

The SafeCycle Switch™

A Nigerian Physician's Guide to
Ditching Toxic Sanitary Pads,
Ending Recurring Infections, and
Reclaiming Your Hormonal
Health—No Matter Your Budget



The SafeCycle Switch™

*What Your Sanitary Pad Is Doing To Your Body — And How To Switch To
Something Safer Starting This Cycle*

By Dr. Salma Nazif

Introduction: The Conversation Nobody Is Having

Something is happening in group chats, on Twitter, in women's WhatsApp groups, and around kitchen tables across Nigeria. Women are talking. Asking questions. Getting scared. And honestly? Some of that fear is completely justified.

You've probably seen the posts. "Sanitary pads cause cancer." "These pads are bleached with chemicals that destroy your womb." "The big companies know and they're not telling us." Maybe you read them and felt a chill. Maybe you looked at the pad in your hand and thought — *is this thing actually safe?*

That question brought you here. And I'm glad it did.

My name is Dr. Salma Nazif, and I've been practicing women's health medicine for over a decade. I've sat across from women — young women, mothers, grandmothers — who came to me with recurring infections, unexplained hormonal issues, painful periods, and unusual discharge. Women who had been treated, re-treated, and treated again, but nothing seemed to stick.

It took me longer than I'd like to admit before I started asking a different question. Not *what is wrong with her body* — but *what is her body being exposed to every single month?*

What I found changed the way I practice medicine. And it's going to change the way you think about something you've probably never questioned before.

This guide is not here to panic you. I'm not interested in fear for fear's sake. What I *am* interested in is giving you the truth — clear, calm, and practical — so you can make informed decisions about your own body.

By the time you finish reading, you will know exactly what chemicals have been found in conventional sanitary pads and what they can do over time. You will know how to check whether your body is already showing signs of irritation or harm. You will know what safer alternatives exist — from the most affordable options you can find at your local market to the premium choices worth every naira. And you will have a clear, simple plan for making the switch at whatever pace works for you.

No complicated science. No scare tactics. Just the information every woman deserves to have.

Let's begin.

Chapter 1: What They Never Put On The Label

Pick up a sanitary pad — any one, the one you use every month — and turn it over. Look for the ingredients list.

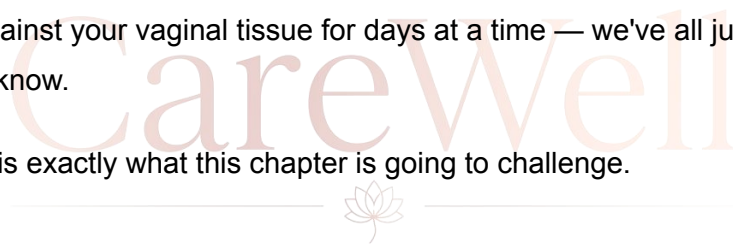
Go ahead. I'll wait.

There isn't one. Is there?

Think about that for a moment. You put this product against one of the most sensitive, absorbent areas of your entire body for three to seven days every single month. For decades of your life. And there is no ingredient list. No disclosure. Nothing.

If your tin of tomato paste had no ingredient list, you wouldn't buy it. If your body lotion didn't tell you what was in it, you'd be suspicious. But somehow, with sanitary pads — products that sit directly against your vaginal tissue for days at a time — we've all just accepted that we don't need to know.

That acceptance is exactly what this chapter is going to challenge.



The Chemistry Behind The Cotton



Most conventional sanitary pads are not made from pure cotton. The soft white layer you see — the one touching your skin — is typically made from a blend of rayon, wood pulp, and synthetic materials. To make these materials look clean, bright, and white, manufacturers bleach them.



The bleaching process, when it involves chlorine, produces a byproduct called **dioxins**.

Dioxins are not something you want anywhere near your body. The World Health Organization classifies dioxins as highly toxic environmental pollutants. They accumulate in body fat over time and have been linked to hormonal disruption, immune system damage, and in long-term high-level exposure, certain cancers.

Now, the argument from manufacturers is that the levels of dioxins in any single pad are extremely low — technically below what regulators consider dangerous. And that may be true for one pad. But consider this: the average Nigerian woman uses somewhere between 11,000 and 16,000 pads in her lifetime. We are not talking about one exposure. We are talking about monthly, repeated, skin-contact exposure over thirty to forty years.

That changes the conversation entirely.

Fragrance — The Hidden Troublemaker

Have you ever noticed that some pads have a faint floral or "fresh" scent? Manufacturers add synthetic fragrance to mask natural period odour. It sounds thoughtful. It is actually problematic.

The vaginal area has a delicate pH balance. It is self-cleaning. It does not need perfume. When synthetic fragrance chemicals — which can contain dozens of undisclosed compounds — come into contact with vaginal tissue, they can disrupt that balance, trigger allergic reactions, and cause the kind of irritation that mimics infection.

Many women treat themselves for yeast infections repeatedly without realising the irritation is coming from their pad, not from their body.

Pesticide Residue — Yes, Really

Conventional cotton is one of the most heavily pesticide-sprayed crops in the world. Unless the cotton in your pad is certified organic, it likely contains trace residues of agricultural chemicals. Again — on their own, in tiny amounts, manufacturers will tell you these are harmless. But the vaginal mucosa is highly permeable. It absorbs things. That is simply how that tissue works.



Why Nigerian Women Face Extra Risk

Here is where it gets specific to us.

Nigeria does not currently have strong regulatory requirements forcing manufacturers to disclose what is inside period products. The National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC) focuses largely on drugs and food — period products fall into a grey area that is poorly monitored.

This means that products that would face tighter scrutiny in Europe or North America can be sold freely here, sometimes without adequate quality testing. Some of the cheaper brands flooding Nigerian markets — the ones sold in open stalls, motor parks, and roadside kiosks — have never been independently tested for chemical content at all.

This is not a conspiracy theory. It is a regulatory gap. And until that gap is closed, the responsibility falls on us — on you — to be informed.

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What Real Women Are Experiencing



In my clinic, I started keeping informal notes on patients who came in with recurring vulvar irritation, bacterial vaginosis that kept returning despite treatment, and unusual hormonal complaints. I began asking them about their period products. What brand they used. Whether it was scented. How long they wore each pad.

The patterns I noticed were not conclusive — this was not a formal study. But they were consistent enough to make me change my own practice. I stopped recommending conventional pads to patients with recurring issues. I started suggesting alternatives. And many of them — not all, but many — reported improvement within two to three cycles.

That was enough for me.

So now you know what's actually inside that packaging — the chemicals, the gaps in regulation, and why this matters more for us here in Nigeria than many people realise. The question is: has your body already been trying to tell you something?

Because in the next chapter, we're going to look at the signals — the ones most women brush off as "just how periods are" — that might actually be your body asking for a change.



Chapter 2: Is Your Body Already Sending You Signals?



Let me ask you something.

When last did you have a period that felt completely normal? No unusual itching afterwards. No irritation down there that you had to quietly manage. No discharge that made you wonder if something was off. No infection that seemed to clear up and then, a few months later, quietly came back.

If you had to think about that for a while — this chapter is for you.

Here is something I tell every woman who sits in my consulting room: your body is not dramatic. It does not create symptoms for no reason. When something keeps happening — when the same irritation returns, when the same discomfort shows up every single month around your period — that is not bad luck. That is a message.

The problem is that most of us have been taught to normalise period discomfort to such a degree that we stop questioning it. We buy the cream, treat the infection, feel better, and move on. Until next time.

What if there is no "next time" — because you finally figure out what's actually causing it?

The Signals Most Women Dismiss

These are the most common signs I see in women whose period products may be affecting their health. None of these alone is definitive proof. But if you are experiencing several of them — especially if they appear or worsen during or after your period — pay attention.

Recurring itching or burning around the vulva

Not inside the vagina — around the outer area, where the pad sits. This kind of localised irritation that shows up during your period and fades a few days after is a classic sign of contact irritation. Many women treat this as a yeast infection when it is actually a reaction to synthetic materials or fragrance in their pad.

Infections that keep coming back

Bacterial vaginosis and yeast infections are common. Having one occasionally is not unusual. But if you are treating an infection, feeling better, and then finding yourself back at the pharmacy two or three months later — something in your environment is disrupting your vaginal flora repeatedly. Your pad is part of that environment every single month.

Unusual redness or a rash along the pad line

This is one of the clearest physical signs. If you notice redness or a rash specifically in the shape of where your pad sits — along the inner thighs, the labia, or the perineum — that is contact dermatitis. Your skin is reacting to something it is touching.

A strong or unusual odour during your period

A mild natural odour during menstruation is completely normal. A sharp, chemical, or unusually strong smell — especially when you remove the pad — can sometimes indicate that your pad's synthetic materials are interacting poorly with your natural chemistry.

Hormonal complaints that your doctor cannot explain

This one is harder to connect to, and I want to be careful here. I am not saying your pad is causing your hormonal imbalance. But if you have been struggling with unexplained hormonal irregularities — cycle disruption, changes in flow, mood changes around your

period — and nothing else explains it, it is worth considering what your body is being exposed to monthly.

How To Do A Simple Self-Check At Home

You do not need a laboratory to start paying attention. Here is a simple observation practice I give my patients. Do this across your next full cycle.

1. Check your pad after removal.

Before you wrap it up and dispose of it, take a quick look. What colour is the discharge on the pad outside of the normal red/brown flow? Is there any unusual colour — grey, green, yellow — that appears at the edges where discharge meets pad material? Any unusual smell from the pad itself, separate from the natural period smell?

2. Check your skin after each pad change.

Quickly observe the skin where the pad was sitting. Any redness? Any raised area? Any itching that starts immediately after you put on a fresh pad? Note it.

3. Track your symptoms by day.

Keep a simple note on your phone. Day 1 of period — how do you feel down there? Day 3? Day 5? Two days after your period ends? If irritation spikes on certain days and fades after your period, that timing is meaningful.

4. Try one cycle without scented pads.

If you currently use scented or "deodorising" pads, switch to unscented for one cycle — even if they are still conventional pads. If your symptoms reduce noticeably, you have just identified fragrance as a trigger. That alone is useful information.

The Difference Between Normal And Not Normal

I want to make this practical for you because I know how easy it is to either panic about everything or dismiss everything.

This is normal:

- Mild cramping during the first 1–2 days of your period

- A natural, mild blood smell during your period
- Slight sensitivity after your period ends as your skin recovers
- Light discharge between periods that is clear or white and odourless

This is worth investigating:

- Itching or burning that happens specifically during your period and not at other times
- Infections that return within 3 months of being treated
- A rash or redness in the exact shape of your pad
- Discharge that is grey, green, or yellow with a strong unpleasant smell
- Pain or burning when urinating during your period

See a doctor immediately if:

- You have a fever during your period
- You notice any sores or unusual skin changes in the vulvar area
- You experience severe pelvic pain that is new or worsening
- There is bleeding that is completely outside your normal cycle pattern



A Word On Self-Diagnosis



I want to be honest with you here. Everything I have shared in this chapter is meant to help you observe and ask better questions — not to replace medical care. If you are experiencing recurring symptoms, please see a doctor. What I want to change is *what you tell that doctor* and *what questions you ask*.

Too many women sit in consulting rooms and say "I keep getting infections" without mentioning that they use heavily scented pads, change them infrequently, or wear them for 12 hours at a stretch overnight. That information matters. Bring it with you.

And if your doctor dismisses your concerns about your period products without engaging with them — it is completely okay to ask again, or to seek a second opinion. You are allowed to advocate for your own body.

So now you have a clearer picture of what to look for and how to start paying attention to what your body is telling you. But here is the thing — knowing the warning signs is only half the equation. The other half is understanding what the products themselves are actually claiming versus what they are actually delivering.

Because those words on the packaging — "soft," "breathable," "dermatologically tested," "natural" — are doing a lot of work. And in the next chapter, we are going to find out exactly how much of that work is real.

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Chapter 3: What The Labels Are Really Saying

So you've picked up a pack of sanitary pads at the supermarket. Maybe it's the one you always buy. Maybe you're trying something new. You turn it over, looking for answers — and what you find is a parade of reassuring words.

Soft.

Breathable.

Dermatologically tested.

Natural feel.

Gentle on skin.

And somewhere in your mind, you think — okay, this one is safe. They tested it. It says so right here.



Here's what I need you to understand: those words are marketing language. They are designed by people whose job is to make you feel confident enough to put the product in your basket. They are not the same as safety guarantees. And in Nigeria, where there is no law requiring period product manufacturers to disclose their full ingredient list, those words can mean almost anything — or nothing at all.

Let me walk you through what the most common claims actually mean.

"Dermatologically Tested"

This sounds impressive. A dermatologist — a skin doctor — tested this product. It must be safe.

But here is the question nobody asks: *tested on whom, how, and for what?*

Dermatologically tested simply means that at some point, some form of skin testing was conducted. It does not tell you what was tested. It does not tell you how many people were in the test group. It does not tell you whether the testing was done on vulvar tissue — which is significantly more sensitive than regular skin — or just on forearm skin in a laboratory. It does not tell you whether the test lasted three hours or three years.

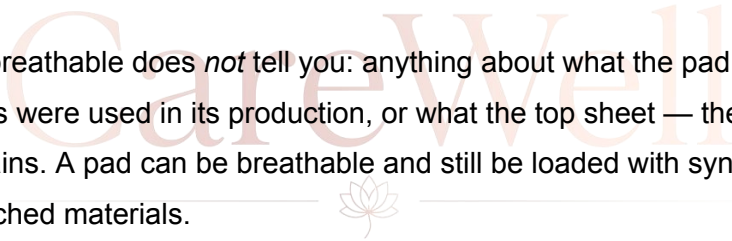
It is a phrase that sounds like a safety certificate. It is not.

"Breathable"

This one refers to the back sheet of the pad — the layer that faces your underwear. Some pads use a perforated or slightly porous back sheet that allows a small amount of air circulation compared to a completely sealed plastic back.

Breathable is better than non-breathable, genuinely. Trapped heat and moisture create the perfect environment for bacterial growth. So this claim has some real meaning.

But here is what breathable does *not* tell you: anything about what the pad is actually made of, what chemicals were used in its production, or what the top sheet — the layer touching your skin — contains. A pad can be breathable and still be loaded with synthetic fragrance and chlorine-bleached materials.



Breathable describes airflow. It says nothing about safety.

"Soft" and "Cotton Soft" and "Natural Feel"

These are the ones I want you to be most careful about.

"Cotton soft" does not mean the pad is made from cotton. It means it *feels like* cotton. The top sheet could be entirely synthetic — a type of plastic material called polypropylene — engineered to mimic the softness of cotton against your skin.

"Natural feel" is even vaguer. Natural feel compared to what? There is no standard. There is no definition. It is a feeling, not an ingredient.

When a pad says "contains cotton" — check carefully. It may contain a small percentage of cotton blended with synthetic materials. Or the cotton layer may be the middle absorbent layer, not the top sheet touching your skin.

If you want actual cotton against your skin, the packaging needs to say something very specific — like "100% organic cotton top sheet." Anything less than that level of specificity leaves room for interpretation.

"pH Balanced" and "Gentle Formula"

Your vagina maintains a natural pH of between 3.8 and 4.5 — mildly acidic — which is what keeps harmful bacteria in check. Anything that disrupts this balance opens the door to infection.

"pH balanced" on a pad sounds reassuring. But again — tested at what pH, using what method, for how long? This claim is not regulated in Nigeria. Any manufacturer can print it on their packaging without independent verification.

"Gentle formula" is similarly unverifiable. Gentle compared to what baseline? Nobody is checking.



How To Actually Read Period Product Packaging



Since ingredient lists are rarely provided, here is what to actually look for when you are standing in that aisle or scrolling through an online store.

1. Look for specific material disclosure.

Does the packaging tell you what the top sheet is made from? If it says "polypropylene top sheet" or "synthetic top sheet" — that is plastic against your skin. If it says "100% organic cotton top sheet" — that is meaningfully different.

2. Look for third-party certifications.

These are the ones that actually mean something because an independent organisation verified them. Look for:

- **GOTS certified** (Global Organic Textile Standard) — means the cotton is genuinely organic
- **OEKO-TEX certified** — means the product has been tested for harmful substances
- **FSC certified** — relevant for wood pulp content

If a product has none of these and only uses its own marketing language, treat its claims with healthy scepticism.

3. Check whether it is scented or unscented.

This one is simple and important. Unscented is always better for vaginal health. Always. If a pad is scented — even lightly — it contains synthetic fragrance compounds that your vaginal tissue does not need.

4. Research the brand independently.

A quick search of the brand name plus words like "toxic," "ingredients," or "review" can surface information that the packaging will never volunteer. Consumer advocacy groups in the UK, US, and Europe have tested many period products and published their findings. Those results apply to the same products sold here.

Introducing The SafeCycle Switch™

Now that you understand what conventional products are actually made of — and how little the packaging is required to tell you — you are ready for the framework that is going to guide the rest of this journey.

The SafeCycle Switch™ is the step-by-step method I developed from years of working with women whose health improved when they changed their period products. It is built on three simple phases:

Phase 1 — Reduce

You don't throw everything away overnight. You start by reducing your exposure. Swap scented for unscented. Reduce how long you wear each pad. Make small changes that immediately lower the chemical load your body is dealing with.

Phase 2 — Replace

You begin introducing safer alternatives — one at a time, at your own pace, within your budget. You try, you observe, you adjust. This phase is about finding what works for *your* body and *your* lifestyle.

Phase 3 — Refresh

You settle into your new routine. You know what works. You know what to look for. You share what you've learned. And your body — given time and reduced exposure — begins to show you the difference.

Simple. Sustainable. No pressure.

We are going to walk through every step of this in Chapter 5. But first — you need to know exactly what your options are. Because you cannot choose something you don't know exists.

And that is exactly what the next chapter is about. Every safer alternative available to Nigerian women today — what they cost, where to find them, and which one might be the right fit for you.

Chapter 4: Your Alternatives — From Budget To Premium



Let me guess.

When you first started hearing about alternatives to conventional sanitary pads, your reaction was somewhere between curious and skeptical. Maybe you saw someone on Instagram talking about a menstrual cup and thought — *that thing goes where exactly?* Maybe you heard about reusable cloth pads and immediately thought about the washing. Maybe the whole conversation felt like something for women in Lekki Phase 1 with too much time and too much money.

I hear you. I had the same reactions.

But here is what changed my mind: I started looking at the actual options. Not the intimidating ones people post about online — all of them. The affordable ones. The practical ones. The ones a busy Nigerian woman with a full life and a real budget can actually use.

And what I found was that there is something for everyone. Whether you are working with ₦500 or ₦50,000 — there is a safer option within your reach.

Let me walk you through all of them.

Option 1: Organic Cotton Pads

This is the easiest switch and the closest to what you already know. Organic cotton pads look and work exactly like conventional pads — you use them the same way, dispose of them the same way — but what is inside them is fundamentally different.

Instead of chlorine-bleached wood pulp and synthetic materials, organic cotton pads use cotton that has been grown without pesticides and processed without chlorine bleaching. No synthetic fragrance. No dioxin-producing bleaching process. Just cotton.

What makes them different:

The top sheet — the layer touching your skin — is actual cotton, not polypropylene plastic. This alone reduces irritation significantly for many women.

Where to find them in Nigeria:

Organic cotton pads are available through health-focused online stores, some pharmacies in major cities, and increasingly on platforms like Jumia and Konga. Brands to look for include Natracare, Organyc, and some locally produced organic options that have emerged in recent years.

What they cost:

This is where it gets honest. Organic cotton pads are more expensive than conventional ones. A pack can range from ₦2,500 to ₦6,000 depending on the brand and where you buy. If budget is a concern, consider using them at least for the first two days of your period — when your flow is heaviest and contact with your skin is most intense — and using a more affordable option on lighter days.

Best for: Women who want the simplest possible switch with no learning curve.

Option 2: Menstrual Cups

This is the one that makes everyone nervous. Let's talk about it properly.

A menstrual cup is a small, flexible cup — usually made from medical-grade silicone — that you insert into the vagina to collect menstrual blood rather than absorb it. You remove it, rinse it, and reinsert it. At the end of your period, you sterilise it by boiling it in water for a few minutes. Then you store it until next month.

I know. It sounds like a lot. Stay with me.

Why it is worth considering:

A menstrual cup has zero chemicals touching your vaginal tissue. No bleach. No synthetic fragrance. No pesticide residue. Just smooth medical-grade silicone sitting inside your body, collecting — not absorbing — your flow. Your vaginal pH is completely undisturbed.

One cup lasts between 5 and 10 years with proper care. Think about what you spend on pads every year — then multiply that by ten. The cup pays for itself within a few cycles and saves you significant money over a lifetime.

The honest challenges:

There is a learning curve. The first cycle with a cup is almost always awkward. Finding the right fold, getting the positioning right, making sure it has sealed properly — these take practice. Most women need two to three cycles before they feel fully confident.

It also requires a level of physical comfort with your own body that not all women start with. That is okay. It can be developed.

Where to find them in Nigeria:

Menstrual cups are available online — Jumia, Konga, and dedicated women's health stores. Look for brands like Lunette, Saalt, DivaCup, or Ruby Cup. Ruby Cup is particularly worth mentioning because for every cup purchased, they donate one to a girl in a low-income community.

What they cost:

Between ₦4,500 and ₦15,000 for a quality cup. One purchase. Years of use.

Best for: Women who are comfortable with their bodies, open to a short learning curve, and interested in the most cost-effective long-term option.

Option 3: Reusable Cloth Pads

Before you scroll past this one — hear me out.

Reusable cloth pads are exactly what they sound like. Fabric pads, usually made from cotton or bamboo, that you wash and reuse. They snap around your underwear just like a conventional pad. They come in different sizes for different flow levels. And they are softer, more breathable, and gentler on your skin than almost anything else on this list.

Why they work:

Pure cotton or bamboo against your skin means zero synthetic chemicals in contact with your vulvar tissue. Women who switch to cloth pads frequently report that the irritation and itching they experienced every month simply stops. Not because anything dramatic happened — but because the source of irritation was removed.

The honest challenges:

You have to wash them. I know that is the part that makes people hesitate. But consider this — you wash your underwear every day without thinking about it. A cloth pad rinsed in cold water immediately after use and then washed with your regular laundry is genuinely not as complicated as it sounds. Cold water rinses first — this prevents staining. Then wash normally.

You will also need enough pads to get through your period — typically six to eight for a full cycle, depending on your flow.

Where to find them in Nigeria:

This is actually one of the most locally accessible options. Several Nigerian small businesses and social enterprises make and sell reusable cloth pads. A quick search on Instagram or WhatsApp business directories for "reusable pads Nigeria" will surface multiple vendors. Supporting a local business while protecting your health — that is a good combination.

What they cost:

Between ₦800 and ₦3,500 per pad depending on the maker and material. A full set of six to eight pads costs between ₦5,000 and ₦20,000 as a one-time investment that lasts for years.

Best for: Women who want chemical-free protection, prefer something familiar in shape and use, and don't mind a small amount of extra laundry.

Option 4: Period Underwear

Period underwear looks exactly like regular underwear. You wear it, bleed into it, rinse it, wash it, and wear it again next month. There are no inserts. No cups. No folding. You just wear it like you wear any other pair of underwear — except it has a built-in absorbent layer that holds menstrual blood without leaking.

Why it is worth considering:

For women who find the idea of a cup too unfamiliar and cloth pads too much extra effort, period underwear is the simplest chemical-free option. You do not change your routine at all — you just change what you're wearing. The absorbent layer in quality period underwear is made from natural materials and contains no synthetic fragrance.

The honest challenges:

Good period underwear is expensive upfront. And it works best for light to moderate flow days — for heavy flow days, many women combine it with another option like a cup or organic pad.

Where to find them in Nigeria:

Available through international online retailers that ship to Nigeria, and increasingly through local health-focused boutiques in Lagos and Abuja. Brands like Thinx, Modibodi, and Knix are well established internationally. Local alternatives are beginning to emerge as well.

What they cost:

Between ₦8,000 and ₦25,000 per pair for quality options. You would need three to five pairs for a full cycle. This is the premium end of the spectrum.

Best for: Women with a higher budget who want the simplest possible transition with zero learning curve.

The Budget Breakdown — Every Option At A Glance



Let me make this simple for you.

Under ₦500 per cycle:

Unscented conventional pads — not perfect, but eliminating fragrance is an immediate improvement while you plan your full switch.

₦500 — ₦3,000 per cycle:

Organic cotton pads — the easiest switch, closest to what you know, meaningfully safer than conventional options.

One-time investment under ₦10,000:

Reusable cloth pads — local options available, lasts years, zero monthly spend after initial purchase.

One-time investment under ₦15,000:

Menstrual cup — the most cost-effective long-term option, lasts up to ten years, completely chemical-free.

One-time investment ₦15,000 and above:

Period underwear — premium, ultra-convenient, chemical-free, best combined with other options for heavy flow days.

Now you know what exists. You know what each option costs, how it works, and who it is best suited for. But knowing your options and actually making the switch are two very different things.

Because here is what most women do — they get excited, they order the cup, it arrives, they try it once, it doesn't go perfectly, and they go right back to their conventional pads and never try again.

That is exactly what *The SafeCycle Switch*™ is designed to prevent. In the next chapter, I am going to walk you through the exact three-phase transition plan — step by step — so that your switch is smooth, sustainable, and actually sticks.



Chapter 5: The SafeCycle Switch™ — Your Step-By-Step Transition Plan



Let me tell you about a patient I'll call Amaka.

Amaka came to me after years of recurring bacterial vaginosis. She had been treated so many times she could practically write her own prescription. When I suggested her sanitary pads might be contributing to the problem, she was skeptical — but desperate enough to try anything.

I told her about the alternatives. Her eyes went wide. She went home, ordered a menstrual cup, tried it on day one of her next period, couldn't get it positioned correctly, panicked, gave up, and called my office to tell me the whole thing was a disaster.

Sound familiar?

Here is what I told her: *You are trying to run before you have learned to walk. Let's start from the beginning.*

That conversation is what eventually became *The SafeCycle Switch™*. A three-phase plan that meets you exactly where you are — no pressure, no overnight overhaul, no disasters. Just a calm, steady transition that your body and your lifestyle can actually sustain.

Let me walk you through it.

Phase 1 — Reduce

The goal of Phase 1 is simple. You are not switching anything yet. You are reducing your current exposure while you prepare for what comes next.

This phase lasts one cycle — just one month.

Step 1: Ditch the scented pads immediately.

If you are currently using scented or deodorising pads, stop today. Switch to unscented conventional pads for now. This single change removes synthetic fragrance compounds from daily contact with your vaginal tissue. For many women, irritation reduces noticeably within one cycle just from this step alone.



Step 2: Change your pad more frequently.

Most women leave a pad on far longer than is healthy — especially overnight. During Phase 1, commit to changing every four to six hours during the day. Yes, even on light flow days. Prolonged contact with used pad materials increases irritation and bacterial growth regardless of what the pad is made from.

Step 3: Let your skin breathe at night.

If your flow allows it, try sleeping without a pad on your lightest nights. Wear older underwear you don't mind staining, or use a small folded piece of clean cotton cloth as a temporary liner. Your skin will thank you for the break.

Step 4: Start researching your chosen alternative.

While you are doing Steps 1 to 3, spend this cycle doing your homework. Revisit Chapter 4. Decide which alternative feels most realistic for your life right now. Order it or find out where to buy it locally. Have it ready before your next period begins.

That is Phase 1. Simple. Low effort. But genuinely impactful.

Phase 2 — Replace

Phase 2 is where the actual switching happens. This phase covers two to three cycles and is where most of the learning and adjusting takes place.

The key rule of Phase 2 is this: **you do not have to go all in immediately.**

If you have chosen organic cotton pads — start using them from Day 1 of your period. Observe how your skin responds. Note any differences in irritation, comfort, or smell. Give it two cycles before you draw any conclusions.

If you have chosen a menstrual cup — and this is important — do not try it for the first time on Day 1 of your period. Practice inserting and removing it before your period even starts. Do this in the shower, when you are relaxed, with no time pressure. Fold it, insert it, check the seal, remove it. Do this several times across a week before your period arrives. By the time your cycle starts, your hands will already know what to do.

The Cup Starter Guide — For First Timers



I want to spend a little extra time here because the menstrual cup intimidates more women than any other alternative — and most of that intimidation comes from simply not knowing the basics.

1. Choose the right size.

Most brands offer two sizes — a smaller size for women who have never given birth vaginally, and a larger size for women who have. Check the brand's size guide before purchasing.

2. Choose the right fold.

The C-fold — where you flatten the cup and fold it in half into a C shape — is the most common starting point. The punchdown fold creates a smaller insertion point and works better for many beginners. Try both and see which feels more comfortable.

3. Insertion.

Relax. This is the most important instruction. Tension in your pelvic floor makes insertion harder. Take a breath, relax your muscles, and guide the folded cup into the vaginal canal angled slightly towards your tailbone — not straight up. Once inside, release it and rotate it slightly to ensure it has opened fully and sealed against the vaginal walls.

4. Checking the seal.

Run a clean finger around the base of the cup. It should feel round — not dented or folded. If it feels dented, the cup has not fully opened. Grip the base and rotate it gently until it pops open.

5. Removal.

Do not pull the stem to remove the cup. This creates suction and is uncomfortable. Instead, bear down slightly with your pelvic floor muscles to bring the base of the cup within reach, pinch the base to break the seal, and then ease it out. Tip it carefully into the toilet, rinse with clean water, and reinsert.

6. Sterilisation.

At the end of your period, boil the cup in a pot of water for five to seven minutes. Allow it to cool completely. Store it in the breathable pouch it came with — never in an airtight container.

If you have chosen reusable cloth pads — start with just two or three for your lighter days while still using your conventional pads on heavier days. Rinse them in cold water immediately after removal. Wash with your regular laundry using a gentle detergent.

Observe how your skin responds over two cycles, then gradually increase how many cloth pads you use each cycle.

If you have chosen period underwear — wear it on your lightest days first. Get comfortable with how it feels and how much it holds before relying on it for heavier flow days.

Phase 3 — Refresh

By the time you reach Phase 3 — roughly three to four months after you began — you have reduced your chemical exposure, tried your chosen alternative, adjusted to how it works, and started to notice what is different.

Phase 3 is about settling in and paying attention to what your body is telling you.

Ask yourself these questions at the end of Phase 3:

Has the recurring irritation reduced or stopped?

Are infections less frequent?

Do you feel more comfortable during your period overall?

Has your relationship with your cycle changed — even slightly?

For most women who complete all three phases, the answers shift meaningfully. Not because anything magical happened — but because a source of monthly chemical exposure was removed and the body, given time, began to recover its natural balance.

Phase 3 is also when many women become the person in their WhatsApp group sharing what they learned. The friend who tells her sister. The mother who buys her daughter a menstrual cup for her birthday. That ripple effect is real, and it matters.

Handling Resistance — From Others And From Yourself

I want to address something that does not get talked about enough in these conversations.

Switching period products in Nigeria is not just a personal decision. It happens inside families, relationships, and cultural contexts that have opinions.

Your mother might think the cup is unhygienic. Your husband might find the whole conversation uncomfortable. Your friends might tease you about washing cloth pads. You might find yourself feeling self-conscious about being "the one doing all this."

Here is what I want you to remember: you do not owe anyone an explanation for decisions you make about your own body. You can share your reasons if you want to. You can recommend this guide to someone you love. But you do not need permission to protect your health.

And as for the resistance that comes from inside yourself — the discomfort, the "this is weird," the "maybe I'll just go back to what I know" — that is normal. Every new habit feels strange at first. Your conventional pad felt normal because you have used it since you were a teenager. Give your new choice the same time to become familiar.

You adapted before. You will adapt again.

So now you have the full SafeCycle Switch™ in your hands — Phase 1, Phase 2, Phase 3. You know what to do, when to do it, and how to handle the bumps along the way.

There is just one thing left to do. Pull everything together into one clear starting point — so that when you close this guide, you know *exactly* what your first move is.

That is what the final chapter is for. And I promise — it is simpler than you think.

Chapter 6: Your Day 1 Action Plan

You made it here.

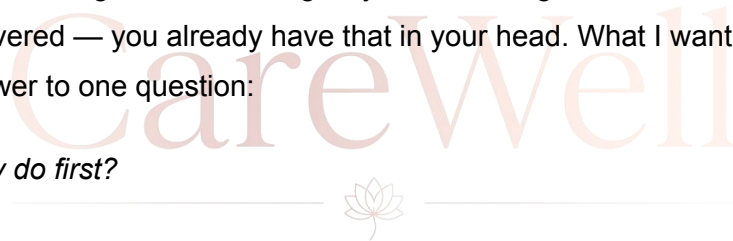
That means something. A lot of women read things like this, nod along, feel motivated — and then life happens. The guide gets closed. The tab gets minimised. The shopping cart never gets checked out. And three months later, they are back at the pharmacy buying the same pack of pads they have always bought, treating the same infection they have always treated.

I do not want that for you.

So before you close this guide, I want to give you something concrete. Not a summary of everything we covered — you already have that in your head. What I want to give you is a clear, simple answer to one question:

What do I actually do first?

Here it is.



Today — Right Now, Before You Do Anything Else

1. Check what you currently have at home.

Go wherever you keep your period products. Look at what brand you use. Is it scented? Does it make any specific material claims? Does it have any third-party certifications? You do not need to throw anything away today — just look at what you have been using and see it with new eyes.

2. Make one immediate swap.

If your current pads are scented — order or buy unscented ones today. This is your very first step in Phase 1 of the SafeCycle Switch™ and it costs you almost nothing extra. Unscented conventional pads are available everywhere. This one change begins reducing your chemical exposure immediately.

3. Decide which alternative you are moving towards.

You read Chapter 4. Something probably resonated with you more than the others. Maybe it was the organic cotton pads because they feel familiar. Maybe it was the menstrual cup because the long-term savings made sense. Maybe it was the cloth pads because you found a local vendor that excited you.

Pick one. Just one. Write it down — in your notes app, in a journal, on a piece of paper. Something about writing a decision down makes it real in a way that just thinking about it does not.

4. Find out where to get it.

Spend ten minutes today — just ten minutes — searching for where to buy your chosen alternative. Check Jumia. Check Instagram. Ask in a women's health WhatsApp group. Find a local vendor if you are going the cloth pad route. You do not have to buy it today if the budget is not there yet. But know where it is waiting for you.

Before Your Next Period

5. Have your alternative ready.

Whatever you choose — have it in your hands before your next cycle begins. Not ordered. Not in a cart. In your hands. This is important because when your period arrives, you will not be in the mood to figure out logistics. You want everything ready and waiting.

6. Re-read the relevant section of Chapter 4.

Whichever alternative you chose — go back and read that section one more time before your period starts. Refresh yourself on how it works, what to expect, and what the common beginner challenges are. Preparation reduces panic.

7. Tell one person.

This is optional — but powerful. Tell one woman in your life what you are doing and why. A friend, a sister, your mother, a colleague. You do not need to convince her of anything. Just share it. Saying it out loud to another person creates a kind of gentle accountability that is surprisingly effective. And she might be more curious than you expect.

During Your First Switched Cycle

8. Keep notes.

You do not need a fancy journal. The notes app on your phone is fine. Each day of your period, take thirty seconds to note how you feel. Any irritation? Less than usual? About the same? Any challenges with your new product? How did removal or washing go?

These notes are not for anyone else. They are for you — so that at the end of your cycle, you have real information about what changed instead of just a vague feeling.

9. Be patient with yourself.

If the cup leaks on Day 2, that is not failure — that is learning. If the cloth pad feels unfamiliar, that is not a sign it is wrong for you — that is your body adjusting to something new. Give yourself at least two full cycles before you make any firm conclusions about whether your chosen alternative is working.

10. Come back to Chapter 2.

After your first switched cycle, re-read the self-check section in Chapter 2. Go through the signals again. Is the irritation different? Has anything shifted? Your body will tell you things if you know how to listen — and now you do.

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Three Months From Now



If you follow the SafeCycle Switch™ — Phase 1, Phase 2, Phase 3 — three months from today, you will be in a fundamentally different place with your period health.

Not because anything dramatic happened. But because you removed a source of monthly chemical exposure that most women never even question. Because you paid attention to what your body was telling you. Because you made a decision — one small, practical, unglamorous decision — to do something differently.

That is how real health change works. Not in one dramatic moment. In small, consistent shifts that add up to something significant.

I have seen it in my clinic more times than I can count. Women who came to me frustrated and exhausted — treating the same symptoms, getting the same temporary relief, going around the same cycle — who made this switch and finally broke out of it.

Your womb has been working hard for you every single month of your adult life. It deserves products that work with it — not against it.

A Final Word

When I first started talking to my patients about their period products, some of them looked at me like I had suggested something radical. *My pad? That is just a pad. Everybody uses them.*

Yes. Everybody does. And that is exactly why this conversation matters.

The fact that something is common does not make it safe. The fact that something has always been done a certain way does not mean it cannot be done better. And the fact that manufacturers are not required to tell you what is in your period products does not mean you cannot ask the question and seek the answer yourself.

You asked the question. You found this guide. You read all the way to this page.

Now you know.

What you do with that knowledge is entirely up to you. But I believe — from everything I have seen in my years of practice — that women who are informed about their bodies make better decisions for their health. And better decisions, made consistently over time, change outcomes.



Your cycle is not something to just get through every month. It is a window into your overall health — a monthly report card from your body. Treat it that way. Listen to it. Protect it.

You deserve nothing less.

With care,

Dr. Salma Nazif



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