxin a serious public health threat that has *no* "safe" level of exposure! Published reports show that even low or trace levels of dioxins may be linked to:

- Abnormal tissue growth in the abdomen and reproductive organs
- Abnormal cell growth throughout the body
- Immune system suppression
- Hormonal and endocrine system disruption

Meanwhile, the FDA's official stance regarding trace amounts of dioxins is that there are no expected health risks associated with trace amounts of dioxins in tampons... Naturally Savvy notes that 10 years ago, House Representative Carolyn Maloney introduced legislation that would have required research into the potential health risks of any ingredient used in feminine hygiene products, including endometriosis, cervical, ovary and breast cancers. Unfortunately, the legislation did not pass, and it does not appear that any such research has been done.

Could You Be Absorbing GMO's Via Your Tampons?

Andrea discovered a number of shocking details about the potential hazards posed by tampons and sanitary pads during her research for the book, *Label Lessons*, such as³:

- *Conventional tampons contain pesticides... Cotton crops make up just 2.4 percent of the world's land, but each year a whopping \$2 billion is spent on pesticides to spray this one crop.*
- *Tampons and pads with odor neutralizers and other artificial fragrances are nothing short of a chemical soup laced with artificial colors, polyester, adhesives, polyethylene (PET), polypropylene, and propylene glycol (PEG), contaminants linked to hormone disruption, cancer, birth defects, dryness, and infertility.*
- *Conventional tampons most probably contain genetically modified organisms (GMOs). According the USDA, 94 percent of all the cotton planted in the US is genetically engineered.*

As Andrea questions, is inserting a [GMO](#) tampon into your vagina several times every month any different than ingesting GMO food? For all we know it may be worse, considering the fact that your vaginal wall is highly permeable, allowing toxins direct access into your bloodstream — be it pesticide residue or a GMO protein.

Beware of Toxic Shock Syndrome

It's important to remember that tampons can create a favorable environment for bacteria growth. Micro tears in the vaginal wall from tampons allow bacteria to enter and accumulate. One recognized risk from tampon use is Toxic Shock Syndrome (TSS), which may be caused by poisonous toxins from either *Staphylococcus aureus* (staph) or group A streptococcus (strep) bacteria. TSS can be a life-threatening condition, so it's important to recognize the signs and symptoms. Should any of the following symptoms arise while using tampons during your period, make sure you seek medical help:

Sudden high fever	Vomiting	Diarrhea
Low blood pressure	Seizures	Rash on palms or soles of feet
Muscle aches	Redness of your eyes, mouth and/or throat	

To minimize your risk of this potentially life-threatening condition:

Avoid super absorbent tampons - choose the lowest absorbency rate to handle your flow	Never leave a tampon inserted overnight; use overnight pads instead	When inserting a tampon, be extremely careful not to scratch your vaginal lining (avoid plastic applicators)
Alternate the use of tampons with sanitary napkins or mini-pads during your period	Change tampons at least every 4-6 hours	Do not use a tampon between periods

Safer Alternatives

Many of today's feminine hygiene products are made primarily from rayon, viscose, and cellulose wood fluff pulp... *not* cotton — let alone organic cotton. Rayon and viscose present a potential danger in part because of their highly absorbent fibers. When used in tampons, these fibers can stick to your vaginal wall, and when you remove the tampon, the loosened fibers stay behind inside your body, thereby raising your risk of TSS. Fortunately, there are safer alternatives, and since the FDA regulates tampon absorbency, all tampons on the market

must meet the same absorption guidelines. According to Dr. Philip Tierno, a Clinical Professor of Microbiology and Pathology at NYU Medical Centre, 100 percent cotton tampons "consistently test under detectable levels for TSS toxins." Based on her own research, Andrea recommends the following brands of tampons and sanitary pads listed below. I've also created an exclusive line of organic cotton feminine hygiene products, which you can find in my online store.

- Natracare
- Diva Cup
- Seventh Generation Chlorine Free Organic Cotton Tampons
- Glad Rags Organic Pads
- Organyc 100% Organic Cotton Tampons

Take Action: Ask for Full Disclosure

To push for full disclosure labelling, Naturally Savvy has created a petition asking Procter & Gamble to disclose the ingredients in their feminine hygiene products. You can sign their petition [here](#).

"Disclosing what's in the products they make that go in and on women's bodies should not be optional, it should be mandatory!" she writes. "We need companies to be accountable for the products they manufacture. We need to know ahead of time how to avoid the rayon, pesticide residue, GMO cotton, dioxins, chemical toxins, petrochemicals, and plastic often found in conventional feminine hygiene products. We need to have full disclosure labelling on tampons and pads so, as women, we can make informed decisions when it comes to the products we buy."

For more information about the potential health risks posed by ingredients commonly used in feminine hygiene products, you may [download the book](#) *Label Lessons: Your Guide to a Healthy Shopping Cart* for free until June 26, 2013.