Virgin is eager to use tampons, but worried about hymen [1]

Hi Alice,

I am a virgin but I want to use tampons. Can I even though I am not broken? Please answer quickly. I start going to the Y in a few weeks! I have no one else to ask. I heard about your Web site on a news station. Thank you so much!

Answer

Dear Reader,

It sounds like diving into the pool at the Y isn’t the only plunge you are ready to take! Rest assured; virgins can absolutely use tampons. Depending on what kind of hymen you have, it’s possible that using tampons can tear or ‘break’ the hymen. Many virgins don’t have intact hymens? and some women aren’t born with hymens at all! They may stretch or tear [2] due to the sexual activity, but it may also occur during non-sexual physical activities like horseback riding or dancing. Sometimes, women and girls aren’t even aware when the hymen breaks. Using a tampon for the first time can seem unnerving, but with a little know-how and practice, using them can be safe and easy ? regardless of whether you’ve had sex before or not.

Where to begin? How about at the store! Try the thinnest tampon you can find ? they may be labeled on the box as ‘slender’ or ‘slim.’ When you’re ready to use the tampon, try to relax as much as possible. Easier said than done to be sure, but staying relaxed prevents the vaginal muscles from tightening and that can make insertion more difficult. Inserting a tampon is easiest when the menstrual flow is medium to heavy because it lubricates the process. Once you’ve made your purchase and have done your best to relax, head on over the restroom and try these steps for inserting a tampon with a built-in applicator:

1. Wash your hands well and unwrap the tampon. Find a comfortable position, either sitting or standing. Try squatting down or standing with one leg on the toilet seat or bathtub. Hold the tampon in the middle (where the smaller tube goes into the larger one) using your forefinger and thumb. Also, check to make sure the string is showing (it should be pointing away from you).
2. With your free hand, pull back the labia (the skin around the vaginal opening) and gently place the tampon in the vaginal opening.
3. Aiming the tampon towards your back, push the tampon into the opening. When your fingers are touching your body and the outer tube of the applicator is completely inside,
you'll know it's in far enough.

4. Then use your index finger to push the inner tube through the applicator (outer tube). This will put the tampon into your vagina, with the string still hanging out.

5. After the inner tube of the tampon is in your vagina, use your thumb and middle finger to remove the applicator (outer tube). Check that the string is still hanging out of your vagina. Pulling on the string will remove the tampon when you are ready to take it out.

Steps adapted from Center for Young Women's Health [3].

If you're having trouble inserting a tampon after a few tries, consider talking with a healthcare provider. A word of warning when using tampons: only use tampons when you have your period and put a new one in at least every four to six hours in order to prevent Toxic Shock Syndrome (TSS). [4] TSS is a potentially deadly condition that occurs when there is too much Staphylococcus aureus, a type of Staph bacteria, in the body. Having a small amount of Staph bacteria in the body is normal, but too much of it can release toxic substances into the bloodstream. Washing your hands before use, changing your tampon frequently, using the appropriate absorbency for your period, alternating use of tampons with maxi pads, and only using tampons when you have your period are all ways to reduce your risk of TSS.

Best of luck to you!

Alice!

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