

Female Hygiene & Period Advice Guide

Rat Race Expeditions

**Extraordinary adventures,
every day of the month!**

General female hygiene during expeditions

Underwear Choice

Pack underwear that are quick-drying, breathable and comfortable. Consider the material, design and make sure you have trained in the underwear you will be wearing during the expedition, you don't want to be finding out you have friction issues half way up a mountain!

Considerations:

- **Material:** Breathable fabrics will help prevent the buildup of bacteria. Wool products are naturally antimicrobial but are more expensive than synthetic fabrics like Nylon and polyester. If choosing synthetic, look for antimicrobial treatments, moisture wicking and quick-drying.
- **Design:** Flatlock seams will limit chafing and irritation, try to avoid raised seams.
- **Washing:** Quick-dry underwear are ideal not just for sweat but also for washing. You can handwash underwear and hang them to dry, which is ideal for multi-day expeditions

Brands like [StepOne](#), [Smartwool](#), and [Icebreaker](#) are a good place to start looking.

UTI's

Regardless of the climate, you will need to be drinking plenty of water to maintain hydrated through the expedition. This should mean you are peeing regularly and helping to keep everything in working order. Certain climates such as hot humid environments will make infections more likely, see climate specific guidance below.

Just like at home, you want to wipe front to back and always wash your hands. We completely understand you will already know this but when you are tired and fatigued, it is easy to forget simple tasks, it is important you always implement the routine basics even if your environment is anything but routine!

If you're prone to yeast infections, talk to your doctor about preventative prescriptions. Consider packing unscented, hypoallergenic wet wipes to keep clean down there.

Incase you do experience discomfort, it's helpful to carry a thrush/antifungal cream or treatment tablets so you can manage symptoms quickly before they worsen.

Washing

Each expedition is different but where it is possible to, please do ensure you wash your body and specifically down there even if you are tired and just dreaming of your bed. It will make you feel much better and help to keep any nasties at bay.

Managing your period

Even if you're not expecting your period, we highly recommend you always pack some essential supplies as factors such as a change in climate, exertion and disrupted sleep can cause unexpected bleeding, all of which are typical on our expeditions.

If you use contraceptive pills and the expedition coincides with your pill free week, you can safely skip the break and continue straight into the next pack to avoid menstruating during the trek. We would recommend contacting your local GP or our medical partners, Trail Med (office@trailmed.com), if you have any questions about your current contraceptive medication and your cycle.

Use whichever menstrual products you're most comfortable and familiar with. If you are going to change up your go-to products due to the new environment, make sure you have tried and tested these in the months prior. A few key notes:

Top Tips:

- Remember to bring a waste specific bag such as a zip lock bag with you to keep all used products separate and contained. Adding a spoonful of baking soda or a small tea bag helps reduce odours.
- If you use a menstrual cup, clean it with filtered water and bury any menstrual fluid in a cat hole.
- You should have a go-to toilet kit which contains your menstrual products, wipes, hand sanitiser, biodegradable soap and toilet paper. Small dry bags or waterproof Zip log bags are great for this, keep it handy in an easy to reach pocket in your pack.

Weeing in the Wild

To reduce pack weight and avoid getting wet, a very practical option is the Kula Cloth®, a reusable antimicrobial pee cloth that dries quickly. It's not essential, but if you adventure often, it's worth considering.

There are also stand to pee devices for those who prefer to urinate without removing clothing but they do require practice beforehand.

For bowel movements, you can use toilet paper (which must be buried with your waste or carried with you, this depends on the expedition and you will be given specific guidance in the EEI) or wash with soap and water, which reduces irritation and produces no paper to carry. A backcountry bidet is another lightweight, hygienic option.

Foot Care

Avoid getting a pedicure just before an expedition. Your natural calluses help protect your feet on uneven terrain and this isn't the time to risk an ingrown toenail. A simple straight across trim is best.

Hot weather specifics

Heat & humidity combined with heavy sweating will increase the risk of UTI's and fungal infections. Top tips to prevent discomfort:

- Choose breathable, quick drying underwear designed to wick moisture. Avoid cotton, which holds moisture, and avoid lace or string-style underwear that may cause irritation, see more in underwear section above.
- Pads can become very damp in humid environments, so change them more frequently than usual.
- To reduce friction, irritation, and the risk of fungal infections, it's best not to fully shave or wax before an expedition as pubic hair provides a natural protective barrier. However, leaving everything completely untrimmed can trap extra moisture, so a middle ground approach can be most comfortable. Approx 1- 2 week growth for most.
- Heat, humidity, and constant movement can cause irritation of the genital or anal area, consider bringing a healing cream or nappy cream, which works well for this type of rash.

Hair

If you have long hair, it's a good idea to bring a small hairbrush and a tiny bottle of hair oil. The heat and humidity can create serious tangles very quickly, and if they're not dealt with daily, they can become extremely difficult and painful to remove.

Cold weather specifics

Some hikers in cooler climates travel with only two pairs of underwear if space/weight is a consideration and use panty liners they can change regularly.

In cold environments, you want to limit how long your body is uncovered and you are exposed so plan ahead before going to the toilet or changing your menstrual products and make sure everything you need is to hand before removing clothing.

Temperature will affect some of your supplies e.g. wet wipes may freeze so seek alternatives or look to keep them close to you so your body heat helps to keep them usable.

If conditions are cold *and* damp, this can increase the risk of infections. Where possible, try and dry underwear out or keep any new underwear dry to minimise having to put damp underwear back on.