

HEALTH INFORMATION FOR WOMEN ON NOLS COURSES

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On your NOLS course you will learn all of the skills you need to live and travel comfortably and responsibly in the backcountry. For many NOLS students, their course will be the first time they have spent a significant amount of time camping in a wilderness environment, so this means that every course starts with very basic information including basic cleanliness and then proceeds from there.

Many women feel some anxiety before their course concerning hygiene in the backcountry. Most women find that it is much simpler than they thought. Feminine hygiene problems are not common. All NOLS instructors, male and female, are trained to handle hygiene issues in a professional and sensitive manner. Below is some information to help you prepare for a healthy NOLS course.

General Clothing Tips

- Bring cotton underwear or nylon underwear with a cotton crotch. Cotton underwear breathes better than nylon and thus reduces the risk of infections.
- Bring the recommended amount of underwear. We know it seems like too few but with washings, it truly will be sufficient for a backcountry course or semester.
- Jog bras are popular. There are all sorts of great fabrics available from lightweight polyester fabrics that dry quickly to fleecy warm models for winter.
- In the summer, wear shorts or underwear that allow for adequate ventilation. Baggy running shorts work well. In the winter polypro long underwear breaths well if you take off your wind protection clothes before going to bed.

Bathroom Hygiene

Don't worry if you've never managed feminine hygiene issues in the backcountry before—your NOLS instructors will teach you ways to maintain privacy and sanitation in a wilderness setting. You'll learn about "going to the bathroom" in the woods. NOLS has a wide selection of "natural" toilet paper options to choose from, including leaves, moss, smooth stones and snowballs. It sounds crazy now, but many students come to prefer these alternatives to toilet paper, which must be burned or carried out. Regular toilet paper is carried by instructors for emergency purposes.

Hand washing is another important consideration for sanitary backcountry living. Your instructors will demonstrate how to effectively wash your hands. One suggestion is to bring a small (2 oz.) bottle of alcohol-based antibacterial hand cleaner for cleaning your hands.

Hygiene Rags – We recommend washing your pubic area with water or mild soap daily. Bring an extra bandanna that you can use to clean yourself.

Tampons/Pads – How many do I bring?

"A little extra" — in case you cycle changes or if pads or tampons become wet. If all women each bring a bit extra, most any emergency can be covered by the group without adding a lot of bulk. Used tampons and pads are bagged and carried out or sent out with the garbage when your course is re-supplied with food and fuel. A small stuff sack with a couple of extra plastic bags is typically used to carry used products. A real aspirin or two (not Tylenol) placed in the bag will help keep odors down.

Changes in your cycle or abnormal symptoms

If you experience changes in your period or abnormal signs such as itching and/or soreness in the vaginal area, excessive and or smelly discharge, increased frequency or pain on urination don't hesitate to bring this to the attention of your instructors. Our first aid kits have medication to treat the more common feminine infections.

