

# Planet- Positive Periods:



A Toolkit for Sustainable Menstruation

**PERIOD.**  
the menstrual movement

**aisle**  
periodoflife.com

  
green periods



# Today's Agenda:



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Welcome, Introductions, Opening Question

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Review Purpose and Objectives

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Review Key Terms

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Presentation and Discussion

Part 1: The Impact of *Disposable* Period Products

Part 2: The Impact of *Reusable* Period Products

Part 3: Examples of People with Planet-Positive Periods

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Closing and Calls to Action

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Take the [Planet-Positive Periods Quiz!](#)

## Introductions and Opening Question



Are there any period products you've heard of and are curious to learn more about?

## Today, we will develop a deeper understanding about:

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-  The impact of various menstrual products on our planet.
-  The impact of our own menstrual footprint.\*
-  Examples of how people can have planet-positive periods.\*

\*Terms will be defined in the next slide

## Key Terms

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### **Planet-Positive Periods, or Sustainable Menstruation**

When people manage their periods in an eco-friendly, budget-friendly, safe and accessible way over the long term. Also known as 'sustainable' or 'eco-friendly periods.'



### **Menstrual Footprint**

The amount of waste and expense associated with managing periods.



### **Discussion:**

Are there any questions you have about these terms, or what today's presentation is about?



Nearly half the world's population menstruates at some point in time, and on average, about **800 million people** menstruate on any given day.<sup>1</sup>

**Hundreds of millions** of people who menstruate around the world use some type of menstrual product to manage their periods.

## Why Does Sustainable Menstruation Matter?

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On average, people menstruate for about **40 years of their life.**<sup>2</sup>

That's about **6.5 consecutive years** spent menstruating in a lifetime.<sup>3</sup>

The products chosen will have an individual and collective impact on our planet. The question is, how much?

**Let's compare the differences.**



# Part One: The Impact of Disposable Menstrual Products



Disposable Menstrual Products are period products used one time for a few hours to manage menstrual flow and are then thrown away. The most common examples are disposable pads and tampons, also referred to as 'disposables' or 'single-use' products.



## Benefits

- Widely available
- No need to clean or maintain



## Impacts

- High negative environmental impact
- High lifetime cost



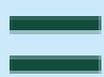
**Consider this:** About how many pounds (or kilos) of menstrual product waste do you estimate will be thrown away in 2022 around the world?

## The Impact of Disposable Menstrual Products

Green Periods estimates that about **30 billion lb** (14 billion kg) of disposable menstrual products will end up in landfills and oceans in 2022 alone, costing an estimated **\$50 billion USD**.<sup>4</sup>



**30 billion lb** (14 billion kg)  
of menstrual waste



the weight of about  
**62 large cargo ships.**

And that's just for one year!

## Environmental Impact

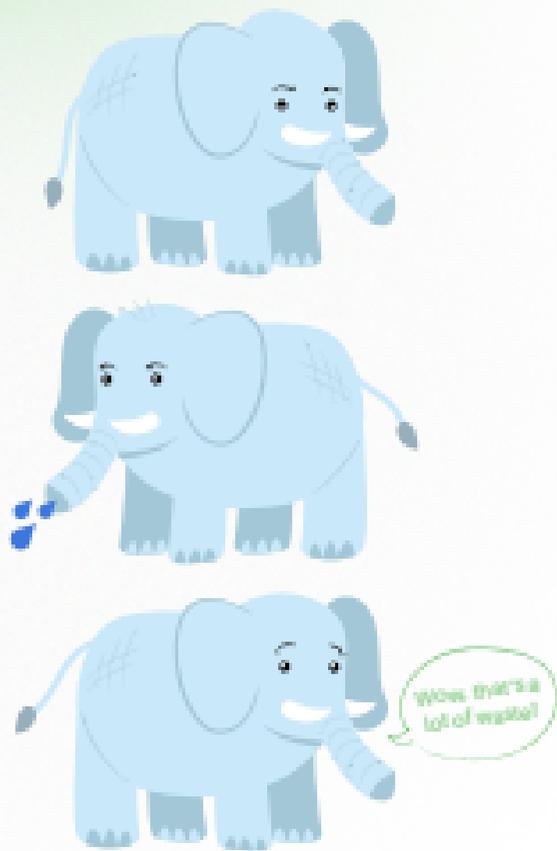
### ✘ High Landfill & Ocean Waste

Over a lifetime, a person who menstruates can use an average of about **11,000 disposable pads or tampons**,<sup>5</sup> individually generating about 220 lb (100 kg) of waste.<sup>6</sup>

**220 lb is equal to the weight of 1 baby elephant of menstrual waste, per person!**<sup>7</sup>

Most disposables end up in landfills - and **billions per year** also end up in oceans when they're wrongly flushed down the toilet.<sup>3</sup>

In the UK alone, over **4 million** disposable products are flushed every day.<sup>8</sup>



## Environmental Impact

### ✘ High Use of Plastic

One pack of period pads can contain **5 supermarket bags' worth of plastic.**<sup>9</sup>

Disposable pads and tampons are often **individually wrapped in plastic.**<sup>10</sup>

Each disposable pad can contain **up to 90% plastic**, and each tampon can contain **up to 6% plastic.**<sup>11</sup>

Once thrown away in **landfills or oceans**, the plastic in disposable pads and tampons can take **more than 800 years to break down**, resulting in smaller pieces called microplastics<sup>11,12</sup>, which are also harmful to animals and the planet.<sup>12,13,14</sup>

<sup>9</sup>Excluding tampon applicators, which are often also made of plastic!



## Environmental Impact

### ✘ High Use of Fossil Fuels

Producing raw materials, manufacturing, transporting and throwing out disposables after one single use burns **large amounts of fossil fuels, contributing to climate change.**<sup>10</sup>

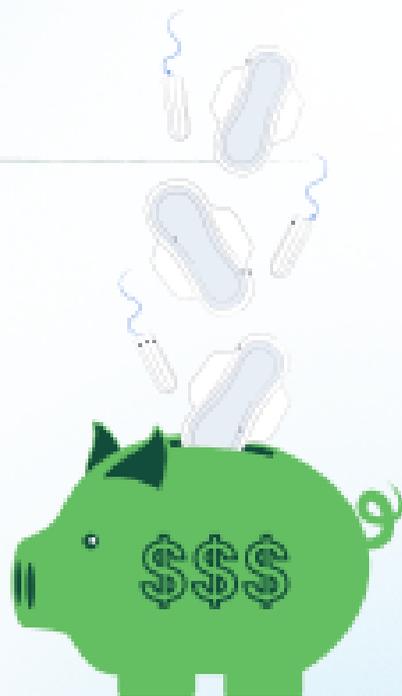


## Economic Impact of Disposable Menstrual Products

In addition to their negative environmental impact, disposable products also have **high recurring costs**.

**According to Green Periods data, the lifetime cost for a person using disposables is about \$3,360 USD.**

- Disposables have to be purchased frequently because they are worn for a few hours and thrown away.
- Disposables may seem affordable with a lower upfront cost, but their recurring lifetime costs quickly add up.



## “Eco-Friendly” Disposable Menstrual Products

Some disposable products are marketed as “eco-friendly”, using words like “organic,” “biodegradable,” “compostable,” “non-toxic,” “chlorine-free,” or “plant-based.”

There is actually **no clear evidence** that these type of products are better for the environment than mainstream disposables.<sup>10</sup>

**Greenwashing** is when companies lead consumers to believe their products or practices are more environmentally friendly than they actually are.<sup>15</sup>

**This can also happen with menstrual products!**



## Impacts of “Eco-Friendly” Disposable Products

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### ✘ Trash Bags and Landfills

Although some Eco-Friendly products can decompose faster than traditional disposables, they're often thrown away in plastic bags and **can't really decompose in a landfill.**<sup>16</sup>

### ✘ High Use of Water

Making just one disposable 100% cotton pad can take up to **6 gallons** (23 liters) of irrigation water.<sup>8</sup> There's no known correlation between using organic cotton and lower water consumption.<sup>17</sup>

### ✘ High Cost

“Eco-friendly” disposables tend to be the most expensive disposable option. Green Periods estimates that the lifetime cost for a person using organic cotton pads is about **\$4,420 USD.**



**Discussion:** Is there anything that has stood out to you about the impact of disposable or “Eco-Friendly” disposable menstrual products?

## What is your individual menstrual footprint?

Now that we've covered the impact of different types of disposable products, let's explore a tool that will help you quantify your own menstrual footprint.



[Click here to watch a video](#)

Photo credit: greenperiods.org

## Green Periods Calculator

We invite you to check your own menstrual footprint using the Green Periods Calculator:  
[greenperiods.org/calculator](https://greenperiods.org/calculator)

If you don't menstruate, share this link with a friend!

 **Discussion:** Any thoughts or surprises from using the Green Periods calculator?



In Part 2, we will discuss options for managing periods in a more planet-positive way.

## Part Two: The Impact of Reusable Period Products



**Reusable Menstrual Products** are period products intended to be washed and used many times to catch or absorb menstrual flow. Also referred to as 'reusables.'



### Benefits

- Long-lasting (typically last for years)
- Low lifetime cost
- Low environmental impact



### Why aren't reusables more commonly used?

- Accessibility
- Period blood stigma
- Initial learning curve

## Impact of Reusable Menstrual Products



### ✔ Long-lasting (typically for years)

Quality reusable menstrual products last for years, and can replace hundreds of disposable menstrual products.

### ✔ Low Cost (in the long term)

Although the initial cost of a quality reusable product might be a bit higher than one disposable product, the lifetime cost of reusables is only about \$324 USD, which is 30 times less than the cost of disposables, because reusables typically last for many years.<sup>18</sup>

### ✔ Low Waste

Over the course of 40 years, reusable menstrual products typically generate less than 1 lb of waste, or 5,000 times less waste than disposable products.<sup>18</sup>



Credit: Green Periods

## Examples of Common Reusable Period Products

Although there are several reusable options that exist, this presentation focuses on the most commonly available and thoroughly tested types of reusable period products.

### Reusable Cloth Pads and Liners

Made of a variety of fabrics.  
Worn like disposable pads and liners;  
replace disposable pads.

**One quality cloth pad can replace  
at least 238 disposable pads!<sup>19</sup>**



## Examples of Common Reusable Period Products

### Menstrual Cups and Discs

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Quality cups and discs are most commonly made of medical grade silicone (though this is not the only safe, well-tested material used). Worn internally; replace tampons.

**One menstrual cup can replace about 2640 disposable pads and tampons<sup>20</sup>**



## Examples of Common Reusable Period Products

### Period Underwear

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Made of a variety of fabrics.

Look and work like regular underwear, but have absorbent fabric in the gusset. Replace underwear, disposable pads and liners.

**One quality pair of period underwear can replace at least 81 disposable pads<sup>21</sup>**



## Why Aren't Reusables More Commonly Used?

### ➤ Accessibility

Reusables are **not as widely available** in retail stores as disposables. They're easily available online, but not everyone has the ability to shop this way.

Reusables cost significantly less in the long term, but **not everyone can afford them** because the upfront cost of one reusable can be higher than a pack of disposables.

Most reusables can be cleaned using water and soap, and **not everyone has regular access to proper sanitation or privacy** while menstruating.

Therefore, **institutions and governments must incorporate easy access to quality reusable products** to advance menstrual equity for all.



## Why Aren't Reusables More Commonly Used?

### ? Period Blood is Stigmatized

Some people and communities **may see period blood as gross**, or associate it with other negative connotations.

- For example: Blood from murders or shootings have been shown on mainstream television for years, yet **period blood is often depicted as blue in commercials** because it may be seen as 'gross'.
- How **cultures and communities** view or experience menstruation may impact someone's decision to use, or not use, reusable menstrual products.

While cleaning menstrual blood may seem gross to some, it is good to remember that menstrual blood is **natural and easily washes off** of quality reusable menstrual products.

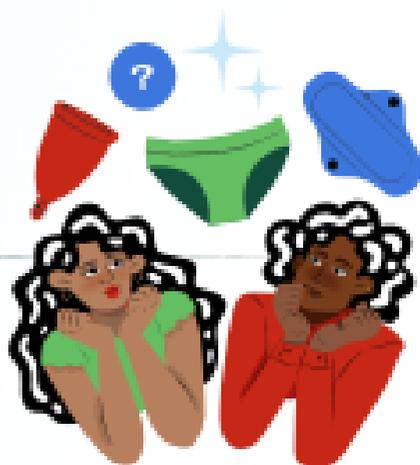


## Why Aren't Reusables More Commonly Used?

### 🔍 Initial Learning Curve

Anything new can be **a little scary at first**. It can take a few tries to learn how to use and care for a new reusable product.

Most period product brands provide **step-by-step instructions** on how to use their reusable products, like [Aisle's Product FAQs](#).



**💧 Discussion:** What are 1 or 2 reasons why people who menstruate should consider trying a reusable menstrual product if they are able to do so?

## A Note about Sustainability and Personal Health

As we talk about planet-positive periods, it's important to consider that **sustainability and personal health are interconnected.**

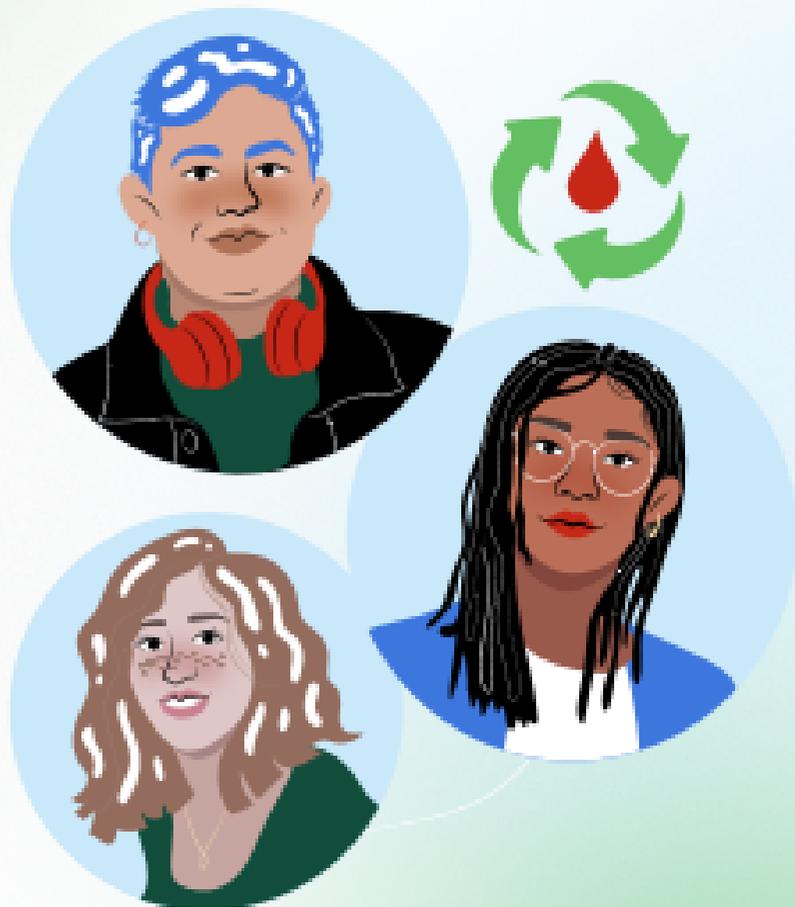
- A **healthy environment** is necessary for people to be healthy.
- The types of period products used can affect health:
  - Some period products don't list all the ingredients they are made of
  - Users of mainstream disposables commonly report irritation & rashes <sup>22,23</sup>
  - Some menstrual products may contain chemicals with unknown or potentially harmful effects <sup>24,25,26</sup>

It's always recommended to **read labels and ask questions** about the ingredients period products contain, since manufacturers aren't always required to disclose all ingredients. Additional research is needed on the health and environmental impacts of ingredients in menstrual products. We have compiled research on potential health impacts of various menstrual products in **Appendix C (research guide)** for additional reading.



## Part Three: Examples of People with Planet-Positive Periods!

Note: These are fictional hybrid profiles based on actual Aisle customer testimonials.





### Name, age & pronouns

Cade, 18, they/he

### Lifestyle

HS Junior/Grade 11

Into music and roller derby

### Disposable Products used before

Organic Pads and Liners

### Reusable products used now

Boxer brief-style period underwear

### What it was like to switch to reusables

As a non-binary-identified person who menstruates, periods can feel awkward, so this is easier and more private.

### What they like about reusables

Period underwear are relatively hassle-free and don't remind them as much that they are bleeding as pads did. Boxer style affirms their gender. Appreciate not having to buy expensive menstrual products every month.

### Estimated lifetime waste before switching vs. after



407 lb (185 kg) vs. 7 lb (3 kg)

### Estimated lifetime cost before switching vs. after



\$4400 USD vs. \$1900 USD



### Name, age & pronouns

Zeba, 20, she/her

### Lifestyle

College Sophomore/ University 2nd year, PERIOD. Chapter Leader, Choir

### Disposable Products used before

Disposable Pads and Liners

### Reusable products used now

Cloth pads and period underwear

### What it was like to switch to reusables

Was surprised by how much more comfortable and absorbent cloth pads are. Washing them in the dorm opened up some interesting conversations!

### What they like about reusables

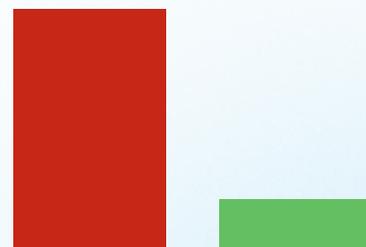
Often got rashes from disposable pads, which have now gone away. Prefers pads during the day and period underwear for overnight. No need to worry about purchasing products each month!

### Estimated lifetime waste before switching vs. after



242 lb (110 kg) vs. 9 lb (4 kg)

### Estimated lifetime cost before switching vs. after



\$4000 USD vs. \$1200 USD



### Name, age & pronouns

Julie, 35, she/her

### Lifestyle

Graphic designer, has a 2-year-old child, enjoys yoga

### Disposable Products used before

Tampons

### Reusable products used now

Menstrual cup and reusable panty liner

### What it was like to switch to reusables

Going from tampons to a cup was relatively easy. A bit of a different feeling to insert and remove, but basically do the same thing. A bit more work to clean the cup, but it's a big win to be able to wear it for so much longer than tampons.

### What they like about reusables

Less drying than tampons. So comfortable that she sometimes forgets she is wearing one throughout the day. Uses a reusable liner at night to feel extra secure.

### Estimated lifetime waste before switching vs. after

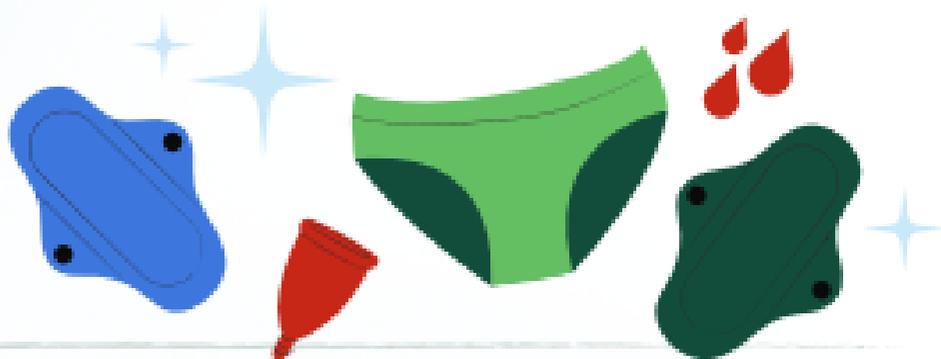


### Estimated lifetime cost before switching vs. after





## Discussion



How could access to reusable menstrual products be improved in your community?

## Closing

**Menstrual products have an individual and a collective environmental impact.**

- Disposable menstrual products have the highest menstrual footprint.
- Choose quality reusable products for more planet-positive periods.
- Sustainability is not about a handful of people doing it perfectly, but millions of people doing it imperfectly.
- Even combining reusables and disposables can make a big difference, and it's a great way to transition to planet-positive periods.



**Closing Question:** If you were to sum up this toolkit for a friend in one sentence, what would you say?



## Calls to Action

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-  **Know the Facts:** Take the [Planet-Positive Periods Quiz](#) and showcase your confidence about what you learned from this toolkit!
-  **Talk about it:** Share this toolkit with friends, family, public leaders and decision makers, whether they have periods or not.
-  **Keep Asking Questions:** Check out our [additional toolkit resources](#), including FAQs on Reusable Products, Questions to Consider when Choosing Quality Reusables, and Research Guide on Potential Health Impact of Menstrual Products.
-  **Create Change:** Advocate for increased access to free reusable products in public spaces.

Any final questions?

# Thank You!

Check out the Appendix Resources to learn more.

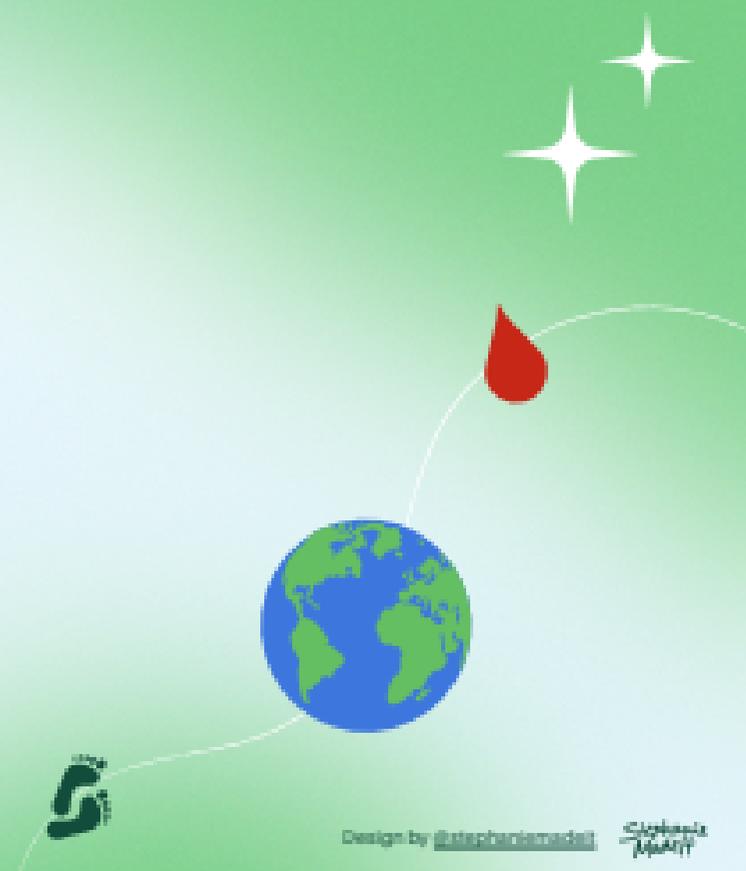
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### Frequently Asked Questions on Reusable Menstrual Products

#### See Appendix A

#### **Do reusable products actually work?**

Yes! Assuming that you are using a quality product, users typically find reusables more comfortable and effective than disposables.

#### **Are reusables safe?**

Quality reusable products are tested for safety and are also reviewed by federal health agencies. When used and cleaned as directed, these products are generally safe. You can also be an informed consumer when choosing reusable products.

### **How do I clean reusable products?**

Most reusables can be cleaned using water and soap or detergent. Rinse reusable pads or period underwear in cold water and either hand or machine-wash with soap or detergent after each use. Menstrual cups can be cleaned with soap and water before use, or can be immersed for five minutes in boiling water before every cycle.

### **How do I manage reusables when I'm outside the home?**

Menstrual cups and discs can be cleaned in public bathrooms by bringing a wet paper towel into the stall, emptying the product into the toilet, cleaning it with the paper towel, and then re-inserting it.

Used reusable pads or underwear can be placed in a waterproof fabric-lined bag to transport until the user gets home to wash them.

## Appendix A — FAQ on Reusables

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### **Will my period blood smell on my cloth pads, cups or period underwear?**

Reusable menstrual product users generally find that their period blood does not smell and healthy period blood odor is not noticeable to others. If there is an unusually strong odor, that might be a sign to check with a medical professional.

### **Where can I buy reusable menstrual products?**

High-quality reusable products are most easily available online. Quality, ethical product companies like Aisle and other Certified B Corps are a great place to look.

**For a full list of frequently asked questions, consult Aisle's online [FAQs or Help Center](#).**

### Questions to Consider When Choosing Quality Reusable Menstrual Products

#### See Appendix B

Reusable menstrual products are increasingly available in a variety of styles and brands, and like many other products, vary in quality. Just because something is reusable, does not necessarily mean that it is truly sustainable. For example, products might fall apart quickly due to poor quality construction, or may not be made with sustainable fabrics.

**What ingredients are used in the product? Has it been carefully tested for potentially harmful chemicals, and is the company open about the results?**

Consider buying from a company that's open about their product ingredients and testing.

## Appendix B — Questions to Consider in Choosing Reusables

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**Does the product meet federal or international standards?** Is the product accepted by federal government bodies like the U.S. FDA (Food and Drug Administration) or Health Canada, or an international body such as ISO (International Standards Organization)?

**How is the product made? Who owns the company? How easy is it to learn about what factories that the company works with and how those factories are run?** Look beyond the trendy branding and cheap prices. Look for transparency around sustainability, ethics and certifications.

**Is the company a certified B Corp?** B Corps are companies that walk the talk when it comes to sustainability; they measure their social and environmental impacts carefully and thoroughly - and have to meet high standards for both.

## Appendix B — Questions to Consider in Choosing Reusables

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**Will the product work really well and last a long time?** For reusable pads and period underwear, you want fabrics and construction that do both. While natural fibers like cotton are often considered more sustainable, some human-made performance fabrics like microfiber (which is often used for the absorbent core of cloth pads) have long-term value because they're super absorbent, leak proof, washable and durable. Cut-and-sew construction can be more durable than "bonded" (glued) treatment.

**For pads and underwear, are the fabrics sustainable?** Look for certifications from GRS (Global Recycled Standard), Bluesign and OEKO-TEX, a highly respected textile testing certification. Organic fabrics should be certified, too; two common ones are GOTS (Global Organic Textile Standard) and OCS (The Organic Content Standard).

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