



Let's talk about *menstruation*

(Yes, you read it right)

In this article we bust the myths about periods, and we address the very real issues faced by millions of women around the world.



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Intro

Health is the most important aspect of everybody's life. And being healthy means maintaining appropriate hygiene standards. Especially of intimate personal care.

Facts about menstruation

The menstrual cycle is "the cycle of physiological changes from the beginning of one menstrual period to the beginning of the next" (Merriam-Webster). The monthly shedding of the lining of the uterus is what we call *menstruation* (Women's Health, 2014).

Menstruation is a natural part of life for almost half of the world's population. An average woman has her period for a total of 7-8 years of her life. Despite of this, menstruation is still embedded in shame, and is taboo to talk about, and as a result, girls get very limited education about how to manage their periods. Studies show that in India, up to 70% of girls did not know what happened to them the first time they got their periods. 1.25 billion women do not have access to a toilet during their period. (WaterAid).

Myths about menstruation

Everywhere in the world, talking about menstruation is taboo to some extent. This lack of openness in the matter has engendered many myths about what menstruation really is.

In Nepal, a tradition called *chhaupadi* considers women to be 'impure' during their periods, and their touch is said to spread disease and contaminate food. As a result, menstruating women are banished from their homes to small, desolate huts on the fringes of their communities (Intimina, 2016).



Uttara Saud, 14, sits inside a Chaupadi shed in western Nepal.
CREDIT: NAVESH CHITRAKAR REUTERS/NAVESH CHITRAKAR (NEPAL - TAGS: SOCIETY TPX IMAGES OF THE DAY)

In Malawi it is thought that if a person walks behind a woman while she is menstruating, their teeth will break (Telegraph, 2016).

In some tribes in Uganda, menstruating women are not allowed to drink cow's milk because of the belief that the women make the entire herd sick (Telegraph, 2016).



Credit: Olga Ekaternicheva via Getty Images

In Bolivia it is believed that drinking, bathing in and even touching cold

water during menstruation can cause cysts or infertility. Also, there is a myth saying that putting used pads in the trash can cause damage, which means that girls must carry their pads around with them. (Intimina, 2016).

Indeed, the ignorance around menstruation and the ever-present myths, spreading false information, are making life difficult for millions of women around the world.

How women deal with menstruation

Millions of women around the world cannot afford feminine hygiene products, and in many cases these products are not even available. As a result, women use what they can find. According to the website dignityperiod.com, 43% of women in urban India use reusable cloth, yet they are often washed without soap or clean water, and cannot be hung up to dry because of the cultural taboo. The same website also states that many Nigerian girls are even forced into a life of prostitution in order to afford buying sanitary articles. (Dignity Period, 2016).

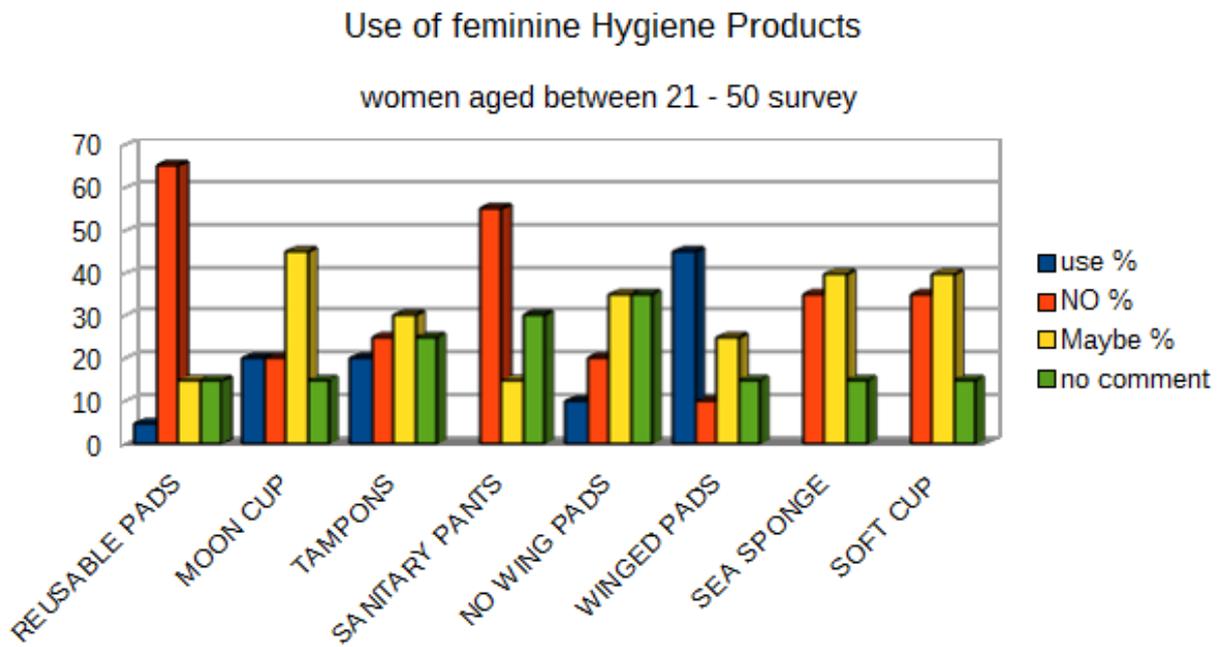
Consequences

73 percent of interviewed Bangladeshi garment workers reported they miss work for an average of six days per month (resulting in unpaid work days) due to vaginal infections caused by unsanitary menstrual materials. This is a loss that few can afford, particularly those who live on less than two dollars a day.

What women actually want to use

GWSE conducted a study to find out what women prefer to use when they are menstruating.

Here are the results:



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