

# ENVIRON MENSTRUAL FACTSHEET 2023



# PERIODS



Women and people who menstruate use more than 11,000 disposable menstrual products in their lifetime – based on an average of 38 years of menstruating using 22 items of menstrual products per cycle, with 13 cycles per year.



In 2019, it is estimated that 1.64 million women (aged 15+) in the UK used 25 or more menstrual pads per month.<sup>(1)</sup>



Average menstrual flow is around 20 - 90ml (1 to 5 tablespoons) per cycle. Barely enough to fill a small teacup. Most women, girls and people who menstruate will do so for on average 38 years and have approx. 500 periods in their lifetime.<sup>(2)</sup>



The average age of commencement for menstruation is 12 years old, although it can be as early as 8 years old for some girls.<sup>(3)</sup>



Each period can cost on average £10, that's £130 a year and £4940 over a lifetime.<sup>(4,5)</sup>



Disposal of menstrual products - tampons, pads, cups and period pants generates 28,114 tonnes of waste per year in the UK.<sup>(6)</sup>



The average woman or person who menstruates throws away up to 200kg of menstrual products in their lifetime.

# CARBON IMPACT



By switching from tampons to menstrual cups people can have 16 times less carbon impact, saving 7 kg CO<sub>2</sub>e (7) over a year.(8)



A single year of menstruation for an average menstruating woman or person who menstruates using mainstream disposable products amounts to a carbon footprint of 5.3kg of CO<sub>2</sub>e.(9)



Given the 1.64 million women and girls menstruating in the UK, that's 8,692 tons of carbon which could drive two wind turbines for a year or is equivalent to a year's emissions from 1,715 cars.(10)

# ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT



Most single use disposable menstrual pads can be made of up to 90% plastic.(11)



Bearing in mind the adhesives, packing, etc, each pad is equivalent to around 4 plastic bags.(12)



Plastic products can take up to a thousand years to decompose in landfill. They can also resist breakdown in the ocean and could persist in the global environment for decades, adversely affecting poor, marginalised and vulnerable communities.(13)



Flush and forget – It has been estimated that of the 4.3 billion menstrual products used each year in the UK between 1.5-2 billion are flushed. That is about 35-47% of products. (15)



Research shows that tampons are perceived as flushable due to their size and composition i.e. 'cottony'. Also, the mechanics of removal makes it appear more 'hygienic' to flush.(14)

# FLUSH AND FORGET



75% of drain blockages are caused by people flushing wet wipes down the toilet. There are approximately 300,000 sewer blockages a year, costing the country £100 million. <sup>(18)</sup> Over twenty-four million people across the UK have admitted to flushing wet wipes, tampons or sanitary pads without thinking of the consequences. <sup>(46)</sup> <sup>(47)</sup>



In Scotland, the figure is estimated to be 220,000 tampons and 122,000 pads which are flushed down the loo. That is 30% of all disposable products used. <sup>(15)</sup>



The 2022 Marine Conservation Society (MCS) Beachwatch programme, found that Sewage Related Debris (SRB), which contains single use period products, comprised 15% of the total litter items recorded on surveyed beaches throughout the UK. 75% of beach litter surveys across the UK find at least one sewage-related item. According to MCS, Scottish beaches saw a huge increased SRD in 2022 with on average of SRD per 100m of beach. <sup>(16)</sup>



Along with wet wipes, 'feminine hygiene products' are the top 7 items which cause 300,000 sewer blockages each year costing £100 million to resolve. <sup>(17)</sup>, <sup>(18)</sup>



In a big u-turn the fine to flush certification on wet wipes will end in March 2024 due to consumer confusion over which wet wipes are ok to flush and which are not. <sup>(19)</sup>



No flush campaigns reduce blockages by 32% in target areas. <sup>(19)</sup>

# ECONOMIC IMPACT



Reusable period products cost 88% to 98% less than disposables ones over the product lifetime.<sup>(20)</sup>



Anglian Water has a period cost calculator.<sup>(21)</sup>



Using a menstrual cup can save up to £3, 700 over a lifetime.<sup>(22)</sup>



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If the whole of the period product market were to move to reusables such as the menstrual cup, the total market value would fall from £48 million to just £1.1m per year. If menstrual cups were replaced five times as frequently (on average every 2 years) the market would be worth £5.6 million.<sup>(24)</sup> But most menstrual cups last for up to 10 years.



A survey of major retailers in Scotland revealed that the range of what period products available on their shelves is based mainly on commercial considerations. The decision-making process takes into account retailers' own brand and brand name products, whether products are part of a campaign or promotion, as well as how products fit with the retailers' corporate identity and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) strategy.<sup>(20)</sup>

# HEALTH IMPACT



If the same levels of fragrance found in menstrual products were in cosmetic products, they would require mandatory labelling.<sup>(25)</sup>



Certain occupations, such as those working in microelectronics and pharmaceuticals, <sup>(26)</sup> can expose women and people who menstruate to chemicals linked with menstrual abnormalities.<sup>(27)</sup>



Some period pants can contain #PFAS – a forever chemical linked to certain cancers, infertility, developmental disorders, obesity, miscarriage and asthma and allergies.<sup>(28)</sup>



Black women may be at more risk of developing or worsening their asthma than the general population from exposure to toxic chemicals in period products, personal care and hair products. <sup>(29)</sup>



Period products have been found to be a considerable source of exposure to endocrine disrupting chemicals (EDCs) <sup>(30)</sup> such as phthalates, bisphenols and parabens for women. These chemicals are linked to cancer, reproductive and developmental disorders, birth defects, asthma and allergies. This is because the skin of the vagina is extremely absorbent, so the absorption rates are higher. <sup>(31,32)</sup>



Synthetic fragrances including those added to period products can contain a cocktail of up to 3,000 chemicals. They can contain chemicals which are carcinogens, allergens, irritants, and EDCs. EDCs are linked, not only to breast cancer and infertility, but to many other reproductive diseases and disorders such as endometriosis.<sup>(33)</sup>



Despite changes in bleaching practices to purify the wood pulp – one of the raw materials used to make menstrual products – chlorine and dioxin (one of the most toxic substances known to humankind) can still be found in menstrual pads and tampons. <sup>(34,35,36)</sup>

# MICROPLASTICS



Every year between 8 and 13 million tonnes of plastic enter our ocean. Globally, some areas of our oceans now contain six times more microplastics than plankton.(37)



White-throated dippers were tested at 15 river sites in south Wales. The birds, which feed on river insects, were eating about 200 pieces of plastic a day. These were mostly fibres, and a quarter were larger than 500 microns.(38)



Microplastics can be twice as harmful leaching toxic additives into the ocean when they break down, while also acting like a sponge absorbing other harmful chemicals from the sea water onto their surface. This makes a very toxic morsel for fish, sea mammals and the human that eat them.(39)



Studies have found that the birds which feed on river insects were eating about 200 pieces of plastic a day. Microplastics concentrations are so ubiquitous that in some waters there may be more plastic than zooplankton. (40)



A University of Manchester study found up to 1.9 million plastic pieces per square metre on the ocean floor including fibres from clothing and other synthetic textiles, and tiny fragments from larger objects that had broken down over time.(41)



82% of British adults support mandatory labelling for single-use products containing plastic.(42)



As many as 51 trillion microplastic particles - 500 times more than the stars in our galaxy —litter our oceans and seas, seriously threatening marine wildlife. (43)

# PERIOD IMPACT



42% of girls in the UK struggle to afford period products resorting to makeshift items like toilet paper. 1 in 10 girls are unable to afford period products leading to 27% of girls in the UK using a period product for longer than recommended because they could not afford a fresh one. (44)



Bloody Good Period, a charity which provides free period products to those that need them, they provided 119,000 packets in 2022 alone.(45)



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