

Personal preference

There are tampon options for you if you're concerned about price and packaging

We're still quite coy about tampons. Adverts have moved on little from the days of women in white jeans running or sky-diving during their periods.

Tampax and Lil-lets have been synonymous with tampons, but the mighty brands are facing strong competition from supermarket options that are a fraction of the price.

There's also a growing market in greener options, from ecologically sourced pure-cotton tampons to

reusable options such as the Mooncup.

We've tested 19 tampons and found that most perform to similar standards. So given that every woman has her personal preferences, we're not recommending Best Buys.

But why not switch to a cheaper brand, which could save you around £15 a year? And, as you use around 22 tampons or towels per period, it's also worth shopping around for more environmentally friendly options.



Insider information



Our expert Alison Eastwood answers your questions

and towels during your period and always using the lowest absorbency for your flow.

Read the leaflet provided with the tampons so you're aware of TSS symptoms.

Q Should I worry about toxic shock syndrome?

A TSS is extremely rare but can be fatal. Using tampons can increase the risk of TSS, especially for teenagers who haven't developed protective antibodies, but the risks are low. The link between tampons and TSS is still not fully understood, but the industry recommends changing them every four to eight hours and always before going to bed, alternating between tampons

Q How can I be greener in my tampon use?

A Women use around 11,000 tampons or towels in a lifetime – around 22 per period – which amounts to about 4.3bn products in the UK each year. To reduce your environmental impact, never flush tampons. You could also avoid compact tampons with plastic applicators.

Q Are there green alternatives to tampons?

A Yes. The most well known is the Mooncup –

a silicone vessel worn in the vagina that you simply empty, rinse and replace during your period. We asked seven women to try the Mooncup for two periods. Despite some initial mishaps, four of our testers are enthusiastic converts, won over by the cost – £18.99 for a cup that lasts for several years – how well it works and the convenience of not having to carry tampons around or dispose of them. Go to www.which.co.uk/tampons for more information.



How we test



Absorbent solutions

In 1964, we tested absorbency by dripping ox blood onto tampons. Nowadays, we rig up plastic bottles, each fitted with a non-lubricated condom with a tampon inside. We drip feed in pink saline solution warmed to room temperature and, once the tampon is saturated, we calculate how much solution has been absorbed and measure changes in width, length and weight.

PHOTOGRAPHY ALAMY, JOHN TRENHOLM

TAMPONS: WHICH SHOULD YOU CHOOSE?

Non-applicators

These are the cheapest type, with supermarket versions averaging around 4p a tampon.

Small and discreet, they expand without an applicator, but green credentials are dented due to cellophane wrapping.

Natracare and Cottons are made from 100% unbleached cotton without non-biodegradable synthetic veils found on other

non-applicators. Natracare also has an applicator range.

Asda, Boots, Sainsbury's and Tesco versions use a twist-opening, which we found a little easier than traditional wrapping.

WE SAY Choose Natracare or Cottons for greener options or a supermarket brand for the best value for money.

Applicator

It's worth shopping around for these as prices per tampon can vary from less than 5p for supermarket brands to nearly 10p for Tampax.

We also found differences in



green credentials. Morrisons and Tesco are wrapped in plastic and get a lower environment score.

WORTH KNOWING These are more popular than non-applicators.

packaged, the push part of the applicator sits inside the casing. This makes the tampon smaller and more discreet, but it means even more significant green issues: plastic applicators and plastic wrapping.

They're also pricey. Big brands are about 13p a tampon and supermarket brands around 9p.

WE SAY Compact sizing is a nice idea but there's some impact on your wallet and the planet.

Compact applicator

These tampons are modelled on traditional applicators but, when



BRAND	SPEC	WHICH? RATINGS			
		PRICE PER TAMPON (p)	VALUE FOR MONEY	PERFORMANCE	ENVIRONMENT
NON-APPLICATOR					
ASDA Freestyle tampons	3.9	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	
BOOTS tampons	6.8	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	
COTTONS 100% cotton tampons	10.6	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	
LIL-LETS Extra comfort tampons	9.2	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	
MORRISONS Elle non-applicator tampons	4.5	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	
NATRACARE Organic all-cotton tampons	15.6	★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	
SAINSBURY'S Non-applicator tampons	4	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	
TESCO Non-applicator tampons	3.9	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	
APPLICATOR					
ASDA Freestyle applicator tampons	4.6	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	
BOOTS tampons with applicator	7.4	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	
MORRISONS Elle applicator tampons	5.4	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	
SAINSBURY'S applicator tampons	4.5	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	
TAMPAX regular tampons	9.5	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	
TESCO applicator tampons	4.4	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	
COMPACT APPLICATOR					
BOOTS compact	11	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	
LIL-LETS compact applicator	13.3	★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	
MORRISONS Elle Silky Smooth	8.6	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	
SAINSBURY'S compact applicator tampons	9.3	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	
TAMPAX Compak	13.2	★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	

Using the table

We tested regular tampons from popular ranges. Superdrug isn't included as its range is changing. Brands are listed in alphabetical order. The more stars the better.

Specification

Price per tampon Based on all pack sizes.

Which? ratings

Value for money We checked prices in several shops and worked out an average

cost per tampon across all pack sizes.

Performance This takes into account absorbency against claims, how easy it is to open each tampon and whether the withdrawal cord is strong enough.

Environment We consider the type of applicator, the materials used in the tampon, how individual tampons are wrapped and the on-shelf packaging.

Contacts

Asda 0500 100 055
www.asda.co.uk
Boots 0845 070 8090
www.boots.com
Cottons 01224 335810
www.cottonsbrands.co.uk
Lil-lets 0121 327 4750
www.lil-lets.co.uk
Mooncup 01273 673845
www.mooncup.co.uk
Morrisons 0845 611 6111
www.morrisons.co.uk

Natracare 0117 982 3492
www.natracare.com
Sainsbury's 0800 636 262
www.sainsburys.co.uk
Tampax 0800 085 0367
www.tampax.co.uk
Tesco 0800 505555
www.tesco.com
Toxic Shock Syndrome Information Service
01483 418561
www.toxicshock.com