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### Toxins in Feminine Hygiene Products: A Canadian Perspective

Research studies on feminine health return few results because the area is underfunded. Luckily, independent advocacy and citizen-led groups are here to save the day as they dedicate their resources towards creating real progress for the well-being of Canadian women—initiatives that could potentially benefit women around the globe too.

As of March 2023, very little information is available on the safety status of feminine health products (FHP) in Canada. The most popular article dates back to 2015, when two companies, Procter & Gamble and Kimberly Clark, made headlines after announcing that they would begin listing ingredients present in all of their FHPs following immense consumer pressure (CBC News, 2015). In that article, the author also affirms that Health Canada does not require brands to list components that make up items like sanitary pads and tampons. So, did Health Canada change anything since 2015? The answer is a bit muddy.

#### The Warning for Tampons

A quick search through the Health Canada website reveals that tampons are among the few FHPs that fall under the classification of medical devices in Canada (Government of Canada, 2015). Tampons, although generally safe, may lead to Toxic Shock Syndrome (TSS) in rare instances due to an infection caused by the *Staphylococcus aureus* bacteria (Staph). This condition can be fatal if it goes undetected or is left untreated. As such, in Canada, brands that supply tampons must indicate on their labels (on the packaging or an insert) a warning for Toxic Shock Syndrome alongside a description of product absorbency.

#### What About Pads and Other FHPs?

Most other FHPs fall outside the category of medical devices, and so brands that manufacture such products face less stringent rules. As there is no mandatory requirement for the listing of



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ingredients, many brands can still get away with the presence of toxins in their products.

In Quebec, most menstrual pad products still do not display a materials list on or inside their packaging. Take, for instance, the brand Personnelle, founded by the owner of Jean Coutu (PJC Jean Coutu, n.d.). Personnelle offers a wide gamut of menstrual products, including panty liners, underpads, maxi pads, adult diapers, and more. Information regarding the chemicals in these items is unavailable on the packaging and also on the Jean Coutu website. Even though the product code and UPC (Universal Product Code) are accessible, consumers cannot easily retrieve more detailed information.

The solution to this scarcity of data remains the same: more research needs to be conducted, especially on FHPs available most commonly to Canadian consumers. Findings from such investigations then need to be presented to the general public to create awareness and push health agencies to act for the well-being of FHP users.

## Final Thoughts

The answers to many of our questions remain unsolved. For now, we can at least find solace in the idea that consumers can significantly impact what is available in their stores, as was the case with the Procter & Gamble and Kimberly Clark story.

In the following and final part of this article, you will uncover some tips to protect yourself better when selecting FHPs and be conscientious about their related environmental impacts.

## References

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