

# Hazards in the Home

# Sanitary Protection

## Menstrual Pads

Conventional disposable sanitary protection is not sterile - the white appearance is due to the bleaching of the raw materials used to manufacture the products. The use of chemicals to increase absorbency and the possible contamination with dioxin (a by-product from the chlorine bleaching process) adds up to a chemical cocktail that poses a potential threat to women's health.

Toxic Shock Syndrome (TSS) can be linked to the use of highly absorbent synthetic materials, like rayon, which is used in combination with cotton in most tampons. Rayon is usually produced with chlorine gas. Chlorine-free rayon does exist but unless manufacturers label their products comprehensively we cannot be certain that their products are chlorine free.

## Advertising

Advertisers of conventional disposable sanitary products sell their products by instilling a sense of shame and a need for secrecy about women's periods, thus perpetuating the social taboo surrounding menstruation. They use words like 'fresh' and 'odour controlling', preying upon insecurity about cleanliness in menstruation. Periods are, in fact, a symbol of health and fertility.

## Alternatives

Many women are unaware of the existence of healthier, alternative sanitary products that can limit exposure to potentially harmful chemicals by choosing organic, all cotton, pads and tampons. Organic cotton is grown without the use of chemicals and the producers use sustainable farming methods. However, choosing a washable organic cotton pad not only limits exposure to potentially harmful chemicals, it also helps to address the environmental problems associated with the use of disposables and promotes a positive approach to menstruation. Washable pads are growing in popularity as women become aware of the potential health risks of conventional disposables and the demand for ecologically sound products increases.

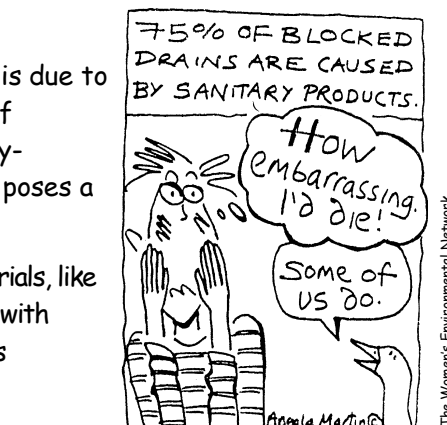
The above was reproduced from 'Natures Alternative'. PO Box 172, Preston, PR2 3WL, 01772 467 546. You can also get information from The Women's Environmental Network, 020 7481 9004, [www.wen.org.uk](http://www.wen.org.uk)

## Nappies

The average child will produce around 5000 soiled nappies on their way to being potty trained.<sup>1</sup> Nearly three billion disposable nappies are thrown away every year.<sup>2</sup>

Disposable nappies are made of paper and plastic. They are bleached and contain various chemicals including perfumes and dyes.

Nonylphenyl ethoxylate, is a known oestrogen mimic which could interfere with sexual development. It has also been found that babies with sensitive skin may react to absorbent gels.<sup>1</sup>



The Women's Environmental Network

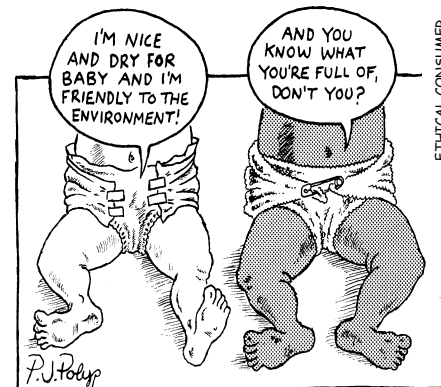
## Tops for Bottoms

Merseyside has a local Nappy Laundering Service which costs £7 a week, after a one-off payment of £55 for nappies, liners, wraps, bin, deodoriser, bin liners etc. They provide fresh laundered nappies to your door each week and at the same time collect the soiled nappies.

For more information or to see a demonstration ring 343 1356.

## Alternatives

Reusable terry nappies offer a viable alternative to disposables. Modern real nappies are quite different from their square cloth predecessors. Safety pins have been superseded by fastening mechanisms and specially fitted shapes, while reusable overpants are available for added safety and comfort. The Real Nappy Association (RNA) advocates the use of thin nappy liners placed inside a terry, allowing solid waste to be peeled away and safely disposed. These are biodegradable, commonly made of cotton, and available from most real nappy suppliers. Real nappies are *the* original breathable nappy, an attribute that, along with regular changing, helps counter nappy rash.



ETHICAL CONSUMER

## Sources of Information

1. Ethical Consumer Magazine. [www.ethicalconsumer.org](http://www.ethicalconsumer.org)
2. Mark Sydenham (1996) *Green Home Handbook*, Friends of the Earth Scotland

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