

## Life cycle of absorbent hygiene products in the ACT

Key:

**Menstrual products** Menstrual products and sustainability - Recyclopaedia<sup>1</sup>**Nappies** Nappies and sustainability - Recyclopaedia<sup>2</sup>**Incontinence products** Continence aids and sustainability - Recyclopaedia<sup>3</sup>

Type of absorbent hygiene product	Manufacture	Packaging	Use	Waste management after use	Pros	Cons
<b>Tampon</b>	Made from cotton (water/energy intensive crop)	Often imported and packaged in soft plastics which add to their associated waste and emissions	Single use	Landfill (can take hundreds of years to decompose)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Convenient</li> <li>• More affordable in the short term</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Single use</li> <li>• High emissions associated with production and waste management (methane)</li> </ul>
<b>Disposable pads and liners</b>	Made from cotton (water/energy intensive crop)	Often imported and packaged in soft plastics	Single use	Landfill (can take hundreds of years to decompose)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Convenient</li> <li>• More affordable in the short term</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Single use</li> <li>• High emissions associated with production and waste management (methane)</li> </ul>

<sup>1</sup>ACT Government City Services, Nappies and sustainability. <https://www.cityservices.act.gov.au/recyclopaedia/factsheets/menstrual-products>.

<sup>2</sup>ACT Government City Services, Nappies and sustainability. <https://www.cityservices.act.gov.au/recyclopaedia/factsheets/nappies-factsheet>.

<sup>3</sup>ACT Government City Services, Continence aids and sustainability. <https://www.cityservices.act.gov.au/recyclopaedia/factsheets/continence-aids>.

		which add to their associated waste and emissions				
<b>Biodegradable single use pads</b>	Cotton and waterproof layers are made of plant polymers making the whole pad compostable and biodegradable		Single use	Take up to 12 months to decompose in landfill <sup>4</sup>	Biodegradable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More expensive than regular disposable pads and liners</li> <li>• Must be disposed of properly to biodegrade (can't go in recycling or compost)</li> </ul>
<b>Reusable cloth pad</b>	Waterproof backing made from PUL (polyurethane laminated material) Absorbent material in the middle layer such as hemp fabric, bamboo velour or cotton fleece Soft cotton top fabric		You need from 6-12 cloth pads to cover you during your cycle Cleaning – rinse in cold water then soak in a container with cold water and wash the pads within 48 hours of soaking One cloth pad should last at least 5 years with proper care.	Materials (cotton, hemp fabric, bamboo velour) biodegradable (e.g. cotton can take a couple of months to break down in the right conditions. Breaks down faster in aerobic conditions, takes longer to break down in anaerobic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cheaper than disposable pads in the long run</li> <li>• Reduces the number of disposable pads ending up in landfill</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Less convenient than disposable pads as you need to wash and dry them after every use</li> <li>• Higher water and energy usage from frequent washing</li> </ul>

<sup>4</sup> Sustainable Period Project, Sustainable Sanitary Options – A4 information sheet. <https://sustainableperiodproject.org/resources/>.

				conditions like landfills)		
<b>Menstrual cup</b>	Soft medical-grade silicone		Needs to be emptied 2-4 times a day, holds up to 4x as much period blood as a tampon. It can be worn for up to 12 hours before emptying. Will <b>last up to 10 years</b> (only need one)	Landfill (would take many years to decompose)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cheaper than disposable pads/tampons in the long run</li> <li>• Reduces the number of disposable pad/tampons ending up in landfill</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They need to be sterilised between periods</li> <li>• Emptying menstrual cups may be messy</li> <li>• They may not fit properly, especially if uterus is too low or you have other anatomical concerns related to the uterus or cervix</li> <li>• Need to rinse the menstrual cup every time you empty it</li> <li>• Removing and inserting the cup may not be convenient for some people who menstruate</li> <li>• Vaginal discomfort</li> </ul>
<b>Period underwear</b>	Made from stain-resistant anti-microbial fabrics such as bamboo, sports merino and microfibre		Can hold between ½ a tampon and 2 tampons worth of menstrual fluid. Period underwear should last just as long as any other pair of underwear	Materials (cotton, hemp fabric, bamboo velour) biodegradable (e.g. cotton can take a couple of months to break down in the right conditions. Breaks down faster in aerobic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cheaper than disposable pads/tampons in the long run</li> <li>• Reduces the number of disposable pad/tampons ending up in landfill</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Less convenient than disposable pads as you need to wash and dry them after every use</li> <li>• Higher water and energy usage from frequent washing</li> </ul>

				conditions, takes longer to break down in anaerobic conditions like landfills)		
<b>Disposable nappies</b>	The manufacturing process of disposable nappies use large volumes of water, oil, trees and electricity. Top sheet and backsheet usually made of polypropylene (crystalline thermoplastic). Plastic tabs and back sheets, elastic, and absorbent gel	Often imported and packaged in soft plastics which add to their associated waste and emissions	Single use	Some disposable nappies are recyclable, but the ACT doesn't have the facilities to process them so they end up in landfill where they can take hundreds of years to decompose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Convenient</li> <li>• More affordable in the short term</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Single use</li> <li>• High emissions associated with production and waste management (methane)</li> </ul>
<b>Reusable nappies</b>	Made up of an absorbent inner layer containing washable or disposable liner and a waterproof outer layer, called the wrap.  Available in a variety of materials, including cotton, bamboo, hemp and microfibre.		Likely to need around 15 to 25 reusable nappies per baby. Clean nappies in washing machine every two to three days and line dry. Reusable nappies should last up to 2-4 years. There are disposable nappy	Materials (cotton, hemp fabric, bamboo velour) biodegradable (e.g. cotton can take a couple of months to break down in the right conditions. Breaks down faster in aerobic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cheaper than disposable nappies in the long run, particularly if you use them for more than one child</li> <li>• Reduces the number of disposable</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Less convenient than disposable nappies as you need to wash and dry them after every use</li> <li>• Higher water and energy usage from frequent washing</li> <li>• Can be difficult to fit clothes over bulkier nappies</li> </ul>

	<p>The outer wraps can be made of fleece, wool, PUL (a type of laminated fabric) or waterproof plastic</p> <p>One size or 'birth to potty' reusable nappies can be adjusted to fit as the baby grows.</p>		<p>services that supply and deliver professionally, however this is expensive and not accessible to the vast majority of people</p>	<p>conditions, takes longer to break down in anaerobic conditions like landfills)</p>	<p>nappies ending up in landfill</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May irritate baby's skin less than disposable nappies as they're more likely to be made of natural fibres</li> <li>• Can be bought second hand</li> <li>• Some local councils such as the Hobart City Council offer cloth nappy rebates<sup>5</sup></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Disposable nappy laundering services are expensive and inaccessible</li> </ul>
<p><b>Certified compostable nappies</b></p>	<p>Compostable nappies look and feel like conventional disposables but are made from natural materials that will breakdown under the right conditions</p>	<p>Made from natural materials that will breakdown under the right conditions</p>	<p>Single use</p>	<p>Currently there are no commercial composting facilities in ACT that can process compostable nappies so while they may break</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Convenient</li> <li>• More affordable in the short term</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Single use</li> <li>• No commercial composting facilities in the ACT – still produce methane as they break down in landfill</li> <li>• Emissions associated with production</li> </ul>

<sup>5</sup> City of Hobart, Cloth Nappy and Reusable Sanitary Product Rebate. <https://www.hobartcity.com.au/Residents/Recycling-and-rubbish/Cloth-Nappy-and-Reusable-Sanitary-Product-Rebate>.

				<p>down faster and with less plastic residues than a conventional disposable they will still produce methane as they break down. FOGO collection pilot in Belconnen, Bruce, Cook and Macquarie does NOT accept nappies.</p> <p>Other jurisdictions such as the <a href="#">Hobart City Council</a> do accept certified compostable nappies in it's FOGO processing facility<sup>6</sup></p>		
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<sup>6</sup> City of Hobart, FOGO and compost. <https://www.hobartcity.com.au/Residents/Recycling-and-rubbish/FOGO-and-compost>.

Attachment 1

<p><b>Disposable continence aids</b></p>	<p>Typically made of cotton, plastics and other synthetic materials</p>	<p>Often imported and packaged in soft plastics which add to their associated waste and emissions</p>	<p>Single use</p>	<p>Landfill (can take hundreds of years to decompose)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Convenient</li> <li>• More affordable in the short term</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Single use</li> <li>• High emissions associated with production and waste management (methane)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Compostable continence aids</b></p>	<p>Compostable continence aids look and feel like disposables aids but are made from natural materials that will breakdown under the right conditions.</p>	<p>Often made from natural materials that will breakdown under the right conditions</p>	<p>Single use</p>	<p>They cannot be safely composted in home composting systems so like conventional disposables must be disposed of in landfill.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Will breakdown under the right conditions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Must be disposed of properly to biodegrade (can't go in recycling or compost)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Reusable continence aids</b></p>	<p>Reusable pads, pants, bed, couch and chair covers made with fabrics such as bamboo, cotton and synthetics</p>		<p>Reusable and easily laundered</p>	<p>Materials (cotton, hemp fabric, bamboo velour) biodegradable (e.g. cotton can take up to 5-7 months to break down. Breaks down faster in aerobic conditions, takes longer to break</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduces waste in landfill</li> <li>• In some cases, reusable pants and pads makes them a more discreet option</li> <li>• People living in home-based environments have a greater potential for</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased laundering and handling (maintaining the dignity of the user)</li> <li>• Disposable aids have dominated incontinence management in private industries/sectors/settings. Changing the industry culture will be a challenge</li> </ul>

				down in anaerobic conditions like landfills)	managing an individual's continence needs using reusable items	
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