



Module 4: Reusable Cloth Pads

Day pads, night pads, panty-liners: what to choose, how they work, and how to make sure they're biodegradable.

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Introduction

Thankfully, there are many easy alternatives nowadays to disposable sanitary products.

We'll be looking at cloth pads, menstrual cups, period underwear, reusable applicators, and even the free flow instinct.

For now, let's get started with cloth pads.

I was put off by the idea of cloth pads for a long time. I didn't even like regular pads. I think I had mainstream society's voice in my head telling me my body and menstruation was icky, and the less I saw my blood the better.

Now I love cloth pads. Two things fundamentally changed my aversion to cloth pads. The first was changing my daughter's reusable cloth diapers. I changed them for a little over 2 years. Blood is so not gross compared to poop! The second thing that changed my aversion was giving them a chance and trying cloth pads on.



I bought my first cloth pads in 2018, and I'm really disappointed I didn't do it years earlier. There are so many benefits to using them. First of all, they are so comfortable, they are like a soft pillow for your privates. Not itchy or sticky or noisy even – there are some lame disposable squeaky pads out there.

Second, they're adorable. The first ones I bought have beautifully designed birds and flowers on them and I'm excited that I get to wear them every month – it's a pleasant experience. There are so many patterns to choose from and you can even make your own. Next, there's no smell when you use them, and so far I haven't had any leaks. They work incredibly well. They also fold up nicely and come with a little waterproof baggie, so it's easy to bring them with you in your backpack. Another advantage is that there's **no risk of Toxic Shock Syndrome** when you use pads, either.



Next, you will save a lot of money with these as compared to regular pads. Especially if you have periods that last forever, you'll be saving money in no time. In fact, [Tree Hugger Cloth Pads](#) has a [savings calculator](#) so you can figure out exactly how much money you'll be saving.

From an environmental perspective, they are an amazing choice. They are reusable, and last anywhere from 5-10 years, depending on how many pads you have on rotation and how long your period lasts. They're typically made of eco-friendly materials – **make sure to get pads that are made from natural fibers and that are free of plastic, nylon, and fragrance or other irritants.**



How to find plastic free pads



Some pads, like Lunapads, use PUL or Polyurethane laminate polyester, which is plastic. That means that you won't be able to compost these at the end of their lifespan, and you'll have to trash them. The PUL layer is added because it's a waterproof layer – if you have very heavy periods, you may want a pad with PUL. I haven't had an issue with PUL-free or nylon-free pads though, like Gladrags.

[Gladrags](#) are 100% zero waste – they only use cotton. Even if the pads you use, like LunaPads, aren't zero waste per se, they are still a low-waste option as compared to disposables. If, based on your flow, you can get away with using pads without the PUL layer, that would be the better option, but choose what makes sense for you.

Since 100% cotton pads are all natural, they can also be composted at the end of their life. Just cut them up into small pieces to speed up the composting process and give them a couple years to decompose.



One last benefit is that some companies you purchase cloth pads from will actually donate pads to people who menstruate and who can't afford to pay for monthly protection. Lunapads for instance has a program called [Pads4Girls](#) that has supplied over 100,000 cloth pads or period underwear to over 17,000 people in 18 countries.

There are some downsides to these cloth pads. Of course, the initial cost is high, so this may be a barrier for you. Cloth pads are much cheaper than period underwear though. You may have to save up for a few months to buy them, but it will save you a lot in the long run. The pads are not as convenient as disposables, in the sense that you do have to wash them instead of chucking them in the trash. This part honestly just becomes routine. I simply throw them in with my laundry, hang dry them, and I'm all set. I expected it to be really unpleasant to wash them but it's no big deal at all. I would say the one thing that does bother me is that the pads can slip and the heavy flow pads can be a little bulky which makes me avoid tight pants – this isn't an issue with the regular flow pads. I love these pads for night-time and for hanging around the house.



When I'm walking outdoors, they'll slip backwards and I'll end up with a pad up against my butt and no protection where I'm actually bleeding. There are a few solutions to this. The first is to use safety pins at the front and potentially also at the back of your pads. I secure it at the back in addition to the front when I'm running. This makes holes in your undies so I don't love it. Some people put puffy fabric paint at the bottom of their pads to help them stick – I haven't tried this and haven't looked into the toxicity of those paints.

Some use very tight, fitted underwear to stop the pad from bunching or slipping which I've found helpful. And others suggest that the size of the base of your underwear should match the size of the base of your pad to reduce slippage. What I personally do is simply wear these pads when I'm working from home and at nighttime. I do use the safety pin technique if I'm going out. But even better to avoid slippage when walking around a lot is to use a menstrual cup or period underwear in my opinion. But it's up to you to see what you prefer. The only other potential problems with cloth pads are that you have to be **extra careful if you use them while you have a yeast infection**. You really need to wash them well on warm or hot water and then put them in the sun to kill any bacteria to avoid reinfection. And finally, hepatitis C is a liver virus that's spread by contact with contaminated blood. If you have this infection, it's important to put your pads in the sealed waterproof baggie that they come with.

Selecting Cloth Pads

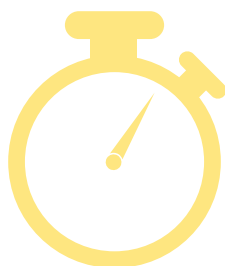


So if you're interested, here's what you need to know. There are 3 types of cloth pads you can use. There's your day pad, which is for the main chunk of your period and works well for moderate flow. It's also great for the post-partum sneeze-pees as I like to call it (urinary incontinence) and moderate post-partum bleeding.

Night pads are for heavy flow during your period or the first days post-partum. They offer great protection when you're moving around at nighttime.

Finally, you have the panty liners, which are for lighter flow days, perhaps at the start and end of your period. You can also use them with a tampon or menstrual cup as back-up or extra protection in case of leakage. Some women also just like to wear panty liners the entire month for daily protection.

How many do you need of each? It depends on your flow and it depends on how long your period lasts, whether it lasts 4-5 days or 14-18 days (yes, it's a thing!). I think starting with 6-12 day pads and 3-6 night pads is a good start. I personally started with 6 day pads and 6 night pads. Cristina just handmade me some extra day pads, so I have a good number now. I didn't have enough at first, so I just had to wash my pads before my period was over to reuse them. I personally don't use the panty liners - I just use day pads in their place. This decision is entirely your own.



+/- 8 hours

Once you have your pads, you clip them onto your underwear and change them as often as you would a disposable. That could be every hour or every 8 hours or more depending on your flow. Once you're done with it, you can fold it up and put it in your waterproof baggie.

Like my daughter's cloth diapers, I try to wash my pads at the very most 5 days after use. If you have a long cycle, you'll have to do another load before your period is done, but it's just a routine I've gotten used to. Some women soak their pads in water prior to washing them, it avoids staining. I personally don't do this and my pads are just fine and come out clean. Just make sure not to use a laundry cleaner that contains soap or it'll coat the pads, and don't use any bleach or softener either, like vinegar. You could use the cloth diaper laundry powder that I use, which contains 2 parts baking soda, 2 parts washing soda and 1 part sodium percarbonate. My pad liners are black, so I'm not concerned about staining. If you want to avoid blood stains, washing on cold will help. I hang dry my cloth pads to keep them in good shape, but you could machine dry them so long as it's on low heat.



Brands



You can find cloth pads at your local zero waste store, if you have one. At the Basel Unverpackt store, you can find 100% cotton pads in different sizes from [PurPurTage](#), which is a German company local to me.

Otherwise, online, you can get [Lunapads](#), that offer cute designs and various models of cloth pads. The wings aren't the most comfortable, and the lining is PUL, but other than that it works well as a pad.

[Gladrags](#) also offers day pads or pads with inserts, so you can add one insert on a low flow day, or 2 to 3 inserts on heavier flow days.

[You can also make your own cloth pads](#). We walk you through how to do that at the end of the workbook if you are interested in getting crafty.