

# Tampon Case Study: Shrinkage & Ethics (2020-2024)

## Product Changes

### Tampax (Procter & Gamble)

- **Evidence of Change:** Multiple consumer reports and visual comparisons show apparent size reduction between older and newer tampons
- **Specific Products:** Differences noted between Tampax Pearl (released 2002) and Tampax Radiant (released 2012)
- **Package Changes:** Consumers report count reductions: "36 instead of 40 in large box and two less in small box"
- **Company Position:** Denies changing tampon sizes, states products "adhere to industry absorbency ranges"

### Lil-Lets

- **Product Differentiation:** Emphasizes tampons that "expand widthways" rather than lengthways
- **Sustainability Changes:** Discontinued plastic applicator tampons in November 2021
- **No Direct Shrinkage Reports:** No specific consumer complaints about size reduction found for 2020-2024

### UK Store Brands (Tesco, Sainsbury's)

- **Sustainability Focus:** Sainsbury's removed plastic applicators from all own-brand tampon lines (2019)
- **Cost Pressures:** UK retailers reported lowering profit expectations and cutting costs due to higher business expenses (2025)

### Organic/Feminist Brands

- **Market Growth:** Organic feminine care market grew from \$2.62 billion (2024) to \$2.77 billion (2025)
- **Key UK Players:** &SISTERS, Grace & Green, Organic Mondays

- **Marketing Approach:** Focus on sustainability and health benefits rather than size or absorbency

## Consumer Response

### Social Media Backlash

- Viral TikTok video (3+ million views) by content creator Melissa Simonson accused Tampax of shrinkflation
- Thousands of supportive comments from women reporting similar experiences
- Multiple platforms (TikTok, X/Twitter) show consistent consumer complaints

### Health Concerns

- Women report seeking medical appointments thinking "something is wrong with their bodies"
- Consumers report "bleeding through tampons more quickly" and "going through tampons so quickly"
- Comments indicate confusion about whether period flow increased or product effectiveness decreased

### Financial Impact

- Consumers note using more tampons per cycle, increasing overall cost
- Coincides with cost-of-living crisis and rising feminine hygiene product prices
- Some consumers report switching to alternative products due to dissatisfaction

## Company Reaction

### Tampax (P&G) Response

- Official statement to Daily Mail (June 2024): "At Tampax we innovate continuously to improve consumer experience"
- Claims adherence to Absorbency Classification and Droplet Scheme guidelines
- Emphasizes regulatory compliance with UK standards
- No acknowledgment of consumer perception of size changes

### Industry Trends

- Material concerns emerged with July 2024 studies finding heavy metals in various tampons

- Market disruption reported with declining tampon sales as consumers turn to alternatives
- Increased focus on sustainability and plastic reduction across brands

## **Ethical Concerns**

### **Transparency Issues**

- No consumer notification of potential product changes
- Same price maintained despite apparent size reductions
- Marketing continues to claim same protection duration (8 hours) despite apparent size differences

### **"Shrinkflation" Debate**

- Classic example of suspected "shrinkflation" - reducing product size while maintaining price
- Particularly problematic for essential hygiene products women cannot choose to forgo
- Disproportionate impact on lower-income consumers during cost-of-living crisis

### **Trust Erosion**

- Consumer testimonials indicate loss of brand loyalty
- Health anxiety created when previously reliable products suddenly perform differently
- Disconnect between company statements and consumer experiences

## **Regulatory Notes**

### **UK Standards**

- Tampons regulated as consumer products under General Product Safety Regulations (2005)
- UK Code of Practice (Version 12, June 2024) provides voluntary industry guidelines
- Absorbency measured using standardized "Syngina" test method with six classification levels
- Code requires clear absorbency labeling on packaging and instruction leaflets

## Oversight

- UK Government Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) Office for Product Safety and Standards (OPSS) provides oversight
- Industry self-regulation replaced Voluntary Notification Scheme in 2007
- No specific investigations or fines related to tampon shrinkage identified in 2020-2024 period

## EU Developments

- New EU Ecolabel criteria for absorbent hygiene products introduced December 2023
- Increased focus on restricted use of hazardous substances and waste reduction
- Greater flexibility for Member States to reduce VAT rates on female sanitary products (2022)

## Conclusion

The case of tampon shrinkage highlights the tension between consumer perception and company statements, raising significant ethical questions about transparency in essential product marketing. While regulatory standards exist for absorbency and safety, they do not specifically address size changes or notification requirements. The controversy occurs against a backdrop of rising costs, sustainability concerns, and increasing consumer interest in alternative products, suggesting a potential inflection point in the feminine hygiene market.

## Sources

- Daily Mail article (June 19, 2024): "Women claim tampons have been hit by shrinkflation"
- UK Code of Practice for Tampon Manufacturers and Distributors (Version 12, June 2024)
- Bloomberg report (July 24, 2024): "Tampon Sales Are Plunging as Eco-Friendly Alternatives Finally..."
- iNews article (July 18, 2024): "What you need to know about metals in tampons"
- The Grocer report (October 2, 2024): "Period care's cool challengers"
- AHPMA (Absorbent Hygiene Product Manufacturers Association) website