

Making Ripples

Periods for the Planet: Alternative Menstrual Products

by Amanda Bancroft

Ladies, this one is specifically directed at you, and any men who care about a woman in their life (daughter, mother, sister, wife...). The topic may be a bit uncomfortable, but if no one talks about it, no one knows they have choices!

Menstrual products, like milk products, have come to commonly mean only brands that provide one option. I grew up thinking that the only milk in existence came from cows, despite my lactose intolerance. Eventually I discovered there were plenty of milk options that wouldn't lead to ovarian cancer and bowel issues, including milk made from soy, almonds, rice, and hemp. There is no scarcity of options when it comes to menstrual products, too, but no one told me this until college.

Inevitably, when I was "on my period" I'd feel embarrassed by crinkling pad wrappers in public bathrooms. I'd be sore from the cotton bleach chemicals and ripped out pubic hair caught in the glue (ouch!). Warning labels for Toxic Shock Syndrome on the tampon box scared me, and I felt guilty that each day I was creating a wad of waste that smelled horrible, too.

Women have a variety of more sustainable options from organic disposables to reusable products, for example: sea sponges, reusable latex-free tampons, organic cotton disposable pads, organic cotton fleece pads (super soft!), and reusable cotton pads that come in so many fabrics it's mind-boggling. My favorite fabric just released by Lunapads is "That 70's Flow" with peace signs and happy faces. We can also get poodles, kitties, glow-in-the-dark stars and tie-dye patterns. But that's just one of the many brands selling alternative menstrual products. Others include Party in My Pants, Gladrags, Natracare, The Keeper, and The Mooncup. These sustainable options (except the organic disposables) can be washed out and reused for years! Mine have lasted over 5 years now, and saved me hundreds of dollars.

Women have chosen to use sustainable menstrual products for a variety of reasons, such as health concerns, the desire to save money, and to protect the environment. Most disposable pads are made of bleached wood pulp, with the leak-proof barrier composed of polypropylene film. These materials are not biodegradable nor are they recyclable. According to Moonpads, over 14 billion pads, tampons and applicators are thrown into North American landfills each year. In parts of Africa, where no landfills exist, this has created a sanitation problem and keeps many girls out of school because they lack access to reusable products. Lunapads has a program called Pads4Girls that increases girls' access to reusable pads.

For a brochure on alternative menstrual product brands online, as well as alternative words for menstruation in slang, check out Ripples' blog!

Ripples is a blog connecting people to resources on sustainable living while chronicling their off-grid journey and supporting the work of non-profit organizations. Read more on this topic and others at www.RipplesBlog.org