

Menstrual Cups, at Age 66, Begin to Make Up for Lost Time Profile 1st

The first reaction from their best friends, users say, is almost always: "Ewww."

Then, slowly, some come around. A few even become imbued with a missionary zeal to spread the word. "I love it," said Rachel Jenkins-Stevens, 25. "I bought one in 1998, and I've only used about five tampons since."

Menstrual cups – soft, flexible cups inserted to catch menses flows – were first patented in this country in the 1930's, but never became popular. They are still hardly the rage, but use of them is growing, especially at women's colleges and through alternative health Web sites.

Safety questions have been raised, but so far the cups have not been linked to toxic shock syndrome or any other medical problem.

Two brands are sold in the United States: the Keeper, released in 1987, which is made of latex rubber and is reusable, and Instead, released in 1997, which is made of soft polyethylene and is disposable.

Some women choose them because they fear that tampons raise the risk of toxic shock or that the fibers of bleaches in them may cause harm. Some like the savings: a \$35 Keeper is supposed to last a decade, while a 10-year supply of tampons may cost about \$650. (Instead is pricier: a 10-year supply would cost about \$400.)

Some like the convenience, an end to purses full of bent applicators and crumpled pads. Some appreciate that many women can wear them without leakage for up to 12 hours, even swimming, exercising or sleeping.

Some like the fact that Instead can be worn during sex. Some feel better about not adding tampons to landfills. (Scientists in Biosphere 2 wore the Keeper.) Some celebrate "moon flows" and want a closer connection to their own menses as a symbol of womanhood. And some mistrust the conglomerates that make tampons and want something "sort of antiestablishment," said Ms. Jenkins-Stevens.

As Harry Finley, the founder of the online Museum of Menstruation and Women's Health, which covers the history and culture of menses, put it: "It'll never become mainstream in America. It involves too much contact with the body, and I think most women are squeamish about that."

Even the president of Instead Inc. agreed: "This product isn't for everybody." The cups for the two brands, one ounce each, are folded and inserted into the vagina with the fingers www.softcup.com

The Keeper is longer, sits lower and has a stem on the bottom that makes it relatively easy to pull out, empty, rinse and replace. Instead sits just under the cervix and is somewhat harder to hook a finger under. It is removed every 12 hours and thrown away.

Mary F. Frost, the president of Instead, says her company sells 12 million to 15 million cups a year, enough for about 150,000 women. Most are sold in pharmacy chains. The president of Keeper Inc., Lou Crawford, refused to give exact sales figures, but she said the business sold "tens of thousands per year."

About the Author

[Menstrual Cup, Feminine Hygiene Cup - Instead Soft Cups](#) The Instead Softcup is a menstrual collection cup that is a healthy alternative to other feminine hygiene products such as tampons or pads. The Softcup is a disposable cup that is made from medical grade plastics and is latex free. It is worn internally for up to 12 hours with no Toxic Shock Syndrome

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