

Latest Shortage Crisis: Tampons

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✓ Fact Checked

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STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- › Tampons are now in increasingly short supply
- › Experts cite supply chain issues resulting from a combination of the COVID pandemic, the Russia-Ukraine conflict, cotton crop failures, increased cotton exports from the U.S. to China and inflation
- › Edgewell Personal Care, maker of Playtex and o.b.™ tampons, blames its declining stocks on “extensive workforce shortages” caused by Omicron surges in late 2021 and early 2022
- › Alternatives to tampons include pads and panty liners, reusable menstrual cups and discs, and reusable washable period panties
- › When using tampons, opt for ones that are certified 100% organic, unbleached, unscented and free of synthetic materials such as wood fluff pulp and other super-absorbent fibers, to avoid risks associated with pesticides, GMOs and toxic byproducts from bleaching. Global Organic Textile Standard (GOTS) certification ensures the cotton is truly organic and free of toxins

April and May 2022 were extra stressful for many parents as they struggled to find baby formula. Now, June is gearing up to become a problematic time for women, as tampons are suddenly in short supply. The average price has also risen by about 10%.¹ MSN recently called out Amazon for price gouging, noting a 96-count box of Tampons was selling for a whopping \$39.²

What's Causing Tampon Shortage?

What's to blame for this shortage? Experts cite supply chain issues resulting from a combination of the COVID pandemic, the Russia-Ukraine conflict, cotton crop failures and increased cotton exports from the U.S. to China. Both cotton and plastic are in high demand and short supply, which is why supplies of tampons – which uses both – are adversely affected.

In its third-quarter fiscal year analysis for 2022,³ Procter & Gamble, maker of Tampax, noted it was having difficulty sourcing certain raw materials and experiencing rising shipping costs. In its “forward-looking statements” under “risks and uncertainties,” P&G included:⁴

“(3) the ability to manage disruptions in credit markets or to our banking partners or changes to our credit rating;

(4) the ability to maintain key manufacturing and supply arrangements (including execution of supply chain optimizations and sole supplier and sole manufacturing plant arrangements) and to manage disruption of business due to various factors, including ones outside of our control, such as natural disasters, acts of war (including the Russia-Ukraine War) or terrorism or disease outbreaks;

(5) the ability to successfully manage cost fluctuations and pressures, including prices of commodities and raw materials, and costs of labor, transportation, energy, pension and healthcare ...”

Edgewell Personal Care, maker of Playtex and o.b.™ tampons, has blamed its declining stocks on “extensive workforce shortages” caused by Omicron surges in late 2021 and early 2022.⁵

Rising inflation is yet another factor contributing to dwindling supplies. “The inflation causes the shortage, and then the shortage causes inflation. It kind of turns into a

feedback loop,” Zac Rogers, an assistant professor of supply chain management at Colorado State University told KOAA 5 News (video above).

Rogers and others are optimistic that the situation will be turned around, however, as the higher cotton prices will incentivize growers to grow more. A question that remains unaddressed is whether farmers will actually be able to grow more, even if they want to, due to skyrocketing diesel and fertilizer costs, and uncooperative weather.

Cotton producing states such as Texas and Oklahoma are currently experiencing severe drought that has prevented planting of cotton this year.⁶

Tampon Alternatives

The good news is that the shortage of tampons is fairly easy to remedy, as there are several viable alternatives. For example, you could use:

- **Pads**, which are available in different sizes and for different flow rates. Unfortunately, due to cotton being a primary component, menstrual pads are also starting to see shortages.
- **Panty liners**, also available in different sizes, can be enough on days when you have light flow.
- **Menstrual cups**⁷ – These are reusable devices made of silicone or latex that are inserted into the vagina to collect the blood. After a few hours, you simply pull the cup out, empty it and reinsert it after cleaning. The cup should be emptied at least twice a day.

Menstrual cups are particularly useful when exercising, swimming or if you have heavy flow. Available brands include Keeper Cup, Moon Cup, Lunette Menstrual Cup, DivaCup, Lena Cup and Lily Cup.

Since they’re reusable for several years with proper care, they can save you a lot of money in the long term. For advice on sizing and fitting, see the Strategist’s article,⁸

“The 6 Very Best Menstrual Cups.”

- **Menstrual discs**⁹ – These are basically the same as a menstrual cup. The main difference is the shape of the device. Whereas the menstrual cup stays put through suction, discs use gravity to stay at the base of the cervix, lodged against the public bone.

Brands include Softdisc, FLEX Disc, Saalt Disc and Cora Menstrual Disc. For a comparison guide to how cups and discs work, see RubyCup’s article,¹⁰ “Menstrual Disc vs Cup: Which Is Better?”

- **Reusable period panties**¹¹ – While having the look and feel of normal underwear, period panties are made to absorb menstrual blood without leaking through. Since they’re washable, you can reuse them for years.

There are more than a dozen different brands available at various price points, and they can be a great option on light-flow days, or as extra protection on heavy days together with a pad, liner or menstrual cup/disc.

Don’t Leave Tampons in Too Long

Do not try to extend your supply of tampons by changing them less frequently, as leaving a tampon in for longer than four to six hours can cause a bacterial infection known as toxic shock (TSS) syndrome. While rare, it can be a potentially life-threatening condition requiring urgent treatment. As explained by the Mayo Clinic:¹²

“Often toxic shock syndrome results from toxins produced by Staphylococcus aureus (staph) bacteria, but the condition may also be caused by toxins produced by group A streptococcus (strep) bacteria ... Possible signs and symptoms of toxic shock syndrome include:

- *A sudden high fever*
- *Low blood pressure*

- *Vomiting or diarrhea*
- *A rash resembling a sunburn, particularly on your palms and soles*
- *Confusion*
- *Muscle aches*
- *Redness of your eyes, mouth and throat*
- *Seizures*
- *Headaches*

Call your doctor immediately if you have signs or symptoms of toxic shock syndrome.”

The tampon’s material may significantly affect your chances of developing this very serious infection. Because tampons made with materials like rayon, viscose, and fluff pulp can leave behind fibers, they can create a favorable environment for bacteria growth.

The outgassing of carbon dioxide and oxygen from these synthetic materials also provide a food source for *S. aureus* bacteria, which is believed to be the causative pathogen for TSS. To minimize your risk for toxic shock syndrome, be sure to follow these tampon safety guidelines:

Change tampons every four to six hours	Alternate the use of tampons with liners or pads during your period
Be careful not to scratch your vaginal lining when inserting the tampon	If possible, choose the lowest absorbency rate to handle your flow — avoid super-absorbent tampons
Never leave a tampon inserted overnight; use overnight sanitary pads instead	Do not use a tampon between periods

Risks of Nonorganic Tampons

While we're on the topic of safe tampon use, it's worth reviewing some of the hazards involved in using nonorganic tampons, pads and liners. First of all, nonorganic cotton tends to be heavily sprayed with pesticides that can then be absorbed through your vaginal tissues. Most are also genetically engineered, which adds unknown risks.

Not all tampons are made of cotton, though. Brands using words like "cotton-soft" and "cottony feel" are usually not made of cotton at all but, rather, rayon (cellulose fibers derived from bleached wood pulp), viscose (a form of wood cellulose acetate) or fluff pulp (manufactured from tree wood), and these have their own set of risks.

Rayon and viscose present a potential danger in part because of their highly absorbent fibers. When used in tampons, these fibers can stick to your vaginal wall, and when you remove the tampon, the loosened fibers stay behind.

Another risk is related to bleaching. Tampons made from rayon are typically bleached with chlorine to make them pristinely white. However, when you use chlorine to bleach materials, potentially hazardous substances such as dioxin and disinfection-by-products (DBPs) such as trihalomethane can be created.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) considers dioxin such a serious public health issue that there is no safe level of exposure. Yet, the government continues to turn a blind eye when it comes to feminine hygiene products, illogically concluding there's no health risk expected from dioxins in tampons and pads. Even if the product is bleached using chlorine dioxide (typically advertised as an "elemental chlorine-free" bleaching process), it can still generate dioxins.

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or pads, look for GOTS (Global Organic Textile Standard) certification.”

On top of all that, there's the issue of the plastic chemicals, such as phthalates, found in the applicators. Phthalates, along with many plastics, are known "endocrine disruptors" because they interfere with normal endocrine system function. Research has linked phthalates to weight gain,^{13,14} blood sugar issues and diabetes,¹⁵ attention and behavioral problems,¹⁶ low IQ,¹⁷ infertility and other reproductive issues.¹⁸

Unsafe Sanitary Pads

As for sanitary pads, today we're seeing a whole new generation of products made from petrochemicals. Conventional sanitary pads are made from over 90 percent plastic derived from crude oil, including superabsorbent polyacrylates, polypropylene and polyethylene.

Synthetics and plastic restrict the free flow of air and can trap heat and dampness, potentially promoting the growth of yeast and bacteria in your vaginal area. And don't be fooled by words like "nonwoven" – they're just fancy words for petrochemicals.

These types of pads discourage healthy airflow. The use of synthetic fibers, plastic-backed panty liners, and contact with toxic chemicals can lead to burning and soreness of delicate tissue in certain individuals.

Opt for Organic and Chemical-Free

To avoid all of these issues, I recommend making sure the feminine hygiene products you select are certified 100% organic, unbleached, unscented and free of synthetic materials such as wood fluff pulp and other super-absorbent fibers.

All cotton sold as organic in the United States must meet strict federal regulations regarding how the cotton is grown, including the type of seeds used. To be absolutely

sure you're getting organic cotton tampons or pads, look for GOTS (Global Organic Textile Standard) certification.

Just as the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) sets standards for organic food, GOTS provides third-party certification for the organic textile industry, including feminine hygiene products. GOTS oversees the growing, processing, manufacturing, packaging, labeling, trading and distribution of all textiles made with at least 70% certified organic fiber.

Like organic food standards, a textile product carrying the GOTS Organic seal must contain a minimum of 95% certified organic fibers, while one with the "made with organic" label must contain a minimum of 70% certified organic fiber.

GOTS-certified textiles must also be produced without conventional cotton's pesticides, genetically engineered ingredients, formaldehyde, chlorine bleaches, heavy metals or other harsh chemicals detrimental to humans and the environment.

Be Prepared for Shortages of Everything

As discussed in "[Are You Prepared for the Coming Food Catastrophe?](#)" current supply shortages are nothing to what's coming. We can expect just about everything to be in short supply, including food and energy. This is all part of The Great Reset plan to manufacture dependency on government, which in turn will be taken over by private interests and central banks through the collapse of the global economy and supply chain.

So, get prepared! Now's actually a great time to transition over to a reusable strategy for your monthly menses, leaving you with one less thing to worry about as basic supplies start to dwindle. Other key areas of basic preparation include:

Food — Grow some of your own food, make friends with local farmers, create or join a local CSA, and shore up your long-term food stores. (Rather than panic buying mass quantities all at once, consider spreading it out and just buy a little more than

you need for the day or week each time you go shopping. You can build up a backup supply rather quickly that way)

Water – Identify sources of potable water and make sure you have one or more ways to purify questionable water supplies

Power – Consider how you might power some of the essentials in your home if there are rolling blackouts, or the electrical grid goes down altogether

Firearms training for self defense and hunting – Learn how to use, store, carry and clean a firearm and work on your marksmanship. Other forms of self-defense training can also be useful, if nothing else, to make you feel more competent and confident in potentially high-risk situations

Communications – Give some thought to how you will communicate with friends and family if cell towers and/or internet goes down

Medicine – Stock up on nutritional supplements, medications, how-to books on alternative home remedies and first-aid supplies

Money – Keep cash on hand, including smaller denominations. Both power grid and internet outages can eliminate your ability to buy without cash. For more long-term protection against inflation, consider buying physical precious metals such as gold and silver

Remember to consider and include analog devices and manual tools in your preparation. We're so used to having unlimited electricity and continuous wireless communications, it can be difficult to imagine the restrictions you'll face without them. If need be, turn off the breakers in your home for a day or two, ditch all wireless devices, and see what challenges come up. Then, figure out what you need to solve them.

Also, consider keeping hardcopies of useful books and important documents, such as your most recent bank statements, asset statements, the deed to your home or car and

so on. Entire books have been written on prepping, and some will take it to extremes. But everyone, at this point, really ought to be preparing, to some degree, for shortages of food, energy and basic goods.

Sources and References

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