



Center for
Young Women's Health
Children's Hospital
Boston

A Guide to Using Your First Tampon

You may feel nervous about using a tampon for the first time. It is normal to feel nervous, especially if you have any unanswered questions about tampons. Hopefully, this guide will answer your questions, address your worries, and make your first experience with tampons a positive one!

Myth or Fact? Take the Tampon Facts Quiz...

There are many myths about tampons. Test your knowledge, to see how much you really know about tampons.

1. Tampons are a healthy alternative to pads.
True False
2. If I use a tampon, I am at a very high risk for infections.
True False
3. A tampon can get lost inside of me.
True False
4. If I use tampons, I will no longer be a virgin.
True False
5. I can swim while wearing a tampon.
True False
6. Tampons fall out with physical activity.
True False

See below for the answers.

What are tampons and how do they work?

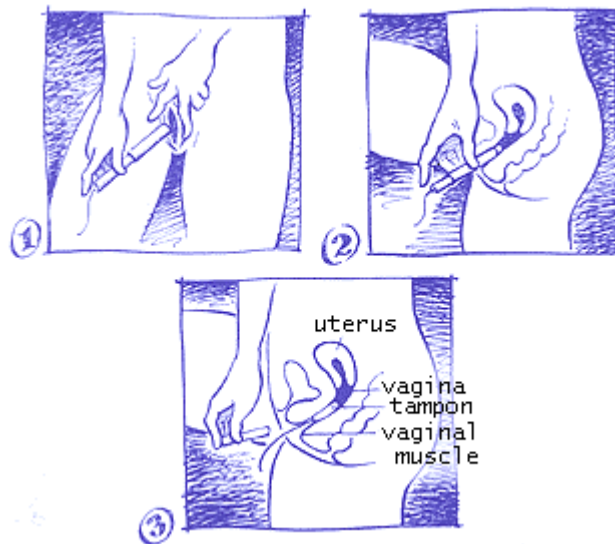
Tampons, like pads, are products used to absorb your menstrual flow. They are made of soft cotton pressed together to form a cylinder-like shape, so that they can be easily inserted into the opening of the vagina. A tampon absorbs your menstrual flow, or blood, before it has a chance to leave the body. Tampons come in all different sizes and absorbencies and can be purchased at most convenience stores or supermarkets.

How do you insert a tampon?

You may be worried and nervous about using your first tampon. Talk to your mom or a friend who has used tampons. It is important to first learn how to use a tampon and then, just relax! The more you relax, the easier the insertion will be. When you are nervous, your muscles tense up, making insertion even harder. For your first time, you may want to try using a tampon when your menstrual flow is heavy; this should allow the tampon to glide in more easily. Choose the smallest size tampon for the first time. By following these simple guidelines, and those that come with your package of tampons, your first experience with tampons should be easy.

1. Sit or stand in a comfortable position. Some women prefer to place one leg on the toilet seat or tub, while others prefer to squat down. After you find a position that is most comfortable for you, hold the tampon with the fingers that you write with. Hold the middle of the tampon, at the spot where the smaller, inner tube inserts into the larger, outer tube. Make sure the string is visible and pointing away from your body.
2. With your other hand, open the labia (the folds of skin around the vaginal opening) and position the tampon in the vaginal opening.
3. Gently push the tampon into the opening, aiming for the small of your back. Stop when your fingers touch your body and the applicator, or outer tube, is completely inside the vagina.
4. Once the applicator or outer tube is inside of you, use your index finger to push the inner tube (the tube where the removal string is connected) through the outer tube.
5. Once the inner tube is all the way in, use your thumb and middle finger to remove the applicator or outer tube. Make sure that the string hangs outside of the vaginal opening. Later, in order to remove a tampon, just pull downward on the removal string.

If the tampon is inserted correctly, you should not feel it. If you feel uncomfortable in any way, you may have inserted the tampon incorrectly or the tampon may not be placed far enough into the vagina. If this occurs, just remove the tampon and start again with a new tampon. Remember that practice makes perfect. If you don't get it on the first try, your second try will most likely be successful. Instead of getting frustrated and giving up, relax and try again!



What if I still don't succeed?

If you don't succeed after several times, see your health care provider. It may be that you were born with a very small opening in your hymen and you can't insert tampons. This is true in only about 2% of teens, but it could be a problem.

A mirror is often helpful so that you can see where your vaginal opening is. Sometimes, even using a small amount of vaginal lubricant (K-Y Jelly) on the end of the tampon will help the first one glide in.

What is TSS?

You've probably heard of this disease before, and how it may be connected to tampon use. TSS (Toxic Shock Syndrome) is an infection that is **very rare**, but potentially dangerous. TSS can affect anyone, male or female. However, it occurs most frequently in young women who wear tampons. You will probably never get TSS, but it's good to know what the symptoms are and how to avoid putting yourself at risk.

Tampons themselves do not cause TSS. TSS is caused by bacteria called *Staphylococcus aureus*. When a tampon is left inside your vagina for too long, it creates a perfect environment for different types of bacteria, including

Staphylococcus aureus, to grow. To avoid developing TSS, follow these guidelines when using tampons:

- **Change your tampons frequently** (at least every 4-8 hours).
- **Choose the correct tampon absorbency.** Use smaller sized tampons when your flow is lighter. TSS occurs more often when super-absorbent tampons are used. Don't use these unless your menstrual flow is particularly heavy.
- **Alternate between pad and tampon use.** You might want to use pads at night, and tampons in the daytime.
- **Wash your hands** before inserting or taking out your tampon.
- **Don't use tampons to absorb anything other than your menstrual flow.** Only insert a tampon once menstrual blood is present.

If you experience the following symptoms while **wearing a tampon**, remove the tampon, and contact your health care provider immediately! These symptoms may seem similar to those of the flu. If they occur while you are menstruating and wearing a tampon, they may signal TSS. Otherwise, they may indicate another infection. It is recommended that you see your health care provider regardless. Symptoms of TSS include:

- Sudden high fever
- A sunburn-like rash
- Diarrhea
- Dizziness, fainting, or lightheadedness
- Vomiting

By following these simple guidelines, chances are you'll never have to worry about TSS. However, it is a good idea to recognize the symptoms, just in case.

So what now?

Check the answers to the quiz that you took at the beginning. Good luck with your first tampon!

1. Tampons are a healthy alternative to pads.

TRUE. Whether you use pads or tampons, it's your choice. You should base your decision on what you feel most comfortable using. Whatever your decision, both methods are healthy and safe ways to absorb your menstrual flow.

2. If I use a tampon, I am at a very high risk for infections.

FALSE. Tampons do not put you at a very high risk for infections. If used correctly, tampons are a safe way to absorb your menstrual flow. There is however, a very slim chance that you can develop Toxic Shock Syndrome. (See "What is TSS?")

3. A tampon can get lost inside of me.

FALSE. It is impossible for a tampon to get lost inside your body. Once a tampon is inserted into the vagina, the muscles in your vagina hold the tampon in place. Also, the opening of the cervix (the structure located above the vagina) is too small for any object like a tampon to enter. Normally the string hangs outside so that all you need to do is pull on it to remove the tampon. Occasionally, however, the string that allows a young woman to pull out the tampon can also get inserted with the tampon. If this should occur, don't panic! All you need to do is relax and manually remove the tampon with your fingers.

4. If I use tampons, I will no longer be a virgin.

FALSE. Using a tampon will not affect your virginity. The only way to lose your virginity is through vaginal intercourse.

5. I can swim while wearing a tampon.

TRUE. One of the benefits to using tampons is that you can participate in all water and physical activities, whether or not you have your period! Occasionally, the tampon may absorb some water. Don't worry, this will only cause the tampon to become a little wet with water and will have to be changed shortly after swimming.

6. Tampons fall out with physical activity.

False. When a tampon is properly inserted into your vagina, the muscles inside your vagina naturally hold the tampon in place so it can't fall out, even when playing active sports. When it's time to change or remove your tampon, these same muscles relax so the tampon can come out.

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