

ACTIVITY 5: REUSABLE PERIOD PRODUCTS

Overview: Pupils are introduced to reusable period products (abbreviated version of Lesson 3)

Great For: Thinking about the costs associated with different period products

Resources Needed:	Post it notes; [If possible] one cup, one reusable pad, one pair of period pants
Prep Time Needed:	5 mins
Works best in:	Classroom
Number of participants:	Smaller groups
Time Needed:	15 mins
Set Up:	None

Age 13+

Learning Outcomes:

Pupils know and can describe how to prepare for and manage periods and are aware of all the available options, including reusables

Activity: Give each pupil a handful of post-it notes and, using a timer, ask them to draw as many period products as they can think of – one per post it note – in 60 seconds. (These do not need to be artistic, just a quick sketch). Then ask pupils to share their drawings with their neighbours and then with the group. Together, compile a list of period products.

Your list should look something like this:

- Disposable pads
- Tampons (applicator and non-applicator)
- Menstrual Cups
- Reusable (cloth) pads
- Period pants

It doesn't matter if pupils haven't thought of all these, you will explore them in a minute.

Explain that today we will be looking at reusable period products. Show the group this information video by charity City to Sea about plastic pollution caused by menstrual products https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lsJjUzN_12o

Discuss the video as a group. What have they learnt?
Does anything in this video surprise them?

ACTIVITY 5:

REUSABLE PERIOD PRODUCTS

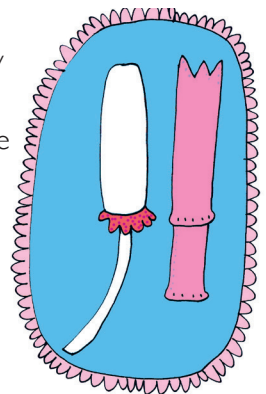
Now, go through each type of reusable product one by one (information is below). If possible, show pupils an example of each type of product and allow pupils to touch and play with them. If not, find images of each type of product for show. Answer any questions about use of the products (see guide below).

Finally, ask pupils to come up with the pros and cons of each product. You could do this using flipchart paper or together on the whiteboard. Invite pupils to think about factors like ease of use; comfort; absorbency; cost; environmental impact. We have provided some figures about the financial and environmental costs of products below. See Lesson 3 for a full version of exploring the pros and cons of each products.

FINANCIAL COSTS

These are average costs, for guidance only. Depending on how heavy their period is, women use between 20 and 24 disposable products per period. Remind the class that within each product category there will be some variation in price:

Pads	£3.50 for pack of 10
Pads (plastic-free/organic)	£3 - £5 for pack of 10
Tampons (applicator)	£2 - £3 for pack of 10
Tampons (non-applicator)	£1.50 - £2.50 for pack of 10
Tampons (organic)	£2 - £3.50 for pack of 10
Menstrual cup	£9 - £30 – one needed (lasts 5-10 years)
Reusable pads	£8 each – 8 needed (lasts about 5 years)
Period underwear	£30 each – 4 needed (lasts about 3 years)



ENVIRONMENTAL COSTS

There are plenty of estimations of the costs of period products, some include:

- The average person uses approximately 11,000 disposable pads and/or tampons in a lifetime
- Disposable products (including packaging) create more than 200,000 tonnes of waste per year
- The Marine Conservation Society estimates that 1.5 - 2 billion period products are flushed down the toilet each year
- A 2010 beach clean found an average of 23 pads and 9 tampon applicators per kilometre of British coastline

For more information, see the Women's Environmental Network <https://www.wen.org.uk/whatstheproblem/>

ACTIVITY 5: INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS

DISPOSABLE PRODUCTS

Disposable Pads come in many shapes and sizes, with different absorbencies. Encourage pupils to try out different options. They are made of different materials – cotton, or corn-fibre pads are available, but many mainstream brands are manufactured with plastic. Some pads are bleached or fragranced which can cause irritation.

Pads stick inside your underwear and some have wings to make them more secure. People often wear longer, bigger pads at night and just after they have had a baby.

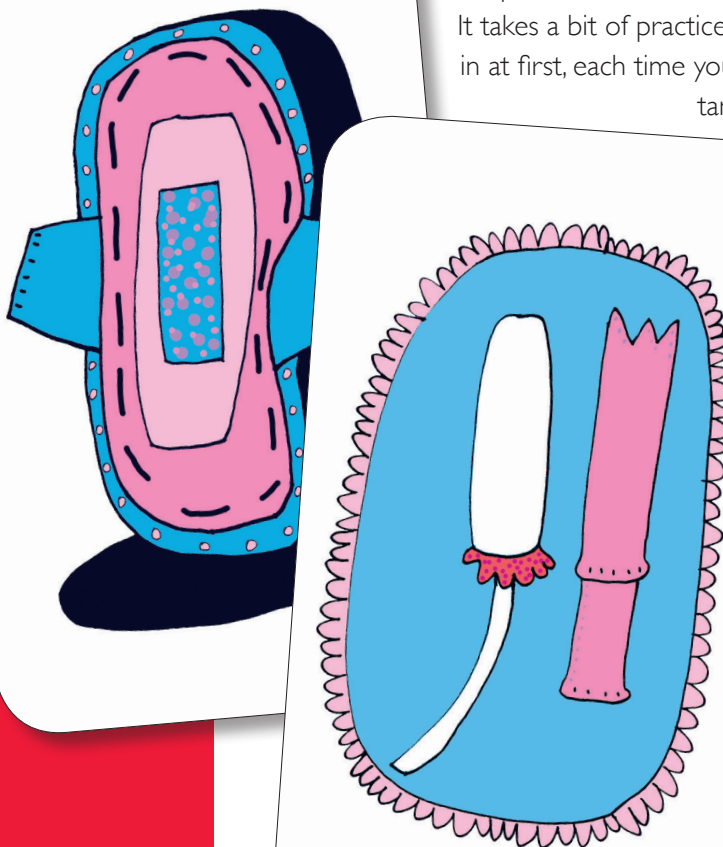
Change your pad every three to six hours. Wrap them in tissue, an empty wrapper or a disposal bag and then pop them in the bin (not down the toilet).

Tampons sit inside the vagina and are more convenient for swimming and other exercise than pads. They come in different absorbances for light to heavy flow - mini, regular, super and super plus. Some are inserted into the vagina with your finger and others come with applicators, made from either cardboard or plastic. These are inserted into the vagina and the applicator end is pushed to insert the tampon, then the applicator is pulled away leaving the tampon inside. Some applicators come ready to use, others need a quick pull to activate them. All the wrappers, applicators and the tampons themselves must be disposed of in a bin and never down the toilet.

Tampons come with instruction leaflets with diagrams of how to insert them. It takes a bit of practice! If you're unsure of how long to leave the tampon in at first, each time you go to the toilet give the string a gentle tug. If the tampon slides out easily and is completely soaked in

blood it's time to change. If it doesn't move, it's probably not fully absorbed and so can be left in a bit longer, and may be painful to remove if it is still dry. Also keep an eye on the string each time you go to the toilet, if you can see red at the top of the string near your vulva it's definitely time to change or you may risk leaking.

Most tampon manufacturers state their tampons can be left in for up to 8 hours, but changing a tampon every 3 to 6 hours is best, to avoid risk of Toxic Shock Syndrome (TSS). Always use the lowest absorbency for your flow.



ACTIVITY 5: INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS

Toxic Shock Syndrome (TSS) is a rare but serious illness. It is a bacterial infection associated with the use of tampons. Many young people worry about using tampons because of TSS. Reassure them that the chances of infection are very small, but also reiterate advice to always use the lowest absorbency for your flow and change them at least every 8 hours.

TOXIC SHOCK SYNDROME
ONLY ONE IN 100,000!

KEY POINT

Many people flush pads, tampons, applicators or wrappers down the toilet out of shame and embarrassment. Remind people to always put products in the bin provided and if there is no bin in the cubicle, wrap them in loo roll and take them to the nearest bin. This is totally normal.

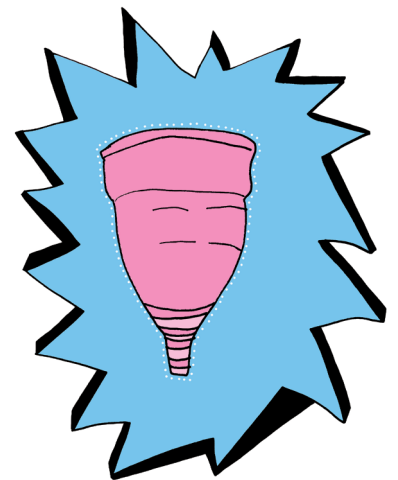
REUSABLE PRODUCTS

Menstrual cups are bell-shaped devices that sit inside the vagina (like a tampon) and collect period flow. Until recently, they have been relatively unknown, despite being invented in 1937.

Cups are made from silicon, and are folded to insert into the vagina. They form a light suction with the vaginal walls holding them in place, before being emptied and reinserted. Many people find them more comfortable than tampons, and they are suitable for a range of activities (including swimming).

Cups can be worn for up to 12 hours – they hold more blood than a tampon, and cause less vaginal dryness than tampons. There is also less risk of TSS. Cups should be rinsed or wiped between each use, and sterilised at the end of each period.

The upfront cost of cups is higher than other products, but they can be used for up to ten years, presenting large environmental benefits. There is lots of information and support online about using menstrual cups, including choosing the right one for you and guidance on cleaning and usage.



ACTIVITY 5: INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS

Washable pads (aka reusable pads or cloth pads) are available in different sizes, styles and absorbencies. Most have wings, with poppers that fasten around the gusset of underwear. They are slightly thicker than most disposable pads as they don't have the gel inside but instead rely on absorbing the blood in their material layers. People often find them more comfortable than disposable pads as they are softer, more like the material of underwear. They can be made of cotton, fleece or bamboo, and it is possible to make your own! Change them as often as you'd change a disposable pad and soak or rinse them in cold water before putting them in your normal wash. If you want to use them out and about, they often come with a small waterproof bag that will keep them safe till you get home and can rinse or soak them.

Period pants are like normal underwear but are made of special absorbent fabric. Period pants come in a range of shapes and styles, including boxer shorts. Depending on the type, they can last up to 8 hours. After use, soak them in cold water before popping in with your normal wash.

