

## **TOXIC SHOCK SYNDROME**

Toxic Shock Syndrome develops when the common bacteria, *Staphylococcus aureus*, produce a toxin which is absorbed into the bloodstream. The toxin rapidly overwhelms the immune system and attacks the major organs, leading to kidney failure, collapse of the lungs and in severe cases, cardiac arrest. Alarmingly, half of all known cases of Toxic Shock are women using TAMPONS.

### **SYMPTOMS OF TSS**

- Always begin AFTER a period starts.
  - Early symptoms may include headache, and/or sore throat,
  - aching muscles and high temperature.
  - Followed by vomiting, watery diarrhoea,
  - a red rash, confusion and dizziness and
  - very low blood pressure.
- Only one or two symptoms may occur. They do not necessarily occur all at once and may not persist.

### **WHAT YOU SHOULD DO**

- Remove the tampon (save it if possible).
- Seek IMMEDIATE medical attention.
- Inform the doctor that you have been using TAMPONS.
- Take a TSS information leaflet with you.

QUICK ACTION MAY SAVE YOUR LIFE

## **AFTER EFFECTS OF TSS**

Survivors of Toxic Shock Syndrome may have been hospitalised for weeks and there is usually a long recovery period. They may have suffered:

- Loss of fingers and toes due to gangrene.
- Permanent kidney and liver damage.
- Deafness and blindness.
- Peeling skin, and loss of nails and hair.
- Continual infections
- Short term memory loss.
- No energy for months or even years.
- Psychological and emotional distress.

### **TO REDUCE THE RISK OF TSS**

- Use the lowest absorbency needed at each stage of your period.
- Avoid using tampons continuously during a period. Alternate with sanitary towels, particularly at night.
- Use a towel at the end of your period.
- Change tampons every 4 to 6 hours.
- Don't use tampons if you've had any unusual discharge.
- Wash your hands before and after use and handle the tampon as little as possible.
- Alert your family and friends to the symptoms and emergency action required.
- Only use tampons made of organic cotton.
- Read and keep this information leaflet or the leaflet inside the tampon packet.

## **THE BACTERIA AND TOXIN**

*Staphylococcus aureus* bacteria are carried by most people on the skin or in the nose no matter how frequently we wash ourselves. They are usually quite harmless and can naturally migrate into the vagina. Certain strains of the bacteria can produce a toxin known as TSS-T1 when tampons are used. The vagina is a very susceptible place for RAPID absorption of toxin. The toxin gets into the bloodstream and circulates around the body attacking the vital organs, especially the kidneys and lungs. The toxin overwhelms the body's immune system producing acute organ damage. Younger people are particularly at risk, as their immune system is not fully developed.

### **WHAT CAUSES THE TOXIN?**

The bacteria in the vagina is usually harmless. Although the exact micro-biological reason for toxin production has not been established, it only happens in association with a tampon. It could be because the tampon introduces oxygen into the vagina, or the tampon provides a surface for the bacteria to colonise. However, it is known that higher absorbency tampons containing man-made fibre are the highest risk.. Also, CONTINUOUS use of tampons during a period increases the risk.

SO, THE ONLY WAY OF AVOIDING TSS IS NOT TO USE TAMPONS.

## INCIDENCE OF TSS

As tampon-related Toxic Shock Syndrome is not a notifiable disease, the official statistics rely on a voluntary notification scheme. These statistics are unreliable. However, from 1990 to 2000 it is believed that 22 deaths have occurred in the UK due to TAMPONS.

Since millions of tampons are used in the UK each month, the disease is considered rare. However, it can strike any woman or girl without warning and can act so rapidly that more fatalities amongst tampon users is inevitable. So remember: **THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS A SAFE TAMPON!**

Communication is essential. Health and safety information on leaflets should be read regularly to identify if any new, crucial information is presented. It is also vital that young girls ensure that they discuss with their parent when they decide to use tampons. Somebody else should know when tampons are used so that prompt action can be taken if the sufferer is unable to help herself.

## APPEAL TO TSS SUFFERERS

We would like to hear from any woman or girl who has suffered from any of the symptoms of TSS whilst using TAMPONS.

## FURTHER INFORMATION

Call: ALICE KILVERT TAMPON ALERT,  
Telephone/fax: 0161 748 3123  
[www.tamponalert.org.uk](http://www.tamponalert.org.uk)

## ALICE'S STORY

Alice Kilvert, aged 15, died on Tuesday 26<sup>th</sup> November 1991 of tampon-related Toxic Shock Syndrome at Trafford General Hospital, Manchester.

Alice's symptoms were initially very mild and did not cause any undue concern. On the Sunday prior to her death she complained of a headache, which persisted, but eased with aspirin. During Sunday evening she was able to watch TV, but she was sick during the night. Although very pale on the Monday morning, she went to school in order to sit her mock GCSE exams, but was taken home as she appeared to be developing influenza. Alice went straight to bed and by tea time she had a slight temperature. At 7 pm she was alert enough to talk about the early evening TV she had missed, but by 10 pm she seemed vague and confused and a little faint.

The next morning, Alice's breathing was shallow and she had a higher temperature, so the emergency doctor was called. The doctor phoned for an ambulance. The ambulance staff tested her blood pressure and it was so low it hardly registered. She arrived at hospital at 9 am and her condition was diagnosed as either toxic shock syndrome or meningitis, and treatment began. She was taken into Intensive Care and put onto a ventilator as her breathing was giving cause for concern. However, the strain on her heart brought on two cardiac arrests. She did not recover from the second one and died at 1 pm.

# TAMPON ALERT

## THE DANGERS OF TAMPON-RELATED TOXIC SHOCK SYNDROME



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