Do I need to change my tampon after using the bathroom? [1]

Hello Alice,

I’ve looked at your FAQ but I haven’t found one like the one I have. When a woman uses a tampon, does she need to change it after she uses the bathroom? I would think that the string would get wet and could contribute to bacteria.

Thank you.

Answer

Dear Reader,

Whether or not a person decides to change their tampon immediately after urinating is a personal choice — period. Urine itself is typically sterile and generally poses little to no risk for an infection. However, if a tampon string comes into contact with human feces and rubs against the genitals, it can pose a higher risk for a genital bacterial infection. Likewise, if a person leaves their tampon in for an excessive period of time (roughly longer than eight hours), they’re at higher risk of experiencing a rare and life-threatening bacterial infection known as toxic shock syndrome [2]. If you’re concerned you’re at risk for, or currently have, a genital bacterial infection, it may be wise to speak with your health care provider who may make the appropriate assessments and provide you with any necessary treatment.

To date, there is no research that indicates any medical reasons as to why a person must remove their tampon immediately after peeing. Similarly, there are no known cases of infection from urinating while using a tampon. For the average healthy person, urine contains a small number of harmless bacteria or no bacteria at all. However, if they have an infection in their bladder or urethra, it may transfer bacteria to their genitals and cause a urinary tract infection [3] (UTI). Otherwise, if a person chooses to replace their tampon after peeing, it’s usually for their own comfort.

Some people change their tampons before or after going to the bathroom, either because they experience discomfort with the feeling of a wet string or because they’re concerned about the odor of urine. Since frequently replacing a tampon may be inconvenient and expensive, here’s a quick option to consider: some people simply hold their tampon string out of the stream of urine if
they don’t want it to get wet while they pee. And if it does get wet, squeezing it between some toilet paper can quickly dry it up! With this easy little trick, peeing with a tampon in might become easier and more comfortable.

Unlike urine, human feces (poop) aren’t sterile and can contain multiple harmful bacteria such as hepatitis A, and Clostridium difficile, and *Escherichia coli (E. coli)*⁴. Consequently, if feces accidentally get on a tampon string, it may pose a risk for a genital bacterial infection. To avoid infection, it’s crucial that people actively avoid getting any feces on their string. This may be particularly difficult for people with rectovaginal fistulas — an abnormal connection between the rectum and vagina, allowing feces to pass through the vagina. But, in the event that a person’s string becomes contaminated, there’s no need for panic. Rather, they can immediately throw their tampon away, replace it with a clean one, and wash their hands with soap or an alcohol-based sanitizer (if soap and water aren’t available).

In the end, it’s all about what makes a person comfortable; if they want to change their tampons after they go to the bathroom, then do so! Regardless of this choice, it’s always helpful to practice healthy tampon hygiene. Some tips include reading the labels on the box of tampons, using the lowest absorbency tampon appropriate for their flow, and keeping their string away from their feces. And, if in doubt about vaginal health, it may be helpful to have a helpful chat with a health care provider, specifically a gynecologist.

Cheers!

Alice!

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