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TRENDING

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Weighing The Pros And Cons Of Wet Wipes Vs. Traditional Toilet Paper

You see them both on store shelves, but which is better? Read this before making a switch.



You probably don't give it a second thought when you use the bathroom: You do your business, reach for toilet paper, wipe, flush, and go about your day. But a growing number of wet wipe products are on the market now—and they're not for the diapered set. Is this something we should be using?

It really depends on what you did in the bathroom and your wiping technique, women's health expert Jennifer Wider, M.D., tells SELF. While you wouldn't more than plain TP after going number 1, failure to clean up

properly after going number 2 can up your risk of getting a urinary tract infection, she points out, since poop particles left behind can travel to your vaginal opening and into your urethra, causing an infection. Plenty of people do just fine with using toilet paper in those situations, but others may need the aid of a durable wet wipe to make sure they get everything out.

As a woman, the actual direction in which you wipe is probably the most crucial thing, regardless of which material you use. Always wipe thoroughly from front to back, Wider says, to ensure you don't accidentally move feces forward to the vaginal area when cleaning up down there.

While wet wipes may get your behind squeaky clean, they can actually cause some extra irritation. Gary Goldenberg, M.D., medical director of the Dermatology Faculty Practice at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai, tells SELF that he regularly sees patients who have itching or irritation of the skin down there, and it's ultimately due to the wiping method people use. "Whenever I see it, patients are usually using very soft toilet paper or wet wipes," he says. While some toilet paper (like all-natural types) can be harsh and rough and irritate the skin, super-soft TP that's scented may have chemicals that you can be allergic to, like fragrance or lanolin. It can also crumble as you wipe, leaving behind itty bitty pieces of paper in its wake.

"Sometimes switching to the most basic (usually the cheapest) TP may improve the problem, along with other treatments," Goldenberg says. "If patients are irritated from frequent wiping, wet wipes may help." However, he cautions against exclusively using wet wipes. "Patients may become allergic to chemicals present in the product," he says. Those chemicals include fragrances, kathon (a preservative), and formaldehyde.

Wider agrees. "If you go for wipes, choose unscented, natural, and chemical-free," she says.

In addition to the health concerns, reports have shown that even wipes marketed as flushable aren't great from a plumbing perspective. They may go down your pipes just fine, but they take way longer than toilet paper to break down and end up clogging up septic and sewer systems.

So, which wiping method is best for you? It ultimately comes down to your preference. If you have sensitive skin, run-of-the-mill unscented TP might be a better choice for you. But if you suffer from UTIs or have difficulty getting clean after you poop, it might be a good idea to keep wet wipes handy, just in case.