



MENSTRUAL CUP SHORT FAQS AND ANSWERS



1. FUNCTIONALITY

How does the Menstrual Cup work?

It collects blood, rather than absorbing it such as pads.

What is it made of?

Menstrual Cups (MCs) are made from different materials (usually rubber, medical grade silicone). WoMena uses those made from medical grade silicone. That is the same material used for the implants put in women's breasts for breast augmentation, nipples used for baby bottle feeding, or the tubes inserted in the body in hospitals. The material is safe - it contains no harmful substances and will not increase the risk of diseases and allergies when used hygienically.

Where do I insert and place the MC?

The whole MC has to be inserted into the vagina, where it will create suction around the cervix and the muscles of the vagina. The MC should sit as low as possible in your vagina and feel comfortable. It should be even lower than a tampon. The stem at the bottom of the MC can help you to adjust, as you can use it to gently push the MC higher or lower.

How is it inserted?

MCs bend and fold easily, you can fold it up before putting it in.

Should you feel the MC while it is inside the body?

No – if you have inserted it correctly, you will not feel the MC when it is inside.

How do I know if I have inserted the MC properly?

There are certain indicators that can tell you if the MC is not placed correctly. The MC is very effective at collecting blood, so if the MC is leaking it is most likely not in the right position. MCs are very comfortable to wear, so if there is discomfort, for example if you feel like the MC is irritating you or poking, it is not placed correctly. Inserting the MC takes practice and you may have to do it several times before figuring out how to insert the MC properly.



MENSTRUAL CUP SHORT FAQS AND ANSWERS

I struggle to insert my MC – is that normal?

Yes, it is completely normal to have difficulties inserting the MC the first couple of months. As long as you keep practising you will get it right eventually!

What position is the best when inserting the MC?

The position that works the best differs from woman to woman. However many find that squatting or propping one leg up on a stool makes insertion easier.

Should I cut the stem of the MC?

Some may experience that the stem of the MC sticks out of the opening of the vagina. This can be due to a low-sitting cervix or that the vaginal length is short. This is very common. If the stem of your MC is outside the vagina it can be uncomfortable and irritate your labia. In these cases the stem can be trimmed until you find a comfortable fit. But cut gradually - if you cut too much it may become difficult to remove.

Can the same size fit all?

Vaginal tissue is very elastic. The same MC can be used for 13-year olds as well as 40-year old women. However, the MC often comes in several sizes, where women who have given birth use the bigger MCs.

Should the MC be lubricated before insertion?

You do not need to use a lubricant before inserting the MC. The vagina is naturally lubricated and the menstrual blood can also function as a lubricant. However, some women find insertion easier if they use a lubricant. Just remember to use a water-based, non-toxic lubricant, such as K-Y jelly. Other products, such as vegetable oils, can damage the MC and cause vaginal infections.

Will the MC fall out if I walk, run, bend, lift or go to the bathroom?

No, one of the great advantages of a MC is that when it is inserted right the MC will seal with the vaginal walls and you can move, bend or lift as you wish.

Can you urinate when you are using the MC?

Yes, women have 3 holes; 1 for urinating (urethra), 1 where stool is excreted (anus) and the vagina. The MC is inserted in the vagina, and you can therefore urinate while using the MC.

How does it feel to sleep with the MC?

You will not notice or feel the MC at all, if it has been inserted correctly. On nights with heavy flow the MC might need back-up (e.g. a pad) but otherwise the MC is all you need to manage your menstruation.

How often do you have to empty the MC?

You should empty the MC every 4-12 hours depending on your flow, so 2-4 times a day. Look for the manufacturer instructions on the MC to be sure you are following them.

How can I know if the MC is full?

The MC is full when it starts to leak. How quickly it is filled depends on how heavy menstrual flow is. You will quickly learn how often the MC should be emptied.



MENSTRUAL CUP SHORT FAQS AND ANSWERS

How long can you keep the MC inside?

You can keep the MC inside for 4-12 hours depending on your flow. You use the same MC for the duration of your period (but take it out, empty and re-insert several times a day).

How do you pull out the MC?

First, wash your hands with water and soap. Squat, insert fingers, and use the stomach muscles that you use to stop and start peeing to push down the MC (not quite like defecating, more with your middle muscles than with your behind muscles). Find the stem and gently pull the stem downwards. Pinch the base of the MC to release suction. Pull gently until you can hear/feel suction is released. Stop and get a better hold of it so when you pull it out, it does not splash.

I struggle to get my MC out – what can I do?

Merely pulling the stem does not remove the MC. If you are struggling, please follow the steps above. Remember to pinch the base of the MC, so that the suction is released. When you press the walls the little holes in the MC will release air and the vacuum will disappear. This makes it easy to get the MC out. If fingers are dry, it will be easier to pull out. If you have enough toilet paper you can dry your fingers during the process of pulling out the MC. If you have difficulties removing the MC, it is important to stay calm. Just take a deep breath, and remember that it is usually difficult the first time. But you will get it out!

Can I use the MC after cutting the stem?

If you have only cut the stem of the MC you are able to use it just as before. However, if there are holes in the base of the MC it might leak.



MENSTRUAL CUP SHORT FAQs AND ANSWERS

2. MAINTENANCE

How do you clean the MC and how often?

While you are in your period, to clean the MC, either rinse the MC with clean water (but without soap) or wipe it off with toilet paper. You will do that 2-4 times a day when you take it out. Between your periods, you need to sterilise the MC.

How do you sterilise the MC?

To sterilise the MC you place the MC in boiling water for 5 min (either in a saucepan or a tin can that has been used for food). Alternatively, you can place the MC in a container with water and a sterilizing tablet for 15 min or place the MC in a container and pour boiling water over it 3-4 times.

Can you use soap to sterilise the MC?

You cannot use soap to sterilize the MC as it will damage the material of the MC.

What method for sterilising the MC is most suitable for women and girls in rural areas?

This depends on the area but most women and girls in rural areas WoMena has distributed MCs to prefer to place the MC in a tin can with boiling water.

Some blogs suggest no need for water to clean MCs, just use lemon. Is this correct?

It is incorrect. It is recommended using the manufacturer's recommendations for the brands that we distribute. Some of them suggest you can use lemon juice to remove smell, but then you should still boil in water to remove the lemon before use. In general, if you use a blog which recommends something which is different from manufacturer guidelines, you are yourself responsible for any mishap. Users tell us they suffer less from smell than with other products

Can the MC be shared with friends or family members after being sterilised?

The MC should not be shared! Intimate personal hygiene items (e.g. toothbrushes) should not be shared for hygiene reasons.

I dropped my MC on the floor – what do I do?

Re-sterilize the MC as it may have gotten dirty.

How do you store the MC?

Between your periods, you will need to dry and store the MC till next period. It is best to store your MC in its cotton bag for ventilation purposes – this way the MC will dry by itself inside the bag and it is not necessary to let it dry beforehand. However, if you stay in an area where there are rats or insects, better to store it in an airtight container such as a glass or plastic jar.

How long can the MC be used for?

It can be re-used for up to 10 years if you take good care of it.



MENSTRUAL CUP SHORT FAQs AND ANSWERS

3. HEALTH & SAFETY-RELATED CONCERNS

Can the MC crawl up and disappear within the body?

No, the MC stays in the vagina and is too big to squeeze into the cervix and into the body.

Is it safe for young girls to use the MC? Is there any evidence to show whether it is safe?

The MC is safe to use if it is used according to manufacturer instructions- both for girls and women. Many women have used the MC for many years (it was invented more than 80 years ago). Studies to date on human populations using MCs show high levels of safety, including as compared to other products.

I have long nails – is it still safe for me to use the MC?

Yes, you can still use the MC when you have long nails. However you do need to be more careful when inserting and pulling out the MC as you might scratch yourself or transfer bacteria from under your nails in the process. Therefore take insertion and the process of pulling the MC out slowly! It is also important that you wash your hands and remember especially to wash carefully under your nails.

Can I get infections from using the MC?

The MC is made of medical silicone and cannot give you infections. However, if you have not washed hands before inserting or removing the MC, there is a risk of infections.

Can I get cancer from using the MC?

Cervical cancer is caused by a virus (HPV) which is transmitted sexually. If you want to avoid that cancer, you should get vaccinated against that virus, or abstain.

Have any women/girls developed allergies after using the MC?

No, most MCs, including the Ruby Cup, are made out of a material called medical grade silicone. This is the same material used in the tubes that they insert in people in hospitals, baby nipples or breast implants, and this material is non-allergenic.

Will the MC make me smell?

The MC is made of medical silicone and will not make you smell. Seek a doctor if you smell or if you observe vaginal discharge. Users report that one of the advantages of using MCs is that it reduces smell.

When the MC is inserted, can it reach the cervix?

When the MC is inserted it creates a suction around the cervix. During menstruation some women's cervix moves down, especially on days with heavy flow and the MC will therefore surround the cervix instead of being under it. In these cases the cervix and MC might touch, but this will not affect the cervix. The cervix also stops the MC from moving further up – the MC will not disappear in your body!

Can I use the MC just after I have given birth to collect blood and discharge?

No, the MC should only be used for menstrual blood. You can start using the MC when you begin to have a normal menstrual flow.



MENSTRUAL CUP SHORT FAQS AND ANSWERS

Does the MC affect menstrual cramps?

Some women have reported that the MC reduces menstrual cramps, others find that it increases cramps. However, no studies have been conducted to explore this relationship.

4. VIRGINITY,SEX & CONTRACEPTIVE USE

Will the MC expand the vagina?

No, the vagina consists of flexible tissue and muscles that make the vagina able to expand and contract. The MC will therefore not affect the tightness of the vagina.

The hymen is a thin membrane that sometimes (not always) partially covers the opening to the vagina. It is sometimes called the 'vaginal corona' to indicate that it often takes the form of a ring, rather than a membrane covering the opening. The appearance of the 'hymen' varies among individuals, and its appearance changes over time, for example hormones make the corona more elastic at puberty. Daily activities (such as cycling, sports, inserting tampons or MCs) may affect appearance, but there is little evidence for this. ¹

Are you still a virgin after using the MC?

The definition of 'virginity' varies between communities and among religious leaders. Many agree that virginity is defined by first vaginal intercourse. There is no certainty that women will bleed at first sexual intercourse (studies indicate that less than half do). If virginity is understood as penile, penetrative vaginal intercourse, the use of a MC or tampon does not affect virginity. Along with other daily activities, using a MC or tampon may or may not cause the corona to stretch, but that would not constitute 'loss' of virginity. ²

Can the MC be used as a contraceptive?

No, the MC can only be used as a menstrual management product and is not a contraceptive!

Can you use a coil (IUD) at the same time as the MC?

Yes, there are many studies which show that using an MC does not affect the coil, including that they do not cause higher risk that the coil will drop out. Coils have a rather high rate of being expelled (around 10% according to some studies) but that has nothing to do with using coils. However, if you feel concerned about it, consult medical personnel, or choose another method

Can you have sex when the MC is inserted?

It is not possible to have penetrative sex with a MC inside. The MC should be removed before sexual intercourse.

MENSTRUAL FLOW

I have heavy flows – will it not leak if I use the MC?

One of the advantages of using an MC is that it has a higher capacity than for example a pad or a tampon (MCs can hold 30 ml, most pads can hold 15 ml). That is, it is a good product if you have heavy flow. If you have a heavy flow you need to empty it more frequently than girls or women with lighter flows.



MENSTRUAL CUP SHORT FAQS AND ANSWERS

Do I need a bigger size if I have heavier flow?

No, if you have a heavier flow you only need to empty the MC more frequently than women and girls with lighter flow.

6. ECONOMY

Does the MC really last up to 10 years?

Yes, if you take care of the MC as instructed it can last up to 10 years. Some discolouring of the MC might happen – this does not mean that your MC cannot be used. Other uses of medical silicone (e.g. breast implants) have been found to last that long. Widespread MC use is fairly recent, and there are no large scale studies, but many testimonials by long-time MC users.

You only need the MC and no other methods, such as pads, to manage your menstruation?

On nights with heavy flow the MC might need backup (a pad) but otherwise the MC is the only product needed to manage menstruation. It also does not require knickers to be worn.

In a cost-comparison to other methods – how much cheaper is it?

One MC costs between 7-35 USD depending on where you get it from; disposable pads cost 1.0-1.5 USD per cycle. That means for disposable pads, 13-20 USD/year and for a MC 1-3 USD/year. So it is already cheaper after a few months.

7. OTHER CONCERNS

Where can you buy MCs?

In many countries people buy MCs over the Internet. There are more than 100 brands available in the market³. However, you should watch the local market - e.g. in Denmark very few shops or pharmacies carried MCs 5-10 years ago. However, consumer interest has increased quickly, and now both pharmacies and health/beauty etc shops sell MCs.

In Uganda, MCs are difficult to find because there is less consumer awareness and no Ugandan manufacturers; therefore, there is limited stock available in the country. MCs can mainly be purchased at Marie Stopes UG and also are available online, though it is advisable to always research on the brand before you purchase.

Has the MC been approved by national health authorities in Uganda?

National authorities in Kenya have approved the MC. However, in Uganda, so far, a regulation procedure for MCs has not yet been established. Companies have been encouraged to register their MCs as a medical device with the National Drug Authority and create standards with the Uganda National Bureau of Standards.

Which MC should we recommend?

WoMena uses brands made from medical grade silicone, which are highly rated on testing (e.g. by countries such as Sweden, France, Denmark) and consumer feedback. WoMena has used these with good results. We cannot recommend one brand over another on the basis of which country they are from.



MENSTRUAL CUP SHORT FAQS AND ANSWERS

How long do different brands of MCs last?

It may depend on the material from which they are made. WoMena uses MCs made from medical grade silicone. This material is also used for breast implants (which need to last a long time) and is usually estimated and marketed to last a minimum of 10 years. We are not aware of any studies comparing the durability of different brands of MCs, and we do not know whether MCs made from rubber have a different durability.

What are the best ways of disposing of the MC after 10 years?

One of the main advantages of MCs is that they are made from a material (medical grade silicone), which is widely used e.g. for baby bottle nipples, breast implants or in hospital settings, and has been widely found to be safe. Therefore we are not aware of any restrictions on their disposal. Another advantage is that there is only one product for 10 years, whereas for disposable pads it would be on the order of 130 per year.

¹. WoMena FAQ, 2018. Do menstrual cups affect hymens/virginity?. Available from: <http://womens.dk/do-menstrual-cups-affect-hymens-virginity/>

². WoMena FAQ, 2018. Do menstrual cups affect hymens/virginity?. Available from: <http://womens.dk/do-menstrual-cups-affect-hymens-virginity/>

³. Van Eijk, A.M., Zulaika, G., Lenchner, M., Mason, L., Sivakami, M., Nyothach, E., Unger, H., Laserson, K. and Phillips-Howard, P.A., 2019. Menstrual cup use, leakage, acceptability, safety, and availability: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *The Lancet Public Health*, 4(8), pp.e376-e393.