



## A woman's choice

KYLIE MCGREGOR LOOKS AT THE HEALTH AND ECO BENEFITS OF CHOOSING CERTIFIED ORGANIC TAMPONS AND PADS FOR PERSONAL CARE.

**A** woman will use an average of around 12,000 pads and tampons over the course of her lifetime. So when it comes to what she puts in or near her body, personal health and safety is paramount.

In the US and France, studies have found traces of potentially harmful chemicals in some pads and tampons, such as polyethylene, polypropylene, bleach, pesticide residues and even dioxins and glyphosates. And while in all cases the levels of chemicals recorded were low, it cannot guarantee zero health risk.

Thankfully, there are a number of certified organic alternatives available.

The first Australian company to offer certified organic tampons and pads was TOM Organic, which launched onto the market a decade ago after founder Aimee Marks discovered the many pesticides and synthetic ingredients used in traditional cotton tampons and pads.

"Conventional brands use heavily sprayed cotton as well as synthetics and plastics to construct the components of their pads and tampons," explains TOM Organic general manager Brooke Franklin.

"And a woman is putting these products in the most absorbent part of her body. So it's important for your personal health to minimise your exposure to any potentially harmful chemicals," Franklin says.

"By choosing organic alternatives you are taking away the risk of being exposed to the chemicals that are sprayed on conventionally grown cotton. This is better for your health overall, as well as reducing the risk of skin irritation and inflammation."

### Eco impact

There's also the environmental impact of menstrual products to consider. It's estimated that thousands of tonnes of disposable sanitary waste is generated worldwide every month. That's a lot of landfill, and rather alarming when you consider a pad, containing plastics or synthetics, takes around 500-800 years to biodegrade.

However, Franklin says certified organic pads and tampons are far more eco-friendly as they break down much more quickly than their conventional counterparts.



Left: Aimee Marks is the founder of TOM Organic.

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Then there's the issue of production. The majority of pads and tampons are composed of conventionally grown cotton, which requires large amounts of scarce water supplies. Also, pesticides, which damage soil ecosystems and run-off into waterways.

"Our tampons contain only 100 per cent certified organic cotton and plant-based materials, nothing else. So they are completely biodegradable, which is critical for the future of our environment," Franklin says.

"Another benefit of choosing organic is the community impact. Yes, it's better for your personal health and the environment, but it's also about the people working in the supply chain and their working conditions and health (by not being exposed to toxic chemicals). When you make the choice for certified organic, it has the ability to impact other people and communities."

Indeed, TOM Organic's innovative approach in this area has been recognised by the organic industry after winning two categories in the Australian Organic Industry 2019 Awards: Best New Organic Certified Product and Best Organic Influencer/Educator for founder Aimee Marks.

### Bamboo too

The good news is that as well as organic cotton options there are now other more eco-friendly alternatives, such as pads made from bamboo. Australian options include Bamboo Babe and Tsuno (which also has organic cotton tampons).

Bamboo is one of the world's most eco-friendly and sustainable fibres. It grows quickly and easily


without chemical inputs and is naturally resistant to pests and fungi.

"Bamboo is also more absorbent than cotton," explains George Harris, founder of Bamboo Babe. "But there are also secondary benefits: bamboo is naturally hypo-allergenic, which means it is low irritant, and it's also naturally antibacterial so that helps to control odours.

"Bamboo is also a sustainable and renewable source. The bamboo we use comes from a bamboo forest that's accredited by FSC, which is a big plus. And being certified organic, no toxic chemicals can be used to grow or make our products. So they are also compostable and biodegradable – breaking down in about 180 days."

### Reusable options

Taking the eco-friendly factor to the next level is the growing number of reusable products appearing on both supermarket and health store shelves, including menstrual cups (made from silicone, rubber or latex), reusable pads (cloth pads) and underwear (absorbent knickers) – all of which can be simply washed and used time and again.

Whatever your preference, in our present social climate where eco-conscious consumers are making purchasing decisions that consider both personal health and environmental impact, today's menstrual options are growing. 

## ECO-FRIENDLY CHOICES

### CERTIFIED ORGANIC

TOM Organic: available online and at Woolworths, Coles, Chemist Warehouse and Priceline; [thetomco.com](http://thetomco.com)  
 Bamboo Babe: available online and at many IGA and organic and wholefood stores; [bamboobabe.com.au](http://bamboobabe.com.au)  
 Tsuno: available online at [tsuno.com.au](http://tsuno.com.au)

### REUSABLE OPTIONS

Pads: Hannahpad – [hannahpad.com.au](http://hannahpad.com.au); Paisley Pads – [paisleypads.com.au](http://paisleypads.com.au); Mense Sense – [mensense.com.au](http://mensense.com.au)  
 Period underwear: Thinx – [shethinx.com](http://shethinx.com); Modibodi – [modibodi.com](http://modibodi.com)  
 Menstrual cups: Juju – [juju.com.au](http://juju.com.au); Lunette – [lunette.com.au](http://lunette.com.au); DivaCup – [divacup.com](http://divacup.com)