Dear Alice,

I had a tampon, and now I can't find it. It was there. I tried to find it, but I can't. Is that possible? I am really worried about it. It was in for about one day. Please help.

Answer

Dear Reader,

Rest assured — there’s nowhere for your tampon to travel beyond the vaginal canal. Although the vagina is only about three to four inches deep, the cervix, which is located at the top of the vagina, is so small that it can only let blood out and semen in, meaning your tampon has hit a dead end. That being said, it’s possible that an object such as a tampon can get lodged near the top or for it to shift sideways, making it hard to reach. Chances are that with some relaxation and a bit more exploration you’ll be able to find your missing tampon. However, if you continue to have trouble locating it, a trip to a health care provider may be in order.

You say that the tampon has been missing in action for about a day. It's a good idea to figure out how to remove it in short order; though rare, you do run the risk for a serious infection if the tampon is left in for too long. Some signs to be aware of that might confirm you have a stuck tampon include foul-smelling discharge or a foul odor from your vagina without any discharge, itching inside your vagina and on your vulva, and uncomfortable and painful urination. If you’re experiencing any of these symptoms, it’s critical to seek medical attention as soon as possible, as you may be experiencing symptoms of toxic shock syndrome, frequently called TSS [2] (more on that in a bit).

With that said, it’s time to roll up your sleeves and find what's missing! Health care professionals recommend lying down on your back or finding another position to help you relax. Doing so will make it easier to retrieve the tampon. Once you feel as relaxed as you can be, try using your (clean and trimmed) fingers to find the string or the tampon to pull it out. If it’s too slippery or you’re not able to find it, you could try asking a partner or a close friend. For a better understanding of the female anatomy and where your tampon might be located you may want to take a look at these diagrams [3]. A tip for possibly pushing the tampon out is to push, similar to when you’re having a bowel movement. The contraction of your vaginal wall may force the
tampon out or shift it so it’s easier to retrieve with your hands. When all is said and searched for, if you can’t find it or remove it yourself, your best bet is to see your health care provider.

No matter what action you take to retrieve the missing tampon, it’s crucial that you do so without delay. The reason being, if a tampon is left in for too long, you do run the risk of TSS. This is a rare, but life-threatening, infection often caused by *Staphylococcus aureus* (staph) bacteria. It’s also worth mentioning that in addition to leaving a tampon in for too long, studies have shown that using the super plus absorbency tampons may also increase the risk of developing TSS. Symptoms of the infection include a sudden high fever, vomiting, diarrhea, fainting, dizziness, or a sunburn-like rash. If you notice any of these symptoms, seek medical attention immediately. To minimize the risk of TSS in the future, wash your hands before inserting a tampon, change your tampon every four to six hours (especially on heavy flow days), and use the lowest absorbency tampon that’s reasonable given the amount of your menstrual flow.

Here’s to ending your search soon!

Alice!

Category:
Sexual & Reproductive Health
Genital Wonderings
Women's Sexual Health

Related questions
The ins and outs of menstrual cups — How do they differ from tampons and pads?
What is a staph infection?
Penis goes where during sex?
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Resources
Medical Services (Morningside)
Medical Services (CUIMC)
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[1] https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/lost-tampon-4