



## Think!

Everyone knows what the toilet is for – to flush away human waste. But do you realise that flushing other items will cause blockages, damage the environment, and some can be dangerous to other people?

## What is the problem?

### **Sewers do not perform magic! They don't make things disappear!!**

Our sewerage systems are only designed to deal with three things

- human waste
- toilet paper
- household waste water

Anything else that is flushed away can cause a real hazard, as well as being a waste of the water you flush it away with.

You wouldn't dream of using your bin as a toilet! So why use the toilet as a bin?

Disposable products are part of everyone's life. They are, by their very nature, easy and convenient to use, and easy to dispose of – **but don't do it down the toilet!**

It may well be a case of “out of sight, out of mind” for the householder, but items such as tampons, sanitary towels, panty liners, wet wipes, nappies, razor blades, cotton buds, colostomy bags and toilet roll tubes can all cause blockages in the drains, the sewerage pipes or at the sewerage treatment works. They don't magically dissolve. Blockages further down the line cause flooding and then your rubbish will have to be removed by hand.

## Expensive

Unblocking the main sewerage system is expensive work for the Local Authority, but if you block **your** household drain then **you** will have to pay for someone to come to clear it – and it could cost you a lot of money.

## Unpleasant, unsightly and dangerous

Sewer blockages can cause sewerage to “back up” and flood into the nearest street or home, which is more than a little “unpleasant” for all those affected.

The sewerage system has overflow pipes that are designed to release water from the sewerage network straight into rivers or seas in periods of heavy rain. The sewage is mixed with a lot of rain and will cause no harm to the environment. But when the screens are blocked by too many flushed personal waste items then those items can escape through the overflow pipes directly into the river or sea.

While biodegradable waste doesn't affect the environment much, materials made of plastics – including **all** so-called disposable personal items – can end up on beaches and riverbanks. Not only do they look unsightly, but they also endanger wildlife and, if sharp, can really cause damage to people.

## **Hello, we meet again!**

It's not a very pleasant sight while taking a walk along the beach to see someone else's used disposable item. There are also dangers, especially to a child, of coming in contact with a syringe needle or used sanitary item.

## **At the works**

Most flushed items get all the way through the sewerage system without causing blockages or escaping. They end up at the sewerage treatment works and can still cause problems by blocking inlet screens.

While these special screens catch most flushed waste products, the debris on the screens must then be cleaned off and sent to a landfill site – where it should have gone in the first place.

This is a very unpleasant job for the sewerage treatment workers and an unnecessary financial cost to the Local Authority and therefore to you – and also to the environment, as not all items can be caught.

Cotton buds, condoms and contact lenses are particularly difficult to remove from sewage because they can squeeze through the screens. They survive the whole treatment process, going into the sea or river with the waste water.



**Everyone can help deal with this problem – change from being part of the problem to being part of the solution.**

**Ensure that you dispose of your personal waste responsibly.**

## What you should do

- **Disposable nappies, liners and wipes** – Flush away the solids from the nappy - never the nappy itself - down your toilet. Then well wrap what is left and put that in with your household rubbish. Reusable nappies are also available.
- **Razor blades** – Put used blades in a rigid container that you were going to put in with the household rubbish anyway.
- **Sanitary towels, tampons, applicators, condoms, incontinence pads, and bandages** – Wrap them well and dispose of them with your other household waste. Special biodegradable bags are available from pharmacies or you could use nappy sacks (available in every supermarket).  
In public toilets, place items in the proper disposal unit.
- **Packaging, toilet roll tubes, contact lenses, cotton buds, and backing strips** – Put them in with your household rubbish. A small bin can be kept in the bathroom for used products.
- **Medicines** – Do not flush them down your toilet **or** put them in with your household rubbish. Medicines will kill the natural bugs that clean the sewage or contaminate the landfill site. Return all unwanted, out of date, or left-over medicines to your local pharmacy for safe disposal. Always keep medicines out of reach of children.
- **Syringes and needles** – Drug users should make use of the Needle Exchange Programme ([www.needle.co.nz](http://www.needle.co.nz)). Other people should contact their local pharmacy to learn which pharmacies accept them.



It is estimated that 75% of blocked drains in the UK are caused by sanitary protection products.

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Tampons can take six months to biodegrade in the sea while plastics can remain in the environment indefinitely.

## Top tips to prevent blockages and problems in your drains and sewers.

1. **Think naturally.** Unless you produced it – or it's toilet paper – don't flush it down the toilet.
2. **Oil and cooking fats** should never be poured down the sink, because they will cool, solidify and gradually block the drain.  
Store them in a **“Fat Trap”**(\*), or let them cool and put them into a container you were already throwing away. You can mix fat with seeds and make “bird cake” for the birds in your garden.  
Another thing – the smell of fat attracts rats to your gully traps.
3. **Don't put kitchen waste** such as vegetable peelings, food scraps, teabags etc. down the sink. Food particles stick to your greasy pipes and block them.  
Scrape plates thoroughly before you wash them. Put waste in the bin. Non-meat waste can be put on a compost heap.
4. **Unwanted oil, paint and chemicals** should be taken to the hazardous wastes area of the landfill. If they reach the sewage treatment works, they kill the natural bugs that clean the sewage. For the same reason return all unused or unwanted medicines to your chemist for safe disposal.

### Fact

Oil solidifies when it meets used washing powder, and sticks to the pipes just like fat does

### Fact

Disposable items are **NOT** supposed to go down the toilet

### Fact

Fat, Oil and Grease (FOG) are **NOT** supposed to go down the drain, as you cannot build a drain capable of handling them

### Fact

Kitchen scraps are **NOT** supposed to go down the drain, and the Local Authorities – who are responsible for all sewers – do **NOT** approve of waste disposal units

You can make a difference to the environment – one way or the other.

**Think before you flush!**

## “Bag it for Landfill”

(\*) For more information on the “Fat Trap” contact FOG-Catcher Ltd, at [www.fattrap.co.nz](http://www.fattrap.co.nz) OR on 0800 FAT TRAP ( 32 88 72 )

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