Dear Alice

I have to take swimming as a requirement. How do I deal with my menstrual period during that time? The department only allows six absences per term. I do not use tampons.

— New Student

Answer

Dear New Student,

Not to worry! You can rest assured you’re not alone in this dilemma. Plenty of individuals with menstrual cycles don’t use tampons. So, it’s likely that other students have had similar concerns in regards to the swimming requirement. Fortunately, there are a couple of options available to accommodate Aunt Flo when it’s time for a swim, such as using an alternative method that prevents menstrual leaking while you’re in the water or discussing how you can satisfy the requirement in a different way with your instructor. Read on for more information and tips for considering these options.

Tampons, though sometimes considered more convenient, are certainly not the end-all-be-all of menstrual management. If you’re curious about an alternative to pads and tampons, there’s a less well-known option that can be used while swimming: the menstrual cup, which serves as a re-usable “menstrual receptacle.” Menstrual cups are available over-the-counter and can be a pricey one-time purchase. However, in the long-term it’s possible that you’ll end up saving money and maybe the planet — it’s a great environmentally-friendly option, since it produces less waste. In addition, another option is period-proof swimwear. This is swimwear that has been designed with either absorption material built-in or holders to keep sanitary pads in place so, depending on how heavy your flow is, you might not need any other back up methods. A quick Internet search for “period swimwear” will give you some options.

If menstrual cups or period swimwear aren’t possibilities for you, you might try talking with your swim instructor to work out a compromise. For example, you could attend class and learn the strokes on the edge of the pool (and not be marked absent), or you could make up the sessions at another time when you don’t have your period. This issue could have come up previously and
your instructor might be familiar with the different options available. If you’re still wary about talking with them about this issue, perhaps you could email them as a first step towards addressing your concerns. After opening up the conversation, you can set up a meeting in-person to work out the details.

When it comes to menstrual cycles, every person is different. The decision to stay on land during your period or try out a new method really comes down to your personal preference. Enjoy your swimming (pur)suits, New Student!

Alice!
Category:
Sexual & Reproductive Health
Menstruation
Women's Sexual Health

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