

## BETWEEN LIVING CONSCIOUSLY AND CONVENIENT USE

When it comes to choosing the type of product we use, the main criteria are **effectiveness** (doing their job properly) and **convenience**: not involving an excessive cost for us (items being easy to handle, not taking long to dry, being cheap, etc.).

The following tables show an assessment of the two types of item (disposable and reusable) with respect to different specific aspects of these criteria. In the first there are items for external use and in the second those for internal use.

### EFFECTIVENESS AND CONVENIENCE OF NAPPIES AND SANITARY TOWELS

	Disposable	Reusable
<b>Effectiveness</b>	<p>The most common ones on the market have a core of cellulose mixed with sap (superabsorbent polymer), the most absorbent known substance (it can retain 800 times its weight in liquid, although when it is put in nappies the absorption capacity is lower). When it is wet, it takes on gel form and does not allow the liquid to escape, even if you squeeze the nappy or sanitary towel.</p> <p>The layer in contact with the skin is usually a <b>synthetic fabric</b>,<sup>1</sup> designed in such a way that the liquid quickly passes to the core. Water does not penetrate the synthetic fibres, so they do not get wet and the skin is always dry.</p> <p>Thick nappies and sanitary towels are usually made of <b>cotton wool</b>. They are less absorbent and waterproof but softer, more breathable and do not cause allergies.</p>	<p>They are usually <b>cotton</b>, woven in the form of <b>towelling</b> or <b>flannel</b>, <b>hemp</b> or a mixture of the two. Some mix polyester into the fabric to help keep the skin dry. Some have polyester material in contact with the skin for the same purpose. All these materials are less absorbent than sap.</p> <p>Cotton is softer than the synthetic materials. There is a good reason why the advertising for disposable products uses the claim cotton-like. However, it loses softness with washing, particularly in hard water areas. In general, the skin breathes better with cloth nappies, it does not heat up so much and suffers less friction than with synthetic material nappies and sanitary towels.</p> <p>The waterproof protector can be a <b>synthetic material</b> (normally nylon or a polyurethane sheet) or <b>wool</b>; in this case it breathes better and is less permeable.</p>
<b>Handling and comfort</b>	<p>They can be put on and taken off very easily.</p> <p>The nappies are usually thinner and lighter than cloth ones. The baby does not often feel wet.</p> <p>Thicker sanitary towels are softer (that is why they are usually used after giving birth).</p>	<p>Some nappies can be put on and taken off in the same way as disposable ones, others take longer. In general, you need to change them more often than disposable ones because children always get wet when they pee.</p> <p>In the case of sanitary towels, they are handled in exactly the same way.</p>

<sup>1</sup> In fact it is a *non-woven material* made of tangled fibres stuck together but not spun or arranged in the form of a mesh. It can also be made by microperforating a film.

<b>Maintenance</b>	There is no maintenance (they are thrown away immediately after first-time use). Organisation is needed so that the rubbish bin does not smell.	They need washing and drying between uses. The sanitary towels need rinsing, without using hot water, before they are put for washing with other clothes.
<b>Availability</b>	They can be bought in many shops. It is necessary to buy them often.	They can only be bought in some shops and at fairs, via distributors who send them to your home or over the Internet (see below).
<b>Price<sup>2</sup></b>	Nappies can cost between 700 and 1,000 euros per baby. <sup>3</sup> Sanitary towels, between 25 and 40 euros per year having a period.	A set of nappies for a baby can cost between 250 and 400 euros. <sup>2</sup> They can remain in good condition for more than one baby, so the price can be divided. A set of cloth sanitary towels can last between five and ten years and costs no more than 90 euros.
<b>Social context</b>	This is the most common and socially accepted option in many countries.	Using this option can attract attention. Maternity units and nurseries may not allow cloth nappies.
<b>Living with them</b>	Nappies and sanitary towels are designed so that we notice pee, poo and periods as little as possible. This distances us from our nature.	Maintaining these tools means we get to know and take care of our own bodies or those of the people close to us in a more conscious way.

#### **EFFECTIVENESS AND CONVENIENCE OF ITEMS FOR INTERNAL USE DURING MENSTRUATION<sup>4</sup>**

	<b>Disposable</b>	<b>Reusable</b>
<b>Effectiveness</b>	Tampons cease to be effective when they are saturated.	Sponges need changing more often than tampons because they absorb less. Menstrual cups do not absorb blood, they collect it. When they are full they overflow.
<b>Handling and comfort</b>	Tampons with applicators mean you do not have to get dirty.	They need rinsing with drinking water before they are put back in, so you either need a sink or to take water with you.

<sup>2</sup> Figures for Spain, 2006.

<sup>3</sup> We have made the calculation assuming that nappies are used until the age of two and a half.

<sup>4</sup> With all of these it is possible to do all kinds of activities comfortably with your period (swimming, running, etc.), which differentiates them from sanitary towels.

<b>Maintenance</b>	None (they are thrown away immediately after first-time use).	Sponges are put in to soak after each period with hot water and vinegar or bicarbonate and they are kept dry.  The menstrual cup has to be boiled for five or ten minutes after each period. It must not be washed with soap.
<b>Availability</b>	They can be bought in many shops. It is necessary to buy them often.	They can only be bought in some shops and at fairs, via distributors who send them to your home or over the Internet (see below).
<b>Price<sup>5</sup></b>	The tampons used during a year can cost between 35 and 50 euros.	Sponges can last two years and cost about ten euros. Cups cost about 30 euros. Some manufacturers say they last ten years, others that they last indefinitely.
<b>Social context and living with them</b>	These are a very common option in countries on the northern shore.	Maintaining these tools means we have a closer relationship with our menstruation.

The following summarises all this information:

- Disposable items are **more absorbent** and, in the long term, **a lot more expensive**. They allow periods and escapes to go more **unnoticed**.
- Generally, reusable nappies need **changing more often**. There is a great variety of types and they can be found to meet all needs, even at night. They are usually **less aggressive** for the skin.
- Maintaining these products makes us more aware of our babies' and our own bodies.

In general, nowadays we usually understand that anything that requires **less time and/or less money** is more convenient because we are usually convinced that “we don't have time for anything else”. Because of this, industrial research is almost exclusively oriented towards offering us products that require little time and little attention. Marketing goes along with this trend and so – in our case – it paints periods, pee and poo as disgusting and even undesirable things, so that it is better if we can manage without touching them or smelling them. The fact that we can manage “not even to notice” they exist is generally seen as indisputable progress. The result of all this is to distance us from our bodies and to make us strangers to ourselves. However, periods and incontinence form part of us, whether or not we hide them.

In conscious consumption we believe that the cultural change required also includes **self-awareness**, which, in turn, includes not disparaging our most personal or intimate aspects but rather recognising them and experiencing them. That is why we think the experience aspect can be as important and decisive in the choice of options as all the other considerations. In the case that concerns use, reusable hygiene items allow us closer contact with what is happening to our bodies or those of people close to us. Dedicating time and attention to ourselves can also help us to identify and discard things we usually spend our time on that are less important to us.

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<sup>5</sup> Figures for Spain, 2006.