Teenager Dies of Toxic Shock Syndrome after using Tampon for First Time

Tampons provide the perfect porous, oxygen-filled, warm moist environment containing nutritious menstrual blood for bacteria to thrive to dangerous levels. Many tampons are known to contain toxic amounts of the chemical dioxin as well as fragrances, dyes, and super-absorbent chemicals. Natasha Scott-Falber, 14, died suddenly of toxic shock syndrome after introducing a tampon into her body.

Posting on Facebook, her family have launched a campaign to raise awareness of the condition so other sufferers spot the signs earlier.
They said: ‘Natasha died of toxic shock syndrome the first time that she used tampons.

‘Generally speaking, it is accepted knowledge that leaving a tampon in for too long can cause toxic shock syndrome. In Natasha's case, she followed all of the instructions and used the tampon correctly; it was simply the introduction of the tampon into her body which caused toxic shock syndrome to take effect.

She became ill five days before she died but remained in good spirits, and passed after falling asleep watching one of her favourite TV programs. She died peacefully at approximately 6.45am last February on Valentine's Day.

Toxic Tampons

Dr. Ilya Sandra Perlingieri, retired professor from San Diego State University and author of the recently released The Uterine Crisis, said women who read the risks of tampon use off the side of a box aren't getting the full story.

Chlorine from bleach eventually turns to dioxin, Perlingieri said. “All tampons are bleached with the exception of two companies,” she said. “Chlorine, whether in laundry, swimming pools, or in tampons, breaks down into a deadly chemical called dioxin.”

“Dioxin is one of the most dangerous chemicals on the planet and literally a tablespoon [of it] would kill everyone on the planet,” she said. “It's so deadly.”

Jill Wood, an instructor in Penn State's women's studies department who received her master's degree studying menstruation and menstrual health, said she does not use tampons as a precaution for her health and safety. “I don't use commercial tampons,” she said. “I don't think the health risks are reasonable.”

She said tampon companies underestimate the effects of dioxin. “Tampon manufacturers say that [tampons] are safe and levels of dioxin are so low that they are almost undetectable,” she said. “[That may be] true, but we only need a small trace amount for dioxin to do damage. It accumulates in our bodies over our lifetime and it's not something the body can ever get rid of. Ingesting it in food is one thing, but putting it in vaginas is another.”

Perlingieri also believes dioxin is unsafe because women use a lot of tampons. “Women use 11 to 12,000 tampons over their life cycle … maybe more with teens using them,” she said. “All that dioxin going into a woman's bloodstream and all those fibers wandering around in a woman's body—that's part of the toxic brew. Tampon companies have known for decades that the ingredients in products are not safe.”

Fibers remain in the vagina after a tampon is removed. “Fibrous material is left behind,” he said. “There are little particulates that come off. Fluid discharge is part of normal movement of the material. Some [fibers are] eliminated with it, but some [are] not.”

What is Toxic Shock Syndrome?

Toxic shock syndrome (TSS) is a highly dangerous bacterial infection – but it can be misdiagnosed, because the symptoms are the same as other illnesses and because it is so rare.

It is assumed to occur when harmless Staphylococcus aureus or Streptococcus bacteria, which live on the skin, invade the bloodstream and produce dangerous toxins.

“The problem is we don't know if the toxicity of the tampons are involved in the process which causes TSS, or if it is the nature of inserting a tampon itself into the vagina which causes the illness.”

TSS causes a sudden high fever, a massive drop in blood pressure resulting in dizziness and confusion, and occasionally vomiting and diarrhea.
Other symptoms – none of which are exclusive to toxic shock syndrome, which is extremely rare – include a sunburn-like skin rash, the whites of the eyes becoming red or pink and the shedding of the skin in large sheets, especially from the palms of the hands and soles of the feet, one or two weeks after becoming ill.

Women are most at risk of getting toxic shock syndrome during menstruation and particularly if they are using tampons, have recently given birth, or are using an internal barrier contraceptive such as a diaphragm.

A Family Devasted

After Natasha’s death it was initially believed she had fallen victim to septicaemia, better known as blood poisoning.

‘We cannot express how much we miss our beautiful, gifted, kind and funny Natasha. All of our family, and many others close to us, are still reeling from the shock of losing our wonderful girl.

‘We hope that you and your family never have to go through what we have gone through, and are still going through.’

Natasha, who was found dead by her father Mike Falber, was described as an ‘all-singing and all-dancing’ youngster who enjoyed acting and playing the guitar.

She had been selected last year to perform in a backing choir for English tenor Alfie Boe at one of Wales’ most prestigious concert halls, St David’s Hall, Cardiff.

A statement from BUPA said: ‘It’s not exactly understood why using a tampon is linked with toxic shock syndrome, but tampon absorbency (the amount of menstrual blood a tampon absorbs) is thought to be a factor.

‘If you’re a woman using tampons, use a tampon with the lowest absorbency suitable for your menstrual blood flow, change your tampon frequently, use a sanitary towel or panty liner from time to time during your period, never insert more than one tampon at one time and use a sanitary towel at night instead of a tampon.’

The family said: ‘We thought that one thing we could do, to honor Natasha, and to help others, would be to start an awareness campaign about toxic shock syndrome.

Perlingieri believes tampons are one of the reasons for increasing vaginal problems.

“We now have staggering rates of endometriosis, fibroids, PID [Pelvic Inflammatory Disease], TSS and 1.7 million hysterectomies performed this past year—the most [ever],” she said. “Twenty-five years ago, these were rare illnesses for women.”

Are Organic Cotton Tampons The Solution?

According to Dr Nunns, consultant gynecologist at Nottingham City Hospital, who recommends his patients change to all-cotton products, the skin of the vulva is the most sensitive on a woman’s body and easily irritated by polypropylene, perfume and bleach, common ingredients in sanitary ranges. He says: “All too often, women are sent away with a prescription for Canesten or whatever, as thrush is the easiest thing for a GP to diagnose. They don’t have the time or inclination to think beyond that. Most patients report that they aren’t even examined.”

All-cotton and organic cotton tampons are between 10% and 20% more expensive than other tampons, but that does not stop them selling well in North America, and particularly in Iceland, where they are the third most popular choice across all sanitary protection products and are stocked in the majority of supermarkets.

Dr Philip Tierno, professor of microbiology at New York University Medical School, has spent 23 years doing independent research into TSS and its link to tampons. It boils down to the fact that the toxin that causes TSS grows in the sort of environment created inside the body around a tampon. What goes into a tampon and how long it is left in the body are both major contributing factors.
Dr Tierno has come up with a persuasive argument for going organic. As with other organically grown crops, because non-intensive farming methods are used, there are no pesticide residues to contend with. “The bottom line is that you can get TSS with synthetic tampons but not with an all-cotton tampon,” says Dr Tierno. He says there are strict case criteria defining TSS, including a temperature of 102, rash and hypo-tension. However women can have variations on these reactions; a slightly lower temperature, for example, and those symptoms might go unreported because they don’t meet the strict definition.

“People think TSS was a health scare of the 80s, that it has gone away, and it’s true that manufacturers changed the blends in their tampons and people got educated about the right way to use them. But the problem is coming back as manufacturers start trying to increase the absorbencies of their products.” His advice is clear: “Never use tampons if you have ever had TSS. Use all-cotton products, don’t use higher absorbencies and don’t leave a tampon in for longer than eight hours. Above all, you are the proponent of your own health – do your bit by raising your brand of tampons as a concern with your doctor.”

Source

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Mark David

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