



CHEM FATALE



Potential Health Effects of Toxic Chemicals in Feminine Care Products

Are you surprised to learn that feminine care products—like tampons, pads, douche, wipes, and sprays—can contain hazardous chemicals? Unregulated toxic chemicals in feminine care products may result in serious health problems, like increased risk of breast cancer, reproductive problems, asthma, and allergic reactions. Chemicals of concern commonly used in feminine care products include carcinogens, reproductive toxins, endocrine disruptors, and allergens.

The presence of toxic chemicals in these products is even more concerning considering that they are used on one of the most sensitive part of our bodies. Vaginal tissue is much more absorptive than other skin, making the presence of hormone-disrupting and other toxic chemicals in feminine care products especially concerning.

Unfortunately, because of the lack of government oversight, toxic chemicals can legally be used in all kinds of personal care products without pre-market safety testing. In addition, it's difficult for women to avoid some of these potentially harmful chemicals in feminine care products because companies are not legally required to disclose ingredients in tampons and pads and fragrance ingredients in other products.

The bottom line: Unregulated toxic chemicals have no place in feminine care products.

Toxic Chemicals in Feminine Care Products & Women's Health

Feminine care products, in one form or another, are used by the majority of women in the United States.

- ▶ Up to 86 percent of women use tampons in the U.S.
- ▶ Other feminine care products—douches, sprays, washes, and wipes—are used by up to 10-40 percent of women.
- ▶ Black and Latina women are disproportionately impacted by toxic chemicals in feminine care products,

as they're much more frequent users of feminine cleansing products like douche, wipes, and sprays.

- ▶ Anti-itch creams commonly contain chemical allergens or irritants and can actually exacerbate the very symptoms that women are attempting to treat.
- ▶ Lots of feminine care products contain formaldehyde-releasing preservatives, and formaldehyde is a carcinogen and a potent allergen.
- ▶ Feminine washes commonly contain ingredients deemed by the FDA to be safe "for external use only." Given the reality of feminine wash and how it's used, it seems inevitable that internal contact will occur from using feminine wash.



SOLUTIONS

What You Can Do to Reduce Your Exposure

1. **Avoid Hall of Shame products**, a list of which is available at www.womensvoices.org.
2. **Read the labels** to avoid these problematic chemicals:
 - ▶ Methylchloroisothiazolinone
 - ▶ Methylisothiazolinone
 - ▶ Parabens
 - ▶ quaternium-15
 - ▶ DMDM hydantoin
 - ▶ octoxynol-9
 - ▶ benzethonium chloride
 - ▶ benzocaine
 - ▶ D&C Red No.33
 - ▶ Ext D&C Violet #2
 - ▶ FD&C Yellow #5
 - ▶ fragrance
3. **Look for brands that disclose all ingredients**, including what's in fragrance.

4. **Reduce your use** of feminine care products.
5. **Eliminate use** of products that may be unnecessary to a healthy vagina.
6. **Choose unscented products** where available (particularly tampons and pads).
7. **Choose chlorine-free** bleached or unbleached cotton tampons and pads.
8. **If you are having allergic symptoms, switch brands!** When you do switch—call the company's 1-800 customer service to tell them why!
9. **Tell the FDA if you've had symptoms** that may be from a feminine care product. Call **1-800-332-1088** or fill out a consumer reporting form available at: www.fda.gov/Safety/MedWatch/default.htm

What Companies Can Do

Eliminate Toxic Chemicals: Companies should develop policies to eliminate the use of carcinogens, mutagens, reproductive toxins, and endocrine disruptors from feminine care products. Additional product screening is necessary to ensure safety of use on mucous membranes.

Disclose All Ingredients: Companies should disclose all ingredients and additives used in tampons and menstrual pads, and all ingredients in fragrances used in feminine care products. Allergens should also be highlighted so women can avoid ingredients they may react to.

What Policy Makers Can Do

Pass the **Menstrual Products Right to Know Act (H.R. 2416)** which requires manufacturers of tampons and pads to disclose ingredients on labels; and the **Robin Danielson Feminine Hygiene Product Safety Act of 2017 (H.R. 2379)** which directs the National Institute of Health to research the impact ingredients in feminine care products may be having on women's health.



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Potential Health Hazards Associated with Feminine Care Products

Tampons: Hazardous ingredients may include dioxins and furans, pesticide residues and unknown fragrance chemicals. Exposure concerns include cancer, reproductive harm, endocrine disruption, and allergic rash.

Pads: Hazardous ingredients may include dioxins and furans, pesticide residues, unknown fragrance chemicals and adhesive chemicals such as methylaldibromo glutaronitrile. Exposure concerns include cancer, reproductive harm, and endocrine disruption. Studies link pad use to allergic rash.

Feminine Wipes: Hazardous ingredients may include methylchloroisothiazolinone, methylisothiazolinone, parabens, quaternium-15, DMDM hydantoin, and unknown fragrance chemicals. Exposure concerns include cancer and endocrine disruption. Studies link wipe use to allergic rash.

Feminine Wash: Hazardous ingredients may include unknown fragrance chemicals, parabens, methylchloroisothiazolinone, methylisothiazolinone, DMDM hydantoin, D&C Red No.33, Ext D&C Violet #2, and FD&C Yellow #5. Exposure concerns include endocrine disruption, allergic rash, and asthma.

Douche: Hazardous ingredients may include unknown fragrance chemicals and octoxynol-9. Studies link douche use to bacterial vaginosis, pelvic inflammatory disease, cervical cancer, low-birth weight, preterm birth, HIV transmission, sexually transmitted diseases, ectopic pregnancy, chronic yeast infections, and infertility.

Feminine deodorant (sprays, powders and suppositories): Hazardous ingredients may include unknown fragrance chemicals, parabens and benzethonium chloride. Exposure concerns include reproductive harm, endocrine disruption, and allergic rash.

Feminine anti-itch creams: Hazardous ingredients may include unknown fragrance chemicals, parabens, methylisothiazolinone, and benzocaine. Exposure concerns include endocrine disruption, allergic rash, and unresolved itch.

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