

ENVIRONMENTAL FACT SHEET

Menstruation by numbers for women and people who menstruate

- Women use **more than 11,000 disposable menstrual products in their lifetime** - based on average of 38 years of menstruation using 22 items of sanitary products per cycle, 13 cycles per year.¹
- Statista estimated that in 2016, an estimated 1.8 million women (aged 15+) in the UK used 25 or more menstrual towels a month.²
- Average menstrual flow is around 85g per cycle. Barely enough to fill a small teacup. Most women and people who menstruate will do so for on average of 38 years and have approx. 500 periods in their lifetime.¹
- The average of commencement for menstruation is 12 yrs old, although it can be as early as 8 for some girls and people who menstruate.³
- Each period can cost up to £41, that's £492/year and **£18,450 over a lifetime**.⁴
- There are around 18 million women of menstruating age in the UK.⁵
- Disposal of single use menstrual products - tampons, pads and applicators **generates 200,000 tonnes of waste per year**.⁶

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Menstruation and Sanitary protection/Femcare market facts and figures, (2007), Absorbent Hygiene Products Manufacturers Association. <http://www.ahpma.co.uk/docs/Menstruation%20Facts%20and%20Figs.pdf>

² Feminine hygiene product consumption in the UK (Kantar Media TGI). Number of women using sanitary towels as feminine hygiene products in the United Kingdom (UK) from 2013 to 2016, by frequency of use (in 1,000s), Statista Dossier.

³ Starting your periods. NHS Choices. 2018 <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/periods/starting-periods/>

⁴ Moss, R., 2015. Women Spend More Than £18,000 On Having Periods In Their Lifetime, Study Reveals. *The Huffington Post*.

<http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2015/09/03/women-spend-thousands-on-periods-tampon-tax_n_8082526.html>

⁵ Calculation from ONS data in Feminine Hygiene and Sanitary Protection Products. UK March 2016.

⁶ Knowwaste <https://www.knowwaste.com/>

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Environmental impact by the numbers

- Most menstrual pads are made from 90% plastic.⁷
- Plastic products can take up to a thousand years to decompose in landfills or in the ocean.⁸
- **Half of UK women flush tampons away.** It has been estimated that 1.5-2 billion menstrual items are flushed down Britain's toilets each year.⁹
- There are approximately 370,000 sewer blockages throughout the UK every year, of which up to 80% are caused by fats, oils and grease, wipes, sanitary waste and other unflushable items.¹⁰
- 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.¹¹
- Microplastics can be twice as harmful leaching toxic additives into the ocean while they break down while also acting like a sponge absorbing other harmful chemicals from the sea water onto their surface. This makes them a very toxic morsel for fish, sea mammals and the humans that eat them.¹²
- Plastic waste kills up to 1 million seabirds, 100,000 sea mammals, marine turtles and countless fish each year. **Plastic remains in our ecosystem for years,** harming thousands of sea creatures every day.¹³

⁷ Calculation by Natracare 2018.

⁸ Plastic Planet: How tiny plastic particles are polluting our soil. UNEP 2018.

<https://www.unenvironment.org/news-and-stories/story/plastic-planet-how-tiny-plastic-particles-are-polluting-our-soil>

⁹ Marine plastics: pollution policy and position statement, 2015, Marine Conservation Society.

¹⁰ Water UK, 'Fats, Oils and Grease | Water UK', 2017

<https://www.water.org.uk/policy/environment/waste-and-wastewater/fats-oils-and-grease> [accessed April 2018].

¹¹ The Ocean Conference. UN 2017

https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/Ocean_Factsheet_Pollution.pdf

¹² Marine Plastic Debris and Microplastics. Global lessons and research to inspire action and guide policy change. UNEP 2016

¹³ The Ocean Conference. UN 2017

https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/Ocean_Factsheet_Pollution.pdf

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- The Marine Conservation Society estimates that sewage related debris (which includes sanitary products) makes up about 8.5% of Britain's beach litter. 18,050 pieces were found in 2017. ^{14 15}
- Figures from the Marine Conservation Society reveal 4 pads, panty liners and backing strips are found for every 100m of beach cleaned, along with 1.2 used tampons and applicators. That's **4.8 pieces of menstrual waste on average per 100m of beach in the UK.** ¹⁶
- The number of wet wipes found on UK beaches has increased 94% since 2016. Even wipes labelled 'flushable' can block pipes and enter our waterways. ¹⁵

Economic impact

- It costs £88 million a year **to unblock sewers blocked by menstrual products** (combined with fats, oils, grease and food waste) in the UK. ¹⁷

Health impact

- Despite changes in bleaching practices to purify the wood pulp – one of 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 towels and tampons. ^{18 19 20}
- **Endometriosis** is linked with exposure to dioxin and endocrine disrupting chemicals even small amounts in menstrual products can add up over a lifetime of use. ^{21 22}

¹⁴ Great British Beach Clean Report, 2017, Marine Conservation Society.

<<https://www.mcsuk.org/clean-seas/great-british-beach-clean-2017-report>>

¹⁵ Stop the unflushables. The Marine Conservation Society. <http://www.wetwipesturnnasty.com/>

¹⁶ Great British Beach Clean weekend 2017 in September from 15-18th. Marine Conservation Society.

¹⁷ Flushability. Water UK

<<https://www.water.org.uk/policy/environment/waste-and-wastewater/what-not-flush>>

¹⁸ Test: Unwanted perfume hides behind 'fresh' and 'anti odour' in tampons and sanitary napkins. KEMI 2016.

<https://kemi.taenk.dk/bliv-groennere/test-unwanted-perfume-hides-behind-fresh-and-anti-odour-tampons-and-sanitary-napkins>

¹⁹ Tampax tampons and always sanitary towels among feminine hygiene products 'contain toxic chemicals'. Lizzie Dearden. The Independent. 25 February 2016

<<https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/health-and-families/health-news/tampax-tampons-always-sanitary-towels-feminine-hygiene-potentially-toxic-chemicals-a6894751.html>>

²⁰ Tampons et protections féminines : une réglementation s'impose ! 60 Millions de consommateurs. 23/2/16 <<https://www.60millions-mag.com/2016/02/23/tampons-et-protections-feminines-une-reglementation-s-impose-10151>>

²¹ Dioxins and Endometriosis: A Plausible Hypothesis Linda S. Birnbaum and Audrey M. Cummings. Environmental Health Perspectives • Vol 110 | NO. 1 | January 2002

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- Traces of **pesticides and insecticides** have also been found in tampons. 20, 19,²³
- Residues of **glyphosate** (a probable carcinogen) and used as an active ingredient in certain weed killers has been found in menstrual towels, tampons and panty liners in France and in Argentina.^{24 25}

Poverty impact

- A study by Plan International UK, from a survey of 1000 14 - 21 yr olds, found that 10% of **girls could not afford menstrual products**. The study also found that 12% of girls had to improvise menstrual wear due to affordability issues and 14% had to ask to borrow menstrual products from a friend.²⁶
- Pupils report 'taping toilet paper' and 'wrapping socks' around their underwear, as low incomes mean that they couldn't afford menstrual products.²⁷

²² Female Reproductive Disorders, Diseases, and Costs of Exposure to Endocrine Disrupting Chemicals in the European Union. L. Trasande et al. *The Journal of Clinical Endocrinology & Metabolism*, Volume 101, Issue 4, 1 April 2016, Pages 1562–1570, <https://academic.oup.com/jcem/article/101/4/1562/2804534>

²³ Pan International. Glyphosate Monograph. Oct 2016.

<http://pan-international.org/wp-content/uploads/Glyphosate-monograph.pdf>

²⁴ Tampons et protections féminines : une réglementation s'impose !

23/2/16

<<https://www.60millions-mag.com/2016/02/23/tampons-et-protections-feminines-une-reglementation-s-impose-10151>>

²⁵ 85% of Tampons Contain Monsanto's 'Cancer Causing' Glyphosate

. Ecowatch. Lorraine Chow. Oct. 26, 2015.

<<https://www.ecowatch.com/85-of-tampons-contain-monsantos-cancer-causing-glyphosate-1882112780.html>>

²⁶ Shailini Vora Chloe Tingle, *Break the Barriers : Girls ' Experiences of*, 2018

<<https://plan-uk.org/file/plan-uk-break-the-barriers-report-032018pdf/download?token=Fs-HYP3v>>.

²⁷ Bulman, M. (2017), Girls from low-income families skipping school during periods because they can't afford sanitary products, Independent.