

Expedition Information for People Who Have Periods

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INTRODUCTION

Sometimes people who have periods can feel pressured into not discussing them, particularly with people who don't have them. However, periods are a perfectly normal thing for a huge percentage of the population, and something that people who don't have them should be supportive about. If you need support getting information, or getting hold of the products you need, then please talk to your expedition leader who will be happy to help regardless of if it is something they have personal experience of. Many expedition leaders of all genders keep supplies of pads or tampons in their first aid kits for if you run out and can offer you advice on managing your periods while on an expedition, so they needn't prevent you from doing any activities.

All the products described below will come with information on how to use them which can be very helpful if trying a new method.

VIDEO INFORMATION

youtu.be/jjFZ1nziJrI

A lot of the information in this leaflet can also be found in [this video by The Brain Scoop](#). It's aimed at people doing scientific fieldwork but is very relevant to anyone spending time in the outdoors (even if they don't have periods themselves).

TAMPONS

Tampons go inside the body and come in a wide range to manage different levels of flow. Tampons are a popular choice on expeditions because they are much smaller and lighter than pads.

- During physical activity, many people find them more comfortable than pads.
- Ensure you're changing your tampon or pad every few hours to prevent infection, even if your flow is light.
- Non-applicator, or digital, tampons, where you use a clean finger to put them in, are much smaller to pack than applicator tampons. If you haven't used them before then you should try them before your expedition to make sure you're comfortable using them as not everyone is.
- It's important to make sure that your hands are clean when using tampons, particularly non-applicator/digital tampons.

PADS

Sanitary pads are an absorbent adhesive pad that sits inside underwear. They are a less popular choice for expeditions but if they are what works best for you, or if you are going somewhere where cleaning your hands might be difficult, then they can be a good option.

- Pads are bulkier to pack and transport than tampons.
- Some people find pads uncomfortable when walking or doing physical activity, and they can absorb sweat.
- Winged pads can cause chafing but tend to stay in place.
- None winged pads can be more comfortable for some people but sometimes move around.
- As with tampons, it's important to change your pad every few hours to prevent infection, even if your flow is light.

DISPOSAL

If you're using managed campsites in the UK then they will either have paper hygiene bins available in the toilets, or your used products can be put in the normal waste bins; just like you would at home or while in a hotel.

If you are in a more remote area then it may be necessary to transport your used products. Large resealable sandwich bags are perfect for this. A non-see-through plastic carrier bag can be used over the top if you don't want people to see what you are carrying.

Unfortunately, hand dug "cat holes" for disposing of poo are not suitable for tampons and pads as these products can take many years to rot away and will often be brought back to the surface by the weather before that happens.

MOON CUPS

Silicone "moon cups" are a popular choice for people who know they're going to be away on long expeditions and are particularly useful in remote locations and countries where other products may be hard to find. They are reusable and very hygienic, and though expensive will last a long time if properly washed between uses.

- If this is something you want to make use of then you should buy one well in advance of your expedition to make sure they work for you and that you are familiar with using them.
- It is important that you know you will be in a location where you can get your hands clean, and be able to clean the cup.
- You can sterilise your moon cup by putting it in a small metal mug of water and bringing it to the boil on your stove.

HYGIENE

- At most campsites in the UK then there will be plenty of clean water to use for washing hands and genitals.
- Unscented wet wipes can make life a lot easier, though create more stuff to carry and dispose of. Scented wet wipes must be avoided if you're going to use them anywhere other than your hands.
- Evaporating "hand sanitiser" gel should never be used on your genitals; it can cause some immediate mild pain due to the alcohol, dry the skin badly, and can cause thrush (yeast infections).
- If you're not sure what the toilets will be like at your campsites, or if there will be clean water for washing then ask your expedition leader. This is a very common question!

- A lot of people find it useful to have quick drying sports underwear that can be easily washed and reused on an expedition. Unfortunately, these can be more expensive than cotton underwear.

BIRTH CONTROL

Some people choose to use hormonal birth control to change when their period happens or to make it less severe. This is very much a matter of personal choice and is something you should talk to a doctor well in advance about to find out if this is the right choice for you. You may find that hormonal birth control does not completely stop your period, experiment before your trip and make sure you bring some products to use if it doesn't work out.

PERIOD DELAY PILLS

Some people choose to talk to their doctor about a period delay pill such as Norethisterone. This medication contains the hormone progesterone and can be used to delay a period for up to 20 days

PAIN MANAGEMENT

Cramps can be a very fast way to spoil an otherwise amazing outdoors experience. Many people use painkillers and heat to help with this.

- If using painkillers, ibuprofen is a popular choice, but this is something you should talk to a pharmacist or doctor about.
- Single use, stick on, “muscle relaxant” heat-pads are available at most pharmacies and many sports shops. They are great for use while walking and moving around at camp. Make sure you read the instructions as some types shouldn't be applied directly to the skin.

You can also fill your drinking-water bottle with hot water and use it as a hot water bottle.

- Be careful to check that the bottle you're using is made of a plastic that can be heated (throw away “pop-bottles” usually can't).
- The lid needs to be on properly.
- Make sure the bottle isn't so hot that it can burn you; let it stand for a few minutes and then check it's temperature with your hand.
- If using a non-flexible bottle you might find it very hard to get the lid off once the water has cooled, remove the lid every few minutes as the water cools to make this easier.
- Don't use boiling water!