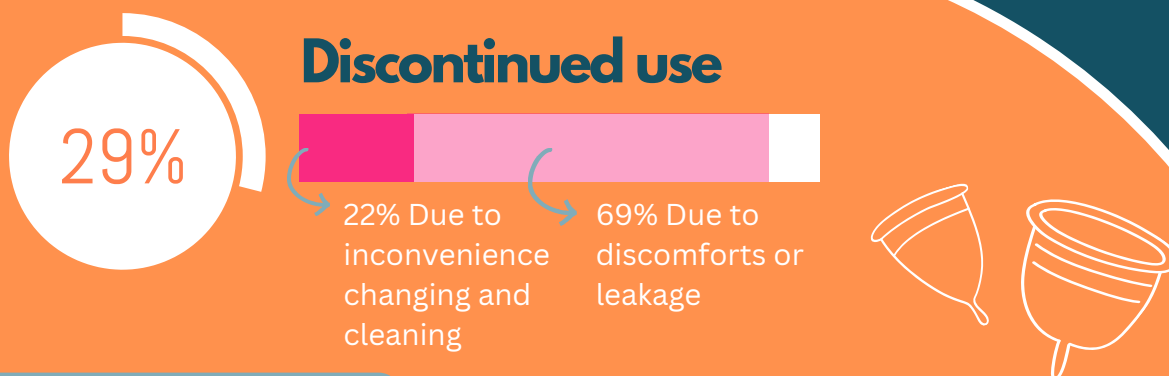


Menstrual cup acceptability and functionality in real-world use: a cross-sectional survey of young people in Australia

More and more young people are using menstrual cups. They have the potential to provide an environmentally sustainable, cost-effective way to manage menstruation. Clinical trials have found cups to be safe and effective, but real-world experiences and needs have yet to be explored.

In 2021, 530 Australians aged 15-24 who had ever tried using a menstrual cup participated in our study. Our findings showed greater challenges with acceptability and functionality than reported in clinical trials.



One issue was not being able to remove it... took myself and my partner 30 mins of attempts to finally get it.

Insertion and removal

- 87% Experienced discomfort inserting or removing their cup in the first cycle of use
- 17% needed assistance to remove their cup
- 45% unable to remove their cup on the first attempt

12 Participants reported IUD expulsion on first cycle of use

Learning curve

Our sample supports the wider research that menstrual cups have a familiarization period of 3-6 months.

Practice made perfect for me, trial and error really helped in getting comfortable.



Education prior to uptake could support preparedness, expectations and experiences of use.

40%

- Early negative experiences using a cup resulted in people giving up.

of those who abandoned use, did so within the first cycle.

- The likelihood of discontinuation and requiring assistance to remove the cup decreased with greater levels of prior information.
- Participants raised how lack of knowledge had impacted their experience and expressed the need for increased education and support.

Fit and exclusive use need to be considered when calculating cost effectiveness of menstrual cups.

- Most participants didn't know that different cups had different characteristics and fit.
- Issues with fit meant participants had to try multiple cups to find the right one.

"I kept being told that the cup was a one-size-fit all and I really hurt myself trying to fit it in all the time."

16% switched to an alternative cup.

Of those who had switched or abandoned use 46% had tried two or more alternative cups

- Menstrual cups are often worn in addition to other absorbents, impacting their cost effectiveness.

"[I wear] liners or pads as well to prevent leaking which means I'm still using single use items."

Implications for policy and practice

- The significant extent of difficulties and discomforts, particularly during learning curve, mean more information and education are urgently needed to support young people taking up the product.
- Provision initiatives both national and globally through governments or NGO's should consider the challenges of real-world cup use and include education in addition.

Citation:

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