



FACT SHEET

What conventional stores tell you about feminine hygiene products?

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Hygiene products play an essential role in women's life by helping them stay clean and confident. They are comfortable and convenient which makes women depend on them on a daily basis.

Conventional stores suggest a [variety of hygiene products](#) including external products such as sanitary pads and panty liners as well as internal tampons and menstrual cups. Women chose what suits better for their lifestyle. However while constantly buying and disposing of hygiene products, not many women know that these products contain a variety of toxic chemicals, including [dioxins, pesticides, bleach and chemical fragrances](#) that may seriously impact their health.

Conventional feminine hygiene products are made from cotton, rayon, or a blend of both. To make them look white, the fibers are bleached using [chlorine dioxide](#). Though this new method of bleaching is less harmful than the one of 1998, it still produces dioxins which end up in the final product. However bleaching is not the only way dioxins get in the hygiene products. Traces of dioxins are found in tampons even those made of 100% cotton¹ because crops can absorb them from soil, water and air where these persistent organic pollutants have been detected.

In fact cotton is considered a dirty crop laden with pesticides and toxic chemicals. To fight pests on cotton plantations farmers apply highly hazardous pesticides like [aldicarb, parathion, and methamidophor](#) which are the most acutely hazardous to human health. According to [Cotton pesticides statistics](#), hazardous pesticides used during cotton

production can also be detected in various pieces of products made from cotton.

Noting that genetically modified cotton is grown extensively, crops are heavily sprayed with glyphosate-containing products. The International Agency for research on Cancer classified glyphosate a probable human carcinogenⁱⁱ. Farmers can use as much these products as they want because GMO cotton is resistant to glyphosate. As result "[85% of tampons, pads and other feminine care products are contaminated with Monsanto's cancer-causing, endocrine-disrupting glyphosate](#)"ⁱⁱⁱ

Neither of these and other toxins are mentioned on the product labels leaving consumers unaware of their presence and potential health threat. If the brand includes cotton on the label of a hygiene product, consumers automatically think it is safe and do not look for any additional information. However, inserting conventional cotton tampons into vagina many times month after month is like challenging your health as you put yourself at risk of absorbing cancer-causing pesticides and added toxins. Alexandra Scranton, Women's Voices for the Earth's director of science and research, says tampons² "are not just your average cosmetics because they are used on an exceptionally sensitive and absorbent part of a woman's body."^{iv}

In addition to various negative health effects, dispose of hygiene products could have a serious impact on the environment. [Change to Green](#) estimates that more than 45 billion tampons and sanitary pads are used every year resulting in 3.2 million kg of waste. It takes 500 years for a regular tampon or other conventional hygiene products to decompose as they are largely made of plastic.

According to [Change to Green](#), even the average "100% cotton" product that many of us believe to be pure fabric, in fact contains only 73% of cotton. "The remaining 27% consists of chemicals, resins and binders used in farming and manufacturing". Conventional sanitary pads are made up from up to 90% crude oil plastic and can contain associated plasticizing chemicals like BPA and BPS, and petrochemical additives which are known endocrine disrupting substances and are linked to heart diseases and cancer. Phthalates, mainly used as plasticizers, are a common ingredient in tampon applicators, and are known to disrupt hormone function and may lead to multiple organ diseases. Phthalates leach from finished products when handled. They can be released from a product by heat, agitation, and prolonged storage.

If conventional hygiene products contain plastic, could they be recycled to reduce their load on the environmental? Nor really as they are designed to collect human waste. In addition these products are largely made of low-density polyethylene. According to a Life Cycle Assessment of tampons conducted by the [Swedish Royal Institute of Technology](#), recycling of low-density polyethylene is energy consuming as it requires high amounts of fossil fuel generated energy. As a result, used hygiene products usually end up either in landfills, sewer systems, waterways or are incinerated.

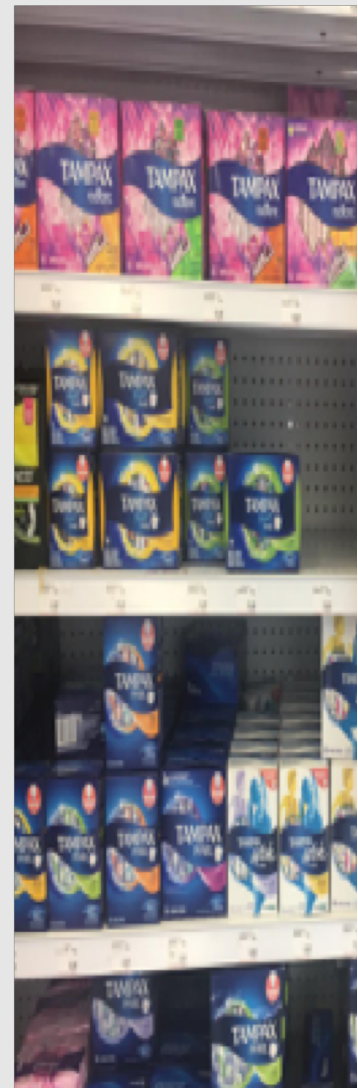
To address health and environmental risks caused by feminine hygiene products, some women decide to switch to organic products which are made of organic cotton grown

without pesticides and with no fragrance added^v.. Such products reduce women's exposure to toxic chemicals and potentially reduce risk of diseases^{vi}.

Despite obvious benefits of organic feminine hygiene products, a small survey conducted by HEJSupport in Canada revealed serious problems. We asked 25 adult women of child bearing age and 25 teenage girls of between 15 and 17 years old to answer a few simple questions (see Table A):

Questions

1. Do you buy organic hygiene products like tampons or pads?
 - never
 - always
 - occasionally
 - always when I see them in store
 - I do not have time to search for organic hygiene products as they are only available in specialized stores. But I would buy them if they are available in conventional stores.
 - I do not have budget for organic hygiene products as they are well more expensive
2. Do you know if organic hygiene products are better for your health?
 - No
 - Yes
 - There is no difference. Conventional products are also made of cotton.
 - Conventional products are better as they are available everywhere in drugstores.



Result

25 adult women of child bearing age				25 Teenage girls 15-17 years old			
Do you buy organic hygiene products like tampons or pads?		Do you know if organic hygiene products are better for your health?		Do you buy organic hygiene products like tampons or pads?		Do you know if organic hygiene products are better for your health?	
never	13 (52%)	No	18 (72%)	never	20 (80%)	No	17 (68%)
always	5 (20%)	Yes	7 (28%)	always	2 (8%)	Yes	8 (32%)
occasionally	7 (28%)	There is no difference. Conventional products are also made of cotton.	15 (60%)	occasionally	3 (12%)	There is no difference. Conventional products are also made of cotton.	15 (60%)
always when I see them in store	4 (16%)	Conventional products are better as they are available everywhere even in drugstores	14 (56%)	always when I see them in store	2 (8%)	Conventional products are better as they are available everywhere even in drugstores	10 (40%)
I do not have time to search for organic hygiene products as they are only available in specialized stores. But I would buy them if they are available in conventional stores	8 (32%)			I do not have time to search for organic hygiene products as they are only available in specialized stores. But I would buy them if they are available in conventional stores	3 (12%)		
I do not have budget for organic hygiene products as they are well more expensive	6 (24%)			I do not have budget for organic hygiene products as they are well more expensive	15 (60%)		

Table A



Results of data analysis (Table A) revealed serious problems associated with organic product availability, product cost, and awareness about product health benefits. More than half of adult women and 80% of teenage girls interviewed never buy organic products. More than 30% of adult interviewees and 12% of girls complained about product availability in stores saying that they do not have time to search for organic hygiene products as they are only available in specialized stores, while 24% of adult women and 60% of girls cannot afford organic products due to their higher price in comparison to

conventional analogues. Only 28% of adult women and 32% of girls interviewed know about health benefits of organic hygiene products, while 60% believe there is no difference as both organic and conventional hygiene products are made of cotton, and 56% of adult and 40% of teenage interviewees even consider conventional products to be a better and healthier choice because they are available in drugstores.

During interviews women noted that conventional stores suggest a broad variety of hygiene products. Such diversity along with the relatively low price gives customers an opportunity to try several products of different types and brands before making a choice they usually stick to for many years. On the opposite, organic products are usually presented by one brand only which restricts choice.

In addition, women often purchase hygiene products when they actually need them giving a preference to conventional stores which are close by. Such stores may have limited or no organic products available, however they are convenient and address women's momentary needs.

ⁱ <http://www.center4research.org/tampon-safety/>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/27552246>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.sott.net/article/341012-85-of-tampons-pads-and-other-feminine-care-products-contaminated-with-Monsantos-cancer-causing-endocrine-disrupting-glyphosate>

^{iv} <https://articles.mercola.com/sites/articles/archive/2019/02/13/absorbent-hygiene-products-health-risks.aspx>

^v <https://integrisok.com/resources/on-your-health/2018/september/organic-feminine-hygiene-products>

^{vi} <https://articles.mercola.com/sites/articles/archive/2019/02/13/absorbent-hygiene-products-health-risks.aspx>

^{vii}