

BOSS Backcountry Hygiene:

Personal Hygiene and Menstruation on the Trail



General Hygiene

In the backcountry, access to water and regular facilities is limited. It is essential to adopt practices that keep your genital area clean to reduce the risk of bacterial infections, including urinary tract infections.

Stay clean: Wash your hands and your genital area regularly. Choose a spot that is 300 feet (or 100 big steps) from water sources and drainage areas. Wash with potable water and biodegradable soap. If water is limited, use the wipes in the BOSS Hygiene Kit. Clean and change cotton or merino underwear regularly.

Stay dry: Wiping with a dedicated bandana or antimicrobial cloth, AKA a pee rag, is good practice on the trail. Rinse it regularly and hang it securely on your pack to dry, letting UV rays disinfect it. Participants can bring an extra bandana into the field as a dedicated pee rag.

Stay hydrated: Hydrate appropriately, and do not hold in your pee. Hydration naturally flushes your system and maintains a healthy body.

Communicate: Please communicate any concerns promptly. If you notice anything unusual or find that you are running low on menstrual or hygiene supplies, inform an instructor as soon as possible. Our team is medically trained and carries additional supplies. We are experienced in managing a range of challenges that may arise in backcountry settings, including those related to personal hygiene.

The BOSS Hygiene Kit: *(Will be provided on your course start date)*

- 2 Black Ziplock Waste Bags
- 1 Bag of Hygiene Wipes
- 1 Bag of Sanitizing Hand Wipes
- 1 Pack Tissue Paper

The Hygiene Kit is meant to support genito-urinary health, act as a bridge from using toilet paper, and provide hygiene support in low-water situations. It is not designed to support all elimination. Your instructors will provide thorough information on your course about general backcountry hygiene using natural materials. We will encourage and require you to explore the options presented and deepen your knowledge!

Pack out ALL hygiene products

Use the black ziplock waste bags to pack out wipes, tissues, tampon applicators, the tampon or pad itself, and ALL packaging. Everything we pack in, we pack out. DO NOT bury wipes or tissues. There will be times during the course to dispose of trash. Please practice Leave No Trace by packing out all hygiene products and packaging.

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Your Menstrual Cycle

There are many ways to manage a menstrual cycle in the backcountry. We always recommend using products you are familiar with at home. Keep in mind the active nature of a BOSS course and bring a sanitary alternative option (e.g., tampons with applicators or pads) for when water is limited. Please come prepared with your personal menstrual supplies. Washing with potable water and biodegradable soap is the recommended way to stay clean in the backcountry.

Your Menstrual Care Kit

If you use tampons or pads, stay with the versions that work best for your flow. We encourage participants to communicate if they need a hygiene break. Please make sure to change tampons regularly to prevent Toxic Shock Syndrome (TSS). Remember to pack out ALL menstrual products and packaging.

If you regularly use a menstrual cup in the front country, you may consider using this method on a course. Begin by digging a cat hole, wash your hands, dispose of your menstrual blood, and then bury it. Clean the cup by washing it with drinkable water and a small amount of biodegradable soap. Wash your hands thoroughly afterwards. We require participants to carry an alternative option to a menstrual cup.

If you are used to a method not mentioned above, discuss your preference with our admissions team or bring options to discuss with your instructor team on the course start date. Due to limited water potential, we do not recommend using period panties or cloth pads/liners.

It's common to see changes in the menstrual cycle on backcountry trips, especially when the conditions are strenuous. In the past, our participants and staff have experienced changes in their cycle timing and flow on the course. Even if you don't expect to get your period during your course, it's better to be prepared. Pack your preferred menstrual kit, even if you have just finished a cycle.