

Free 7 Periods

Biodegradable pads

As a University of Reading student, I have a strong fondness for our institution, its campus and everything that it strives to achieve. Although as an English Language and Linguistics student I do not have any vast knowledge of the science behind global warming or the intricacies of our impact on our environment, I have long had a passion for living a sustainable lifestyle. Because of this, I was excited when I became chosen to receive and trial the natural, plastic free period product company Natra Care's biodegradable pads, I was delighted.

I chose the pads over other trial options such as tampons or menstrual cups because I felt that as a relatively large item in comparison to the other products, it is important to tackle the amount of plastic being used by other brands in the making of these.

When I received the pads, I was surprised to discover that the brand turned out to be Natra Care, as this is one I have been using since I first got my period. However, since moving to university I had recently stopped buying them due to the lack of stock in mainstream, local supermarkets.

As such, using them again was an interesting experience after having used more standard, plastic-based, perfumed products beforehand. As I enjoy the scent that some brands include in their pads, it was a little disappointing switching back to the plainness of Natra Care. However, it is important to note that this was a minor factor and not an inconvenience that would hinder my buying or usage of the product.

The pads were easy to use, coming in a neat cardboard box. Each item had wings on the side, which made application easy and ensured the pad stayed in place. Something each one also had which did not impress me so much was an individual wrapping. This was completely unnecessary in terms of hygiene or preservation, and definitely does not support the whole purpose of creating a more waste-free, sustainable product. However, this issue was the only problem that truly lowered the company in my eyes, and redeemed itself by the wrappers also being 100% biodegradable.

The pads were, however, extremely comfortable to wear, moulding to your own body shape, and I was able to wear them all day without any inconvenience or discomfort at all. Another benefit was that unlike many pads which include a plasticised outer coating, these did not rustle or create any noise when moving, making them entirely discreet to wear.

As I remember, Natra Care is one of the more expensive brands when it comes to period products, an obstacle I have come to expect when shopping for plastic-free or "alternative" items. Most shops that actually do stock them charge around 1.5-2

Free Periods

times the price of an average, cheap bag of pads or tampons that you may find in the Co-Op or Asda. However, they are not extortionately pricey, leading me to think that I would be inclined to buy the product again.

It is the slightly higher price that would probably make me inclined to hesitate before recommending these pads to a friend. On the other hand, it is also crucial to note that Natra Care is a cruelty-free enterprise, meaning they never test on animals. This is a vital aspect of the buying process for me as I believe that no animals should have to suffer unnecessarily for our benefit. This leads me to the decision that if I were in need of more and failed to find any others that were a) cheaper, b) cruelty-free and c) also biodegradable, I would then certainly make an effort to seek out Natra Care.

As students, I believe that we have the ability to help by doing a lot of little things that add up, from remembering to turn that kitchen light off if we're the last one out, to buying food such as fruit and vegetables in their plastic-free versions when possible. Using sustainable products for a natural cycle that many of us females experience is just one of the things we can be doing to make a less negative impact on our planet.

Free Periods

Biodegradable tampons

I wanted to get involved in this campaign as I am always keen to reduce my single-use plastic consumption and I have always been conscious that your period can be very detrimental to the planet with the amount of waste that it can produce.

I wanted to try the biodegradable tampons as it would be a way of switching to a more environmentally-friendly product whilst using something which I am used to. Before using the product I was a little apprehensive due to the applicator being made of cardboard rather than plastic which made me wonder how easy they were to use. The packaging was really nice and the tampons came in wrapping which could be recycled too. The tampons came in a variety of absorbencies allowing girls to alter which tampons they could use depending on their period and time in their menstrual cycle.

The tampons were a lot easier to use than I thought they would be and I couldn't tell any difference between what I would normally use which made me really happy and pleased to know that I could have a more sustainable period! They were comfortable and lasted the same length of time as I would normally use a tampon for which was great piece of mind for when I was out and about.

The tampons were roughly the same price as my usual products making it no more expensive to use a more sustainable product.

I would definitely recommend this product to my friends or anyone who is looking into ways of being more sustainable in their everyday life. Despite my initial apprehensions, the product was easy, comfortable and effective which is what any girl wants!

Ellie Moore

Free Periods

Biodegradable tampons

Using sustainable and organic period products is a great way to become more eco-friendly!

Before starting the trial, I was not sure how the 100% organic cotton tampons would hold up compared to others I have used before. But I was still excited to try them as I have wanted to before but didn't want to spend money on products that might not work for me.

They do not look or feel any different to the Tampax Tampons I was using before. The only noticeable difference is the applicator which is made out of cardboard and still just as easy to use as a plastic one. Whilst a lot of brands use rayon and non-organic cotton to produce tampons, which can also sometimes be bleached for a bright white colour, the natracare tampons are made out of 100% chlorine-and-bleach free-cotton. This makes them better for your body and a sustainable product with a company that actively tries to reduce their impact on the environment in their production process.

You can buy this brand from Waitrose, Holland & Barrett, amazon and pharmacies, but there are also other sustainable and organic brands you could get instead. In terms of price, they are affordable and compare similarly to other period product brands.

I don't know why I haven't started using sustainable period products before as there are only benefits and would definitely recommend them to my friends.

Katinka

Free Periods

Menstrual cup

I'm Holly, a first-year student at the University of Reading and I had been toying with the idea of making the change from using regular sanitary products to using a menstrual cup for a while, however I always put it off. Then the opportunity to trial a cup came around and decided it was the best time to test the switch! I've always been conscious about how unsustainable tampons and pads are, and the massive amount of waste they produce. This is why I decided to apply to trial the menstrual cup, because it would be a one-time purchase that could last you years.

Before participating in the trial, I was excited to be able to test out a new product for my periods, as I have used sanitary pads and tampons since my period started. I was also nervous as it was going to be a new experience, but I was more hopeful that I would like the cup because I was wanting to make the change beforehand.

My experience using the product has been amazing. I had read that you are able to wear it for up to 12 hours, which is equivalent to approximately three tampons worth! The first time using the product I was nervous, but excited to see how it was going to go. I had watched videos provided by the Organicup company for tips and tricks on how to use it for first timers. It was super easy to follow the instructions and to insert! I had initially thought that the product might be uncomfortable, because it is a lot wider and larger than a tampon, so I had my doubts. However, I was thoroughly surprised as you cannot feel the cup at all whilst wearing, so you can honestly forget about it for at least 8 hours, depending on how heavy your period is.

After just 2 days I felt like I had gotten the hang of it pretty well. You can wear it all night without feeling like you are going to leak, or that you will have the risk of toxic shock syndrome (TSS) that is linked with tampon use. Additionally, you don't need to worry that you might not have packed a tampon or a pad for when you need to change! You already have everything you need if you were going out for the day for example. All you need to do, if you did want to change during the day, is go to the bathroom and empty the cup into the toilet, and then wipe the cup with tissue or a baby wipe and then reinsert the cup! It was hard to get used to the first time taking out the cup and cleaning it, however that soon goes away and feels like normal!

The Organicup can last you for years, whereas a box of tampons would last me 1-2 cycles. This is a big difference in price, as the cup is priced at £21 and a box of tampons costing around £5 depending on the brand and size you buy. So not only are you actually saving money long term, you are reducing the amount of waste you produce by a massive amount.

I have already recommended this product to my friends, and I would thoroughly recommend this product to whoever is reading this. I know it seems like a scary

Free Periods

switch and an odd idea, but trust me, it's worth it. I am going to switch over to this product myself. I couldn't let myself switch back to tampons and pads after knowing how easy the Organicup was to use. With so many options now for sustainable alternatives to normal sanitary products, it is so important to explore your options, because as you don't have a choice in actually having your period, you do have a choice in how to cater for your period with trying to be as environmentally, and body friendly as possible.

Holly

Free Periods

Menstrual cup

Short intro of me:

I'm Tasha, 21, a second-year French and Spanish student. I usually use tampons and have never tried a sustainable period product before.

Why did you want to get involved/try this product?

I'd been considering buying a cup or some period underwear for a while, and this was the perfect opportunity to try it out for free! The amount of plastic I was throwing out from using disposable period products saddened me, inspiring me to look into sustainable options. Organic products are too expensive for me to buy consistently and don't solve the issue of landfill waste. I also think that there isn't enough dialogue around periods, and engaging in this discussion seemed like a good opportunity to help normalise the topic.

Initial impressions before participating in the product trial

I was excited to try out the product, also a little nervous as I had heard stories of my friend dropping hers down the toilet almost instantly! I was pretty sure that I would like it because I use tampons currently, and it seems basically like a reusable tampon? I wasn't sure how cleaning it would work, as I'd heard you had to boil them every time you changed it which sounded like a lot of hassle.

Your experience of using the product

I tried it out before my period started, as you have to learn the technique to get it to 'pop' open inside you to get the cup to seal. [don't] picture: squatting awkwardly on my bathroom floor with Google in one hand and the cup in the other, trying not to fall over while figuring out how the hell this is supposed to work. It was a good idea to practice beforehand because I didn't want to worry or be stressed about getting it wrong when my period had just started. So, when my period did actually start, I had a good idea of how to take less than 25 minutes to fit it. Next was removing it: heeding my friend's advice (the aforementioned toilet dropper) I did this while in the shower so that if I dropped/spilt it, I wasn't going to have to fish it out of the toilet and buy a new one. It occurred to me during this process that I'd not really seen a whole bunch of fresh period blood before - it's a lot goopier than I'd realised. Weirdly, that makes it easier to clean, as the blood just kind of slips out without leaving a whole bunch in the cup, or splashing everywhere.

Overall, I love it. It's so convenient to not have to make emergency runs to the store because I've run out of tampons, or having to buy three different types because my flow changes during each period.

Free 7 Periods

I think that using a period cup requires a certain level of comfort with your body, as you'll have to spend a decent amount of time fiddling to get it in the first time - the experience isn't as removed as using a tampon. You will get blood on your hands, and you will have to squat on your bathroom floor. Personally, that didn't bother me, but I certainly know people who would scrunch their noses at the thought.

How easy was it

After initially figuring it out, it's really easy and low maintenance. You don't even have to empty the bathroom bin anymore! It's pretty much insert, remove, dump, rinse, repeat. There are no worries about leakage, or accidentally contracting TSS, or having to carry spares. I'm on my second cycle with it now, and being able to just grab it is great!

How comfortable was it?

It feels pretty much the same as wearing a tampon, except without the annoying string. You can't feel it at all once it's in. Because you only really need to change it in the morning and at night, the aspect of worrying about how long you've been wearing your tampon/pad for during the day is completely gone. I sometimes get pain from using a tampon and the physical pressure of an object, and while there was still some pain, I think it was less. I know there are theories out there about having a chemically treated object inside you causing period pain, so if this is a problem for you, a period cup is probably worth a try!

Good value for money?

When you compare it to the cost of buying tampons or pads, it pays for itself pretty quickly, but I was reluctant to fork out for the cost upfront if I didn't know I was going to like it. I'd say if you use tampons at the moment, it's similar enough that it'll likely work for you and worth the investment.

Would you recommend it to a friend?

Yes!

Would you switch over to this product yourself?

Yes! I won't be going back!

Tasha

Free Periods

Menstrual cup

Hi, I'm Lucy and I'm a convert to the menstrual cup.

I was really interested in trying this product as I've heard a lot about it, but never really been sure if it was worth the investment. A friend at another University took part in a similar scheme, but she was not very enthusiastic about the experience. But it was free, so I thought 'Why not?'

After a little research and some anatomically dubious YouTube videos (all animations, I hasten to add!) I felt confident I understood the theory behind the cup, but aren't we all a little wary of popping new things up our gungas (Kiwi slang, curtesy of an actual Kiwi). It was with trepidation that I soaked the soft silicone cup in boiled water for three minutes, and got to work...
And easy as that it was in and doing its thing.

I've never really been able to use tampons because I find them incredibly uncomfortable and sometimes painful. This follows nearly a decade of trial and error, so I'm pretty confident they aren't for me. For this reason I was extremely, and very pleasantly, surprised to find the cup caused no discomfort at all and was really very comfortable. I honestly couldn't feel a thing! It did take a couple of tries to get used to, and to get the seal completely right, but it's very easy to get the hang of. I think the weirdest part was seeing a little cup filled with my own blood, but it wasn't gross like a used tampon. I'm really not a fan of the tampon! The cup also has little marks on the side so you can keep track of how much blood you're losing, perhaps not the most fun pastime, but definitely could be useful in some situations.

The cup was really easy to use, and you can keep it in much longer than a tampon, 10- 12 hours. I also had the opportunity to use it whilst on holiday (yay!), so I can vouch for its brilliance in suspicious squat toilets, cramped aeroplane toilets and a wide variety of other toilets. One of my friends said she would worry about emptying it in a public place, but that wasn't a problem. In fact it makes it much easier in situations where a there is no sanitary bin available.

The cup is excellent value for money, even though the upfront cost may seem a little steep! If we assume a box of 20 tampons per period (changing every 6 hours for 5 days) at £2.50, and a cup usually costs £15 to £20, it's only the cost of 6 to 8 months' worth of periods. But you can keep the cup for between 5 and 10 years. Big savings on other menstrual products. I was given a CaringPanda menstrual cup to try and I can highly recommend them!

Free 7 Periods

I will be recommending the cup to all my friends, especially the female ones, and forwarding this article to a surprising array of people including my mum! So I encourage you, dear reader, to head out (or onto the internet) and invest!

Lucy

Free Periods

Sanitary pants

I'm currently a final year nutrition undergraduate at the university, with a strong desire to improve the sustainability of my student lifestyle. During my time at Reading I have already started following a vegan diet, and now wish to further broaden the ways in which I can live more sustainably to everyday household products. I've already begun switching to reusable mugs and bags and using only paper straws, because every little helps right? Therefore I thought trialling reusable sanitary products would be another step in the right direction, to live a more sustainable lifestyle and possibly save some cash too.

I'd been intrigued by reusable sanitary pants for a while prior to participating in the trial. Not having to use up my weekly budget on expensive pads monthly definitely did sound appealing, as did the simplicity of just switching your normal underwear for these. As the product isn't yet particularly mainstream I assumed prior to testing them out that there would be a reason for this, and that they may look bulky or be uncomfortable.

After testing this product I was however pleasantly surprised. They were relatively stylish looking and not noticeably bulky under leggings or trousers. They were also just as comfy as normal underwear, and certainly more pleasant to wear than regular pads. Although the company Modibodi that produce the underwear also have a heavy flow range, I was testing the light to medium flow product. The website suggests that they have an equivalent absorbency to 1.5 tampons. I felt that this product was most useful after the heaviest flow had passed, in the last few days of your cycle. When using the product over the last three days of my cycle they prevented any leaks and I didn't experience any major issues. If you wanted to use them throughout your period, the heavy flow ones may work better during the first few days of your cycle.

As a student I only do clothes washing once a week normally, I was therefore glad that I received three pairs to use. If you also don't do washing particularly regularly I would then suggest purchasing multiple pairs. The main issue that I had with the product in terms of requiring multiple pairs is that this would be quite an expensive upfront cost. The pairs that I received cost £18 per pair from the Modibodi website. I understand that to spend this in one go would be difficult for many students. I do believe that in the long run the product would save you money reducing the amount of monthly pads that would need to be purchased. I do however feel that for a lot of students the main reason this product wouldn't be useful is this high upfront cost.

I would most likely recommend the product to a friend if they have a more disposable income. I think the product itself is an excellent alternative to pads with its comfort

Free Periods

and ease of use. I believe they would also save you money in the long run, but realistically an upfront cost of £54 for three pairs could be a few weeks food for some students, so other cheaper reusable products such as the menstrual cup maybe more appealing. They could be a good idea to ask for as a birthday or Christmas gift. As I now own the product I will definitely continue to use them from now on and overall feel the product quality and practicality is great

Free Periods

Reusable pads

I signed up for this trial as I wanted to be more environmentally friendly and reduce the amount of waste I'm producing. I have previously used a menstrual cup for a few years but personally I prefer pads so was very excited when I was able to try out the reusable pads. My main concern was that they would move too much as I have read various reviews saying they moved and caused a lot of leaking.

The reusable pads function basically the same as disposable pads. However instead of a sticky side to attach to your underwear there were "wings" with poppers. The poppers had two options, so it could be thinner or thicker, I guess this depends on how small your pants are?? One thing I was worried about was that they would move about too much especially during the night which would lead to leaking. I didn't experience movement at all and as the pad is relatively big a slight bit of movement did not really make a difference. So, if you're worried about movement then that's not an issue. One thing I will note is that the pad is quite "bulky", whilst nowhere near a maxi pad, you definitely notice it there. Whilst this helps with the snug fit preventing movement this may put you off if you prefer ultra-thin pads which you can't feel at all. Whilst snug, the pad is still very comfortable to wear as it is very soft and not tight.

Reusable pads range in price from around £10-20 for a pack of 3/5, while initially this may seem quite a lot the cost is significantly reduced the more you use them as you do not have to repurchase them. If you plan to use cloth pads exclusively you may need to buy quite a lot as they need changing as regularly as disposables so you either need to stock up with quite a few or be very efficient with your washing. Despite this I would say they're cost effective although not as effective as a menstrual cup. A note on washing, personally I just chucked them in with my clothes in the washing machine; this didn't appear to do them any harm. They actually came out of the washing machine basically dry, so very little time would be needed to dry them.

My only real concern is that they are not as convenient as disposables when out and about. When you're in your own home it's easy to change and then just chuck the used one in the washing basket however when you're out and about you'll need to carry a small bag to put the used one in and carry it around all day. Depending on how long you wear it for/ carry it around it could begin to smell. This is my only real concern with the product and it really is not that inconvenient, so I will continue to use them.

I would fully recommend this product to a friend as well as a menstrual cup. The pads were easy to use there really is very little difference between these and disposables so for me I will be switching to these almost exclusively.