

Information and recommendation for people with incontinence who have menstruation*

Incontinence products and menstruation

As menstruation pads are not designed to absorb fast-flowing liquid like urine or to hold as much liquid as an incontinence product we do recommend to continue to use your incontinence product also during menstruation. In this document we will explain why odour may appear and why there is an increased risk of skin imbalance during menstruation and how you can avoid this with appropriate hygiene and changing routines.

TENA incontinence products are designed to absorb urine quickly and efficiently through the top layer. This layer consists of very small perforations which allow this process to take place rapidly. Menstrual discharge contains blood, mucosal tissue (that has accumulated along the walls of the uterus) and vaginal mucus. It is more viscous than urine and passing blood clots can be normal for some during menstruation. If the blood stays on the surface of the incontinence product it causes a damp environment with a higher pH value which puts the skin at a risk of lesions and may cause odour.

Why not use a menstruation pad on top of the incontinence product?

This is NOT recommended because:

- When urine leaks into the menstruation pad it is unable to lock it away from the skin, which will consequently remain very wet. This will result in discomfort for the user and a risk of incontinence-associated dermatitis.
- The menstruation pad will prevent the area of the incontinence pad beneath it from absorbing urine.
- If the urine volume is high, there is an increased risk of leakage on clothing from the urine that the menstruation pad cannot absorb (since the urine will continue out on the sides and not be absorbed by the incontinence product beneath).
- Placing a menstruation pad on the incontinence pad will decrease the incontinence pad's ability to breathe, causing a hot and sweaty atmosphere and discomfort.

We therefore recommend changing incontinence pads more often during menstruation instead of using both a menstrual product and an incontinence product at the same time.

pH and vaginal health, why is it important?

The vagina cleans itself by secreting natural fluids and maintaining a slightly acidic pH. In between menstruation periods the pH is often between 3.8 and 4.5, but variations can occur. A slightly acidic vagina is the perfect environment for lactobacilli, the types of good bacteria that help keep the vagina clean and healthy – and unwanted bacteria struggle to survive in an acidic environment.

What can cause imbalance and odour during menstruation?

- A high pH level makes the sensitive skin in the genital area more susceptible to infection or inflammation. During menstruation the pH in the vagina is elevated as blood has a pH of about 7.4 (slightly basic). The composition of the microflora can then be slightly altered due to the elevated pH, this is part of the natural cycle and does not mean that there is something wrong. Some women however are more prone to infection during or after menstruation.
- Wearing a wet and warm pad for a longer time can cause skin imbalance and increased odour.
- Cleaning the internal genital parts or using harsh soaps enhance the risk of disturbing both the mucosa and the microflora.

Recommendations to keep the genital area clean, dry and healthy:

Healthy skin is more resistant to infection. It is essential to keep the genital area clean, dry and healthy to maintain or improve the skin's ability to protect itself against infection.

- During the menstruation period it is important to change the pad more frequently to avoid skin imbalance and increased odour.
- If you change the pad more often you may be able to use a pad with a lower absorption.
- A healthy mild cleaning routine of the outer genital parts when changing a pad can help keep the microflora in balance.
- Avoid harsh soap in the sensitive genital area. Instead choose skin care and cleansing products with a low pH (pH 4.0-5.0).
- Use TENA wash cream to clean fragile skin, and TENA barrier cream for extra protection of the skin.
- Dry the skin gently after cleaning and before putting on a new incontinence product, since bacteria grow better in moist areas. Provide air if possible.

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*and don't use menstrual cups or tampons

