

The rags: paraphernalia of menstruation

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Internal protection

Commercially-made tampons were first sold in Australia in the 1930s. Tampax were advertised as early as 1939 in *Woman* magazine. They were slow to catch on and were frowned on in many circles, especially for unmarried girls. However by the 1960s many women had accepted tampons for all the reasons that manufacturers advertised, including their invisibility, their disposability (just flush down the toilet), and greater physical freedom, especially for swimming. Another kind of internal device marketed from time to time is based on the idea of a receptacle or 'cup' to collect menstrual flow rather than absorb it.

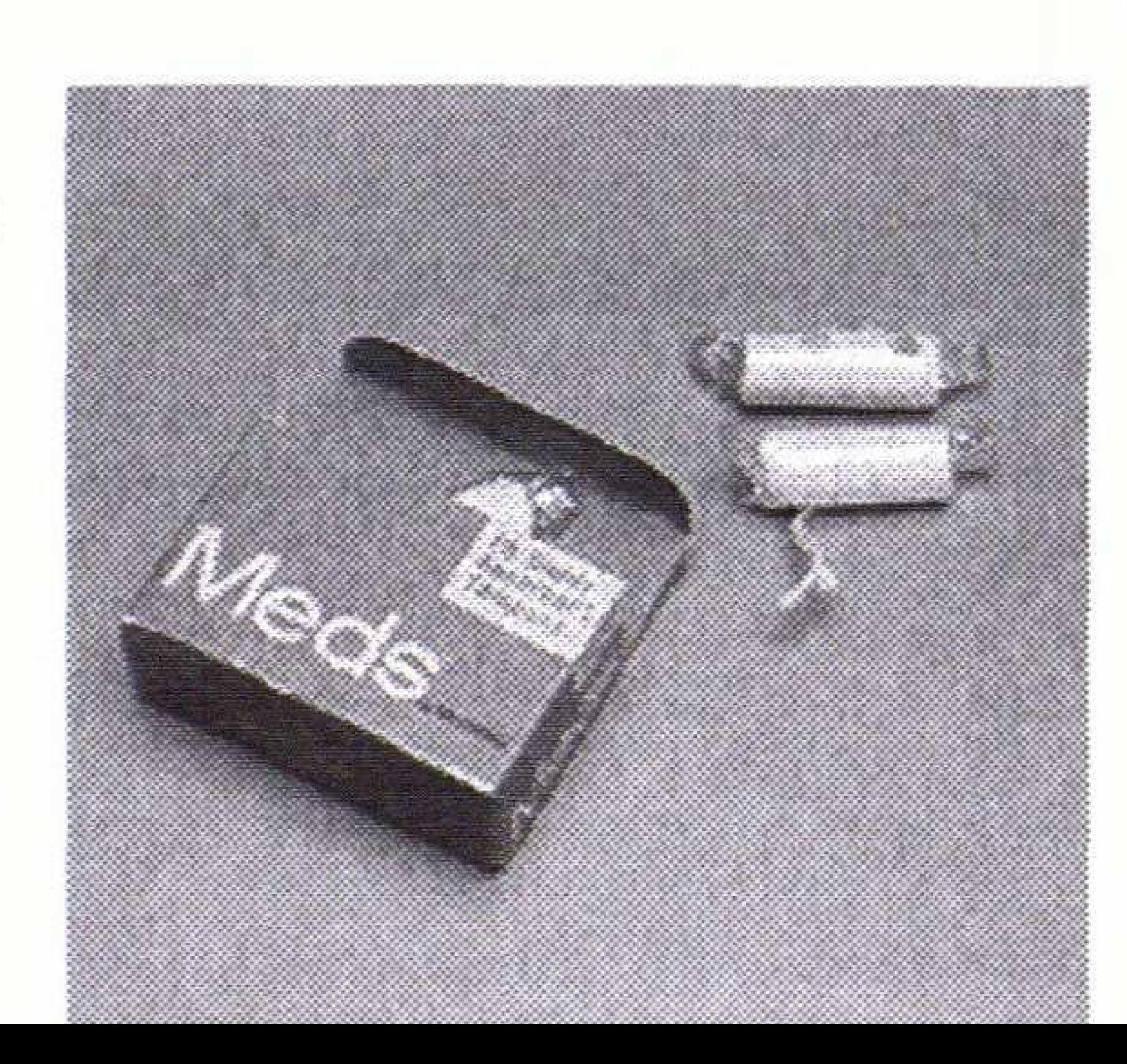
In the early 1960s the concept of plastic-lined pants to wear over pads to minimise leakage was just coming in. They were hellishly hot and creaked and rustled when you walked. My sister and I were keen tennis players and I remember Mum sewing rows of lace on the back of the 'special pants' so they would look like our regular tennis knickers. There was hell to pay when we wanted to switch to tampons; nice girls just didn't in those days. I think I was about 16. Mum only found out when we blocked up the toilet with the discarded ones.

KP, Bowral, formerly Sydney, NSW

We made pads out of towelling squares. It was a bit of a work of art making something comfortable and unseen. I know there was always a grab for the 'better' ones and I used to be sneaky and try and keep a few good ones hidden in my room so my sister couldn't get them first. I didn't know until I started work about shop-bought ones or Tampax. Probably our mother didn't either and certainly wouldn't have had spare money for that, and it was a wonderful thing to find there was a better way.

AL, Hawkes Bay, NZ.

tampons, opened packet, Meds, textile/ paper/ cellophane, Johnson & Johnson Pty Ltd, Australia, c1970. Five tampons remain in this





New Comfort - New Freedom With Tampax - Internally worn
Sanitary Protection. Advertisement
in Woman (Sydney, NSW), 24 July
1939, p18 PHM research files.

Diaphragm tampon and applicator, prototype,
Gynaeseal, latex/ plastic, developed by Dr John F
Cattanach, produced by Chattan Australia Pty Ltd,
Australia, 1987.

Developed by a Melbourne physician, Gynaeseal was a disposable cup-like latex device with a built-in 'catchment pouch'. It was inserted by means of a plastic, spiral applicator and positioned over the cervix, where it could remain in place by suction for up to for 24 hours. Gynaeseal was developed for use

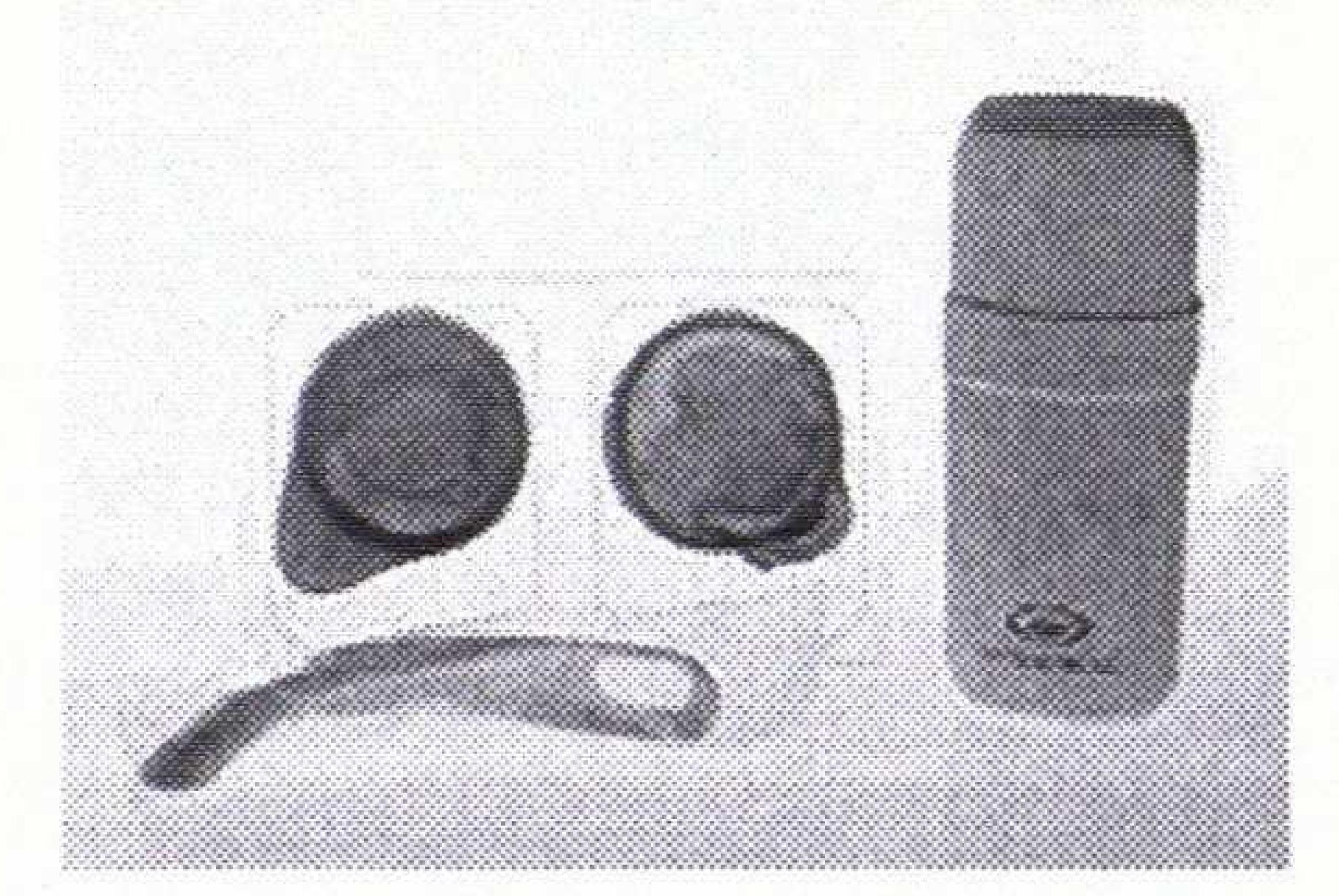


in 'natural' family planning because it made sexual intercourse during menstruation 'safe and free from embarrassment'. This meant that couples using birth control methods based on 'periodic abstinence' could reduce the number of days of abstinence by having sex during the woman's period 'without fuss or mess'. PHM collection 87/1325D. Gift of Dr John F Cattanach 1987.

Diaphragm tampons and applicators, Gynaeseal purse pack with additional pouch and applicator, latex/ plastic, developed by Dr John F Cattanach, produced by Chattan Australia Pty Ltd, Australia, 1989.

Promoted as 'the ultimate in menstruation management', Gynaeseal was launched in 1989 but does not appear to have gone into mass production.

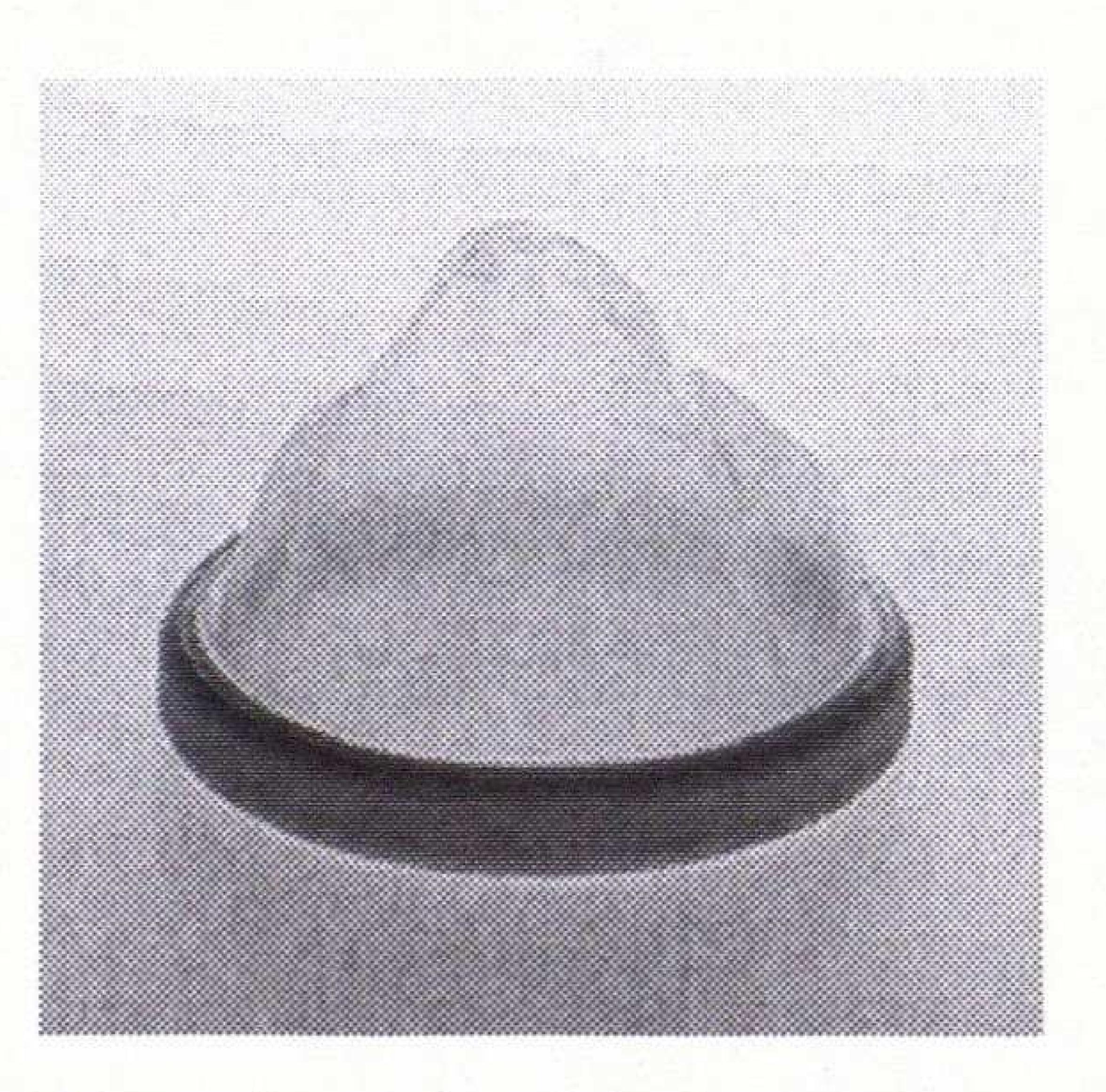
Neither the government nor any commercial



companies in Australia showed interest in the product. PHM collection 89/1517D. Gift of Dr John F Cattanach 1989.

Menstrual cup, Instead SoftCup, thermoplastic, Ultrafem Inc, USA, 1996.

Internal cups, which fit under the cervix and collect menstrual fluids rather than absorb them, have been manufactured since at least the 1930s. Generally they have not been a marketing success. Instead SoftCup is a recent version. When these were launched in the USA in 1996 the manufacturer's main claim was that they moulded to a woman's internal shape, creating a seal that protected against leakage, making them especially useful on 'heavy flow days' and 'during



exercise – even sexual intercourse'. Initial sales appear to have been slow but the product was still available in the USA in 2005. It has not been released in Australia. PHM collection 2000/21/1. Gift of Mr Harry Finley 1996.