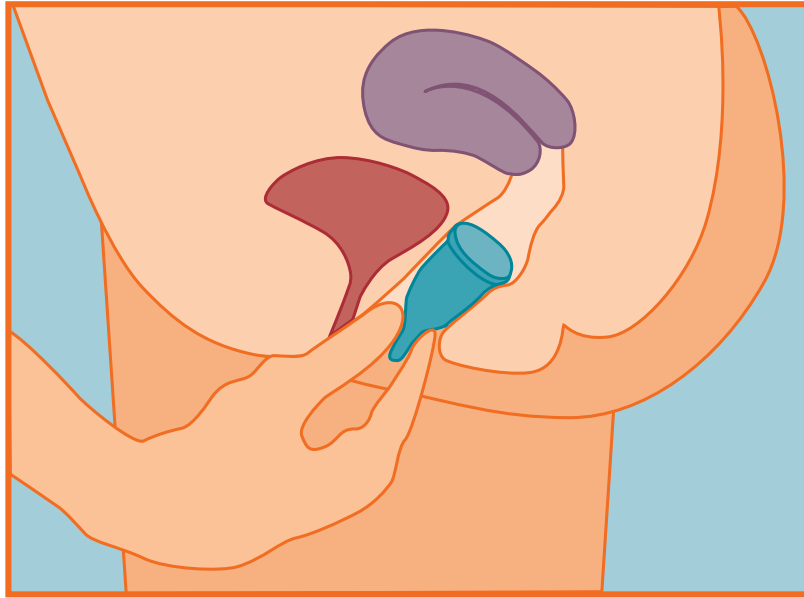


# Menstrual cup information for health practitioners

Menstrual or 'moon' cups are reusable, bell-shaped devices made of silicon or rubber which are worn internally. They sit low in the vaginal canal and collect, rather than absorb, the menstrual flow.



## How do menstrual cups work?

Menstrual cups are made of soft, flexible material; to insert one, you fold it up to make it smaller, and then position it inside the vagina so it opens (specific instructions vary between manufacturers). A cup can be worn between 4 to 12 hours. The duration the cup can be worn depends on the cup type as well as the heaviness of the menstrual flow. The cup can be worn overnight. When the cup is removed the menstrual blood is emptied into the toilet. The cup must then be rinsed and washed with mild soap or a substitute. It can then be reinserted. When the user's period has finished the cup should be sterilised by boiling, microwaving or using a steriliser solution.

To remove a menstrual cup, it is important to release the vacuum seal of the cup before removing it. This can be done by placing a finger up the side of the cup towards its rim and squeezing gently. The cup can then be pulled out at an angle.

## What are the benefits and what are the risks?

Menstrual cups are reported as easy to use after a familiarization phase, convenient for the user once purchased and have a greater holding capacity than tampons. (1)

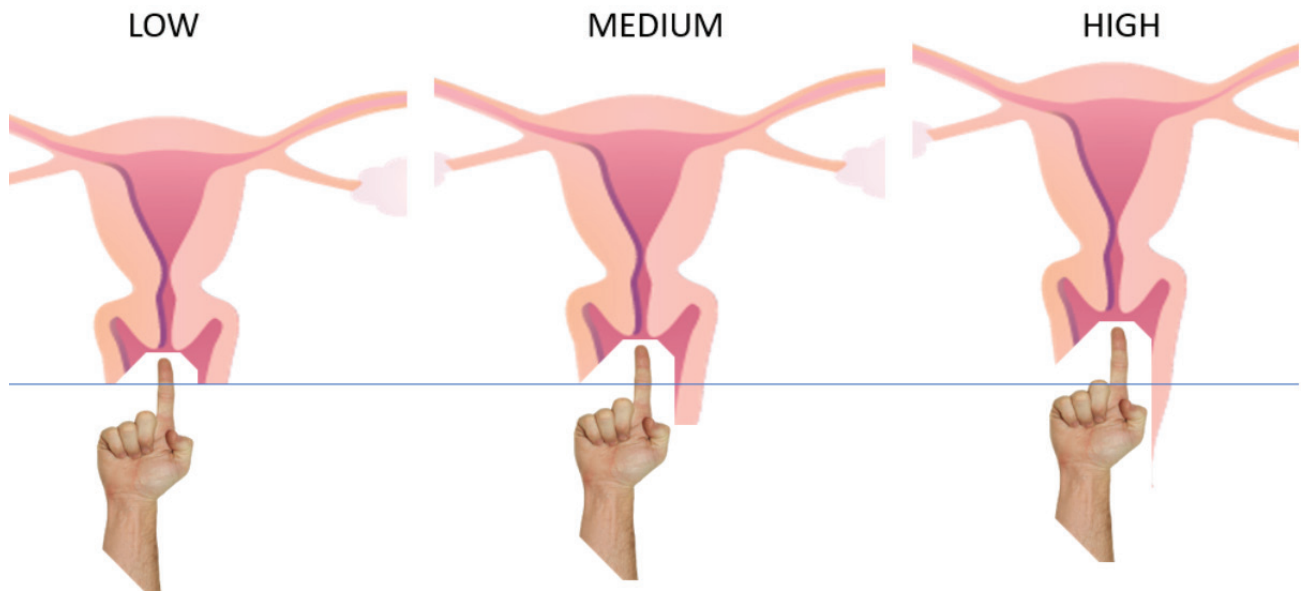
A meta-analysis exploring the acceptability of menstrual cups among users found the main negative effects were discomfort or pain with insertion or removal though these were limited to a small number of case reports. (1) Other issues identified included difficulty removing the cup, vaginal or pelvic pain, vaginal irritation, and allergic reaction to silicone.

The meta-analysis found that there is a high continuation rate with menstrual cup use (70% of participants across 15 studies. (1)

## Can menstrual cups be used with Intrauterine devices (IUDs)?

Studies have reported dislodgement of IUDs while using menstrual cups. One study reported on seven cases of IUD dislodgement during removal of the menstrual cup. This appeared to be related to the length of the IUD string and the pressure exerted when pulling the cup out. (2) A retrospective chart survey did not find an increased risk for IUD expulsion within 6-8 weeks after insertion among menstrual cup users compared to tampon users. (3)

FPV recommends that menstrual cups are not used in the first 3 months post insertion as this is when expulsion is at the highest risk. After the first 3 months it is important that users release the suction of the cup and take care when removing. Further study into the use of concurrent use of a cup and IUD is needed.



## Can menstrual cups be used by patients who have never been sexually active or are nulliparous?

Yes. There are smaller cups that may be more comfortable for younger, never been sexually active or nulliparous users. Many manufacturer's websites base their recommendations on what is the appropriate cup size on the user's cervical position and have advice on how users can determine their own cervical position. Be aware that several manufacturers recommend that if users are unclear about what cup size to use, they should see their health care provider to assist in sizing the cup.

If you need to determine a user's cervical position, gently insert your fingers into the user's vagina and identify the cervix. A low cervix will be in the first third of the vagina. A medium position would be in the mid third of the vagina. If the cervix is in the final third of the vagina then the cervix is high.

## What about infection?

The meta-analysis also found that there was no increased infection risk (reproductive tract or systemic infection) associated with the cup when compared to other menstrual products. (1) 5 cases of toxic shock syndrome were identified in the meta-analysis' literature search (the study identified 43 studies eligible for inclusion with a total of 3319 participants). There was no increased association of cup use with infections such as bacterial vaginosis and candidiasis when compared to tampon use. (1)

## Further information

Choice has a guide to buying menstrual cups in Australia.

<https://www.choice.com.au/health-and-body/reproductive-health/womens-health/buying-guides/menstrual-cups>

### References

- (1) Van Eijk A, Zulaika G, Lenchner M, Mason L, Sivakami M, Nyothach E, Unger H, Laserson K, Phillips-Howard P., Menstrual cup use, leakage, acceptability, safety, and availability: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *The Lancet Public Health* 2019; 4: e376-93.
- (2) Seale R, Powers L, Guiahi M, Coleman-Minahan K. Unintentional IUD expulsion with concomitant menstrual cup use: a case series. *Contraception* 2019; 100:85-87.
- (3) Wibe ER, Trouton KJ., Does using tampons or menstrual cups increase early IUD expulsion rates? *Contraception* 2012;86: 119-21.

