

Wellbeing from the woods

They are small, white and discreet, and they make life easier for half of humanity. Short supply chains and high standards are critical in the manufacture of our tampons.



Egyptian women were actually wrapping papyrus fibres into small rolls as early as 1500 BC. Linen was used in Greece, and sheep's wool in Rome. In ancient times, however, tampons were more often used as contraceptives or to apply substances. Only since it has been possible to sterilise cotton wool reliably (in the 1930s) has it been a safe medical device suitable for absorbing menstrual blood directly within the body.

Premium viscose

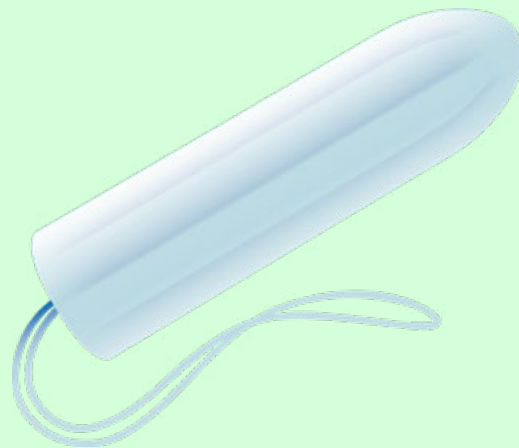
Anyone buying an own-brand tampon in pharmacies and discount stores in Germany, Austria and Switzerland usually has a product from Rauscher Consumer Products (RCP) in their hand. The subsidiary of the Lohmann & Rauscher (L&R) Group is a leading European manufacturer of own-brand tampons and feminine hygiene products.

To ensure the shelves are always well stocked, Felix Hautt buys 2,000 tons of viscose fibre each year. The strategic procurement manager has to follow strict criteria, both internally and externally: Suppliers must work to the same high standards in terms of environment, working conditions and human rights that L&R sets for itself. These demands are constantly getting stricter, including external ones: "Our customers demand certified fibres, full stop," says Hautt, meaning fibres certified to the requirements of the Forest Stewardship Council FSC and the Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC). Both certification schemes define criteria for ensuring that forests are managed sustainably, ecologically and with social responsibility. If a supplier cannot provide evidence of certification, they are ruled out as a business partner.

Beech trees are

40%

cellulose.



Gentle and safe: tampons made from certified raw materials meet the highest standards.

“Our customers demand certified fibres. Full stop.”

Felix Hauft, Strategic Procurement Manager at Rauscher Consumer Products

Outstanding sustainability

Gerlinde Holzleithner reads the requirements catalogue calmly. She is Head of the Hygiene Division at Lenzing AG, one of the world's largest producers of fibre pulp, and one of the most environmentally friendly. The company has achieved Platinum status with EcoVadis for the fifth year in a row, placing it among the top one per cent of all companies assessed world-wide; for the third year in a row, it has achieved first place in the rankings by non-profit organisation “Canopy”, which assesses the largest producers of wood-based cellulose fibres based on their performance in protecting endangered forests. The certifications make Hauft's work easier: “Where a supplier has a top EcoVadis rating, that takes away a lot of my worries.”

Lenzing AG has a long list of sustainability certificates, as long as their association with Rauscher Consumer Products. Records go back at least 50 years, but the association itself goes back even further. Hauft and Holzleithner laugh and agree it's been “forever”.

From forest to wadding

Lenzing AG is named after the town of the same name in Upper Austria. “We actually manufacture both the pulp and the viscose fibres here at this site,” explains Holzleithner. The beech trees from which the fibres are made come predominantly from this region or from Central Europe. The wood is chopped into small pieces and boiled in lye. At temperatures above 150 degrees Celsius, it takes several hours for the approximately 40 per cent cellulose to separate out from the fibre matrix. Anything left over, such as bark or hemicelluloses, is processed by the company's own biorefinery into products such as the wood sugar xylose and acetic acid. Anything which cannot be reused goes to the biomass power plant and provides energy for production.



Different countries, different customs – three international tampon facts

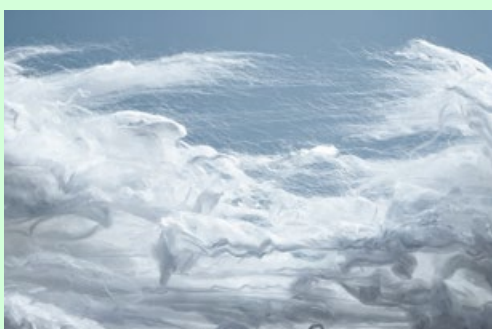
1. People who menstruate use more than 10,000 tampons and sanitary pads over their lifetime.
2. 45 billion personal hygiene products are used worldwide every year.
3. Tampons are very popular in Europe, North America and Australia, while sanitary pads are preferred in Asia, Latin America and Africa.





50+

years together:
L&R and Lenzing



The art of the right nozzle

The cellulose is liquefied in an organic solvent. This creates a honey-like mass, which is then pressed through microfine spinnerets. “The shape of the spinneret dictates the properties of the fibre,” explains Holzleithner. Viscose fibres can be processed into silky underwear as well as robust protective clothing for firefighters or durable car seat covers. Or tampons, nappies and wet wipes. The requirements for purity, processing and quality are particularly high for personal hygiene applications. Because tampons are worn inside the body, the fibres are subject to the strictest medical criteria. They are examined microbiologically in accordance with the European Pharmacopoeia, for instance.



Freshly spun viscose fibres go through a rinsing process to remove impurities.

250

kilometres separate
Lenzing AG and RCP.



Short stretch

The fine, white fibres are pressed into large bales for transport worldwide. However, the RCP tampon production at the L&R site in Schönaun an der Triesting is only about 200 kilometres away in Lower Austria. “Hardly any customers have a shorter supply chain”, notes Holzleithner. Hauff appreciates the proximity not just for logistical reasons: “We maintain a really good partnership with Lenzing”, he insists. The bales are transported in trucks from L&R. Instead of returning empty from delivery trips, the drivers pick up raw materials directly in Lenzing several times a week.

**“Hardly any
customers have
a shorter supply
chain.”**

Gerlinde Holzleithner, Head of the
Hygiene Division at Lenzing AG

The wadding web is wound automatically, pressed into tampons and packed hygienically.



Precision down to the second

Once they arrive at the L&R site, the viscose bales are opened up and expand to their full fluffiness. Two different types of viscose are blended for tampons: One makes the tampons particularly absorbent, the other ensures stability. A mixing machine blends the two materials. A teasel then separates the fibre bundles and combs them in the same direction. The machine shapes and compresses the loose fibre layer into a wadding web optimally prepared for further processing in the tampon machine. This machine, made in Switzerland, cuts the web into precise lengths and applies a non-woven fabric, which gives the finished tampon a silky surface. This non-woven fabric is currently made from plastic; research is underway on a bio-based solution.

The machine then applies the withdrawal cord, knots it and winds the strip into a roll. A heated press tool compacts the roll and forms the tampon's characteristic grooves. The machine then immediately wraps the tampon in foil to prevent it from expanding again. More than 100 pieces spill out every minute; Rauscher Consumer Products manufactures many millions of tampons each year, every one a small piece of Austria.