

ARE YOU A FLUSHER OR A BINNER?

Anyone with a conscience would bin it, but how?
Jasmine Gardner
meets the woman to spare us the guilt

Are you an oblivious flusher or a militant binner? At that time of the month, when the matter of messy disposal arises, do you drop your sanitary items down the lavatory and hope the drainage doesn't choke, or do you parcel them up in wads of loo roll and tuck them into the bottom of the bathroom bin under an empty toothpaste tube?

In her research, Martha Silcott, 45, a businesswoman from Stoke Newington, north London, has come across every kind of tampon habit. The only woman in her household – she lives with her husband and two teenage sons – she had always been a guilty flusher. She knew she wasn't supposed to send them down the pan – just because tampons can flush doesn't mean you should flush them. It costs the water companies in England and Wales £70m a year to clear the drains of nasties and stop them ending up on the world's beaches.

After years of contemplating the solution while working as a financial adviser in the City, she has an answer – a small, biodegradable plastic bag that you can open and seal using just one hand, before throwing it in the bin. And now she has convinced one of Britain's biggest supermarkets that her FabLittleBag will appeal to our environmental conscience, and it goes on sale tomorrow. "It's the result of guilt and frustration," she says. "I knew it was wrong to flush, and although I hadn't experienced the embarrassment of getting a toilet blocked, I knew people who had."

Not flushing, however, presented other problems. "I started wrapping it in loo roll, but they build up quickly in the bin. At other people's houses, what do you do? What if

you're at a household with no women and they don't have a bin?"

Once Silcott began looking for a solution, she also started to collect horror stories. "A friend who found there was no bin in the bathroom of her friend's house put hers into the kitchen bin. The next morning, she got a call saying, 'The dog found it in the bin and thought it was a toy.'"

For Silcott, the current "solutions" on the market are not satisfactory. One product is a small nappy sack. The other is those paper bags you see in hotels. "You need both hands to tie up or fold them. And nappy sacks are see-through. As for the paper bag, it must have been a man who invented something made of paper that doesn't seal to put a moist item in."

She cobbled together the first version of her FabLittleBag from nappies and Sellotape in

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2001, when her sons were babies. "But I didn't know what to do with it." By 2006, she had found a friend with a plastics company who made a prototype. The patenting process "took ages", but was finally granted in 2013. Now, after realising she needed to focus on the project full-time and find investment, Silcott has quit her job. "At the moment I'm severely in the minus," she says. Her husband, a legal-aid criminal barrister, is supporting the family alone. "I have found it quite stressful – I've been used to always earning money."

But for Silcott, it's not about making money. "It's about creating awareness." She's working with water companies who want to give the bags out, for free, as part of their education programmes. "People think of toilets as bins. Everyone thinks their waste pipe is huge, but it's actually just 10cm. I live on the end of a terrace, and I started thinking – three women in a house, five tampons a day, multiplied by however many houses on the terrace."

So, will people buy her FabLittleBag? Or should she have developed a flushable tampon? "I hope it can become profitable. It's not perfect – until tampons can be digested inside a bag, it won't be – but I like to say currently it's the best solution, full stop. Period." ●

FabLittleBag, £3 for 20, from Waitrose and Ocado, from tomorrow

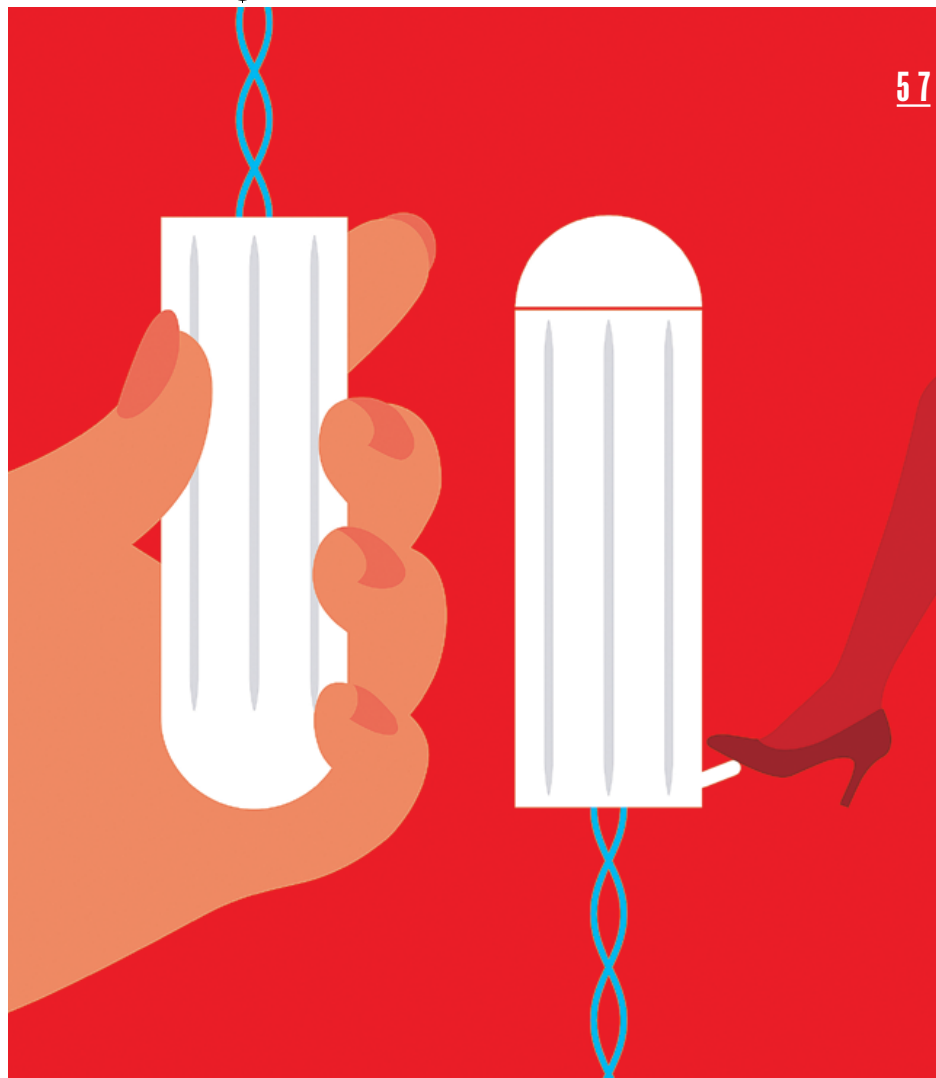


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