**YESHIVAT HAR ETZION**

**ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)**

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**Deracheha: Women and Mitzvot**

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Shabbat & Menstruation

What are the *halachot* of managing menstrual pain, cleaning off blood, and using menstrual products on Shabbat?

**By Laurie Novick, with Research by Ariella Gentin**

**Rav Ezra Bick, Ilana Elzufon, Shayna Goldberg, Rachel Weber Leshaw, and Rav Da’vid Sperling, eds.**

# Introduction

What does a discussion of menstruation and Shabbat tell us about women and mitzvot?

Defined narrowly, Deracheha’s mandate is to discuss women and mitzvot: women's obligations, exemptions, and unique customs, with an emphasis on halachot where there may be a distinction between men and women. At first glance, this piece on halachic aspects of menstruation on Shabbat might not seem like a natural fit. Women are fully obligated in the prohibition against performing labor on Shabbat, so the halachot that govern how that prohibition affects menstruation are primarily questions of hilchot Shabbat, and only circumstantially related to women.

Even so, dealing with menstruation on Shabbat raises specific practical issues, and it can be difficult to find direct or focused mention of them in halachic compendia. For example, discussion of using pads on Shabbat is often buried as an aside or footnote to discussions of diapering on Shabbat. This might make sense in a comprehensive work on Shabbat, but part of our mandate is to take halachic issues like these, of common concern to women, and move them to the foreground.

In fact, this has been one of the most commonly requested topics from the Deracheha community. Our community has asked for a single, clear, source-based, accessible piece that puts these frequently asked women’s questions front and center. Here it is.

Menstruation plays an essential role in human reproduction. On a roughly monthly basis, a fertile woman’s uterine lining thickens, sheds, and begins to thicken again to allow for the possibility of embryo implantation. The days of bleeding are part of an ongoing cycle of possibility and renewal.

Women relate to these monthly rhythms in a range of ways. For some, the menstrual cycle is a mere quirk of biology. Others find spiritual significance in building awareness of the cycle. Israeli educator Rut Lazare penned the following prayer for a mother to recite at her daughter’s menarche. It expresses a range of sentiments about the menstrual period in a religious framework to which women, mothers or not, may relate:

Rut Lazare, "A Daughter’s First Period," in *A Jewish Woman’s Prayerbook*, ed. Aliza Lavie, trans. Kaeren Fish (New York: Random House, 2008), 140.

Blessed are You, Lord, for having made me a woman./ During the six days of Creation You formed woman/ And every month I recall Your goodness and Your wisdom./ Blessed are You for having granted me my beloved daughter/ Whose body You created in wisdom and perfection/ And within whom You implanted the power of fertility and childbirth./ You have joined her to our mothers and matriarchs/ In timeless merging of/ Pain and knowledge.

Halachic discussions of menstruation typically focus on the laws of *nidda*, and the experience of menstruation usually remains private. For these reasons, it can be difficult to learn Shabbat and Yom Tov *halachot* relevant to menstruation – either textually or mimetically. Here, we explore common practical halachic questions that arise for someone menstruating on Shabbat: the parameters of seeking pain relief, washing, and the use of menstrual products.

# Pain Management

In the days leading up to menstruation and during the days of the menstrual period, some degree of achiness, mood swings, or cramping are common. Popular treatments include hot water bottles, pain relievers, and diuretics. Women with more severe symptoms may use anti-depressant and contraceptive pills preventively.

Taking Pills

The *halachot* of *refu’a* (healing) on Shabbat complicate the use of medications. The Mishna presents a number of restrictions on undertaking *refu’a* during Shabbat. For example, a person can consume a food or drink with healing properties on Shabbat only if it’s an item that healthy people also consume:

Mishna *Shabbat* 14:3

We don’t eat Greek hyssop on Shabbat, because it is not a food of healthy people…A person may eat all foods [that healthy people eat] for healing [purposes], and drink all drinks, aside from palm sap and root drink, because they are for jaundice. But one can drink palm sap for his thirst and spread root oil for non-healing purposes.

The Talmud cites a rabbinic decree that can explain this mishna and others like it,[[1]](#footnote-1) and Rashi fills in the details of what it means:

*Shabbat* 53b

Ulla said: it is a decree on account of crushing herbs.

Rashi *Shabbat* 53b s.v. Decree

Our sages decreed against things that heal, for if you were to permit any healing, one would come to permit crushing herbs, which is a Torah-level prohibition of *tochen* [grinding].

Before the advent of modern pharmaceuticals, medicines were often prepared by grinding or crushing ingredients for immediate use. The decree restricts the pursuit of physical healing on Shabbat, lest one come to grind medicinally active materials on Shabbat. Grinding, *tochen*, is one of the thirty-nine main categories of prohibited labor on Shabbat.[[2]](#footnote-2)

The decree is widely understood to remain in force today, even though most people no longer prepare their own medications.[[3]](#footnote-3)

From its inception, the decree has **not** applied when a person is dangerously ill (*choleh she-yesh bo sakana*).[[4]](#footnote-4)

There is also a widespread consensus[[5]](#footnote-5) that the decree does not apply when a person is bedridden or cannot function normally because of illness,[[6]](#footnote-6) even when not in danger (*choleh she-ein bo sakana*).

Shulchan Aruch OC 328:37

Whatever is not food or drink of healthy people, it is prohibited to eat and drink for healing [on Shabbat]. And specifically someone who has a minor ailment and he takes hold of himself and goes about like a healthy person, but if he has no ailment at all, it is permissible. Rema: And similarly if he becomes bedridden, it is permissible (Beit Yosef).

This means, for example, that a woman with a migraine or cramping that leads to overall pain or weakness related to menstruation is permitted to take pills that will help alleviate these conditions on Shabbat.

Additionally, someone who has reason to suspect that her symptoms will lead her to become a *chola she-ein ba sakana* if they go untreated, may take a pill on Shabbat from the onset of symptoms to prevent this from happening:[[7]](#footnote-7)

*Shemirat Shabbat Ke-hilchetah* 34:16[[8]](#footnote-8)

One who has a light pain, it is prohibited for him to take any medicine [on Shabbat]…but if there is a concern that if he not take the medicine the pain will increase and he will become sick, such that his halachic category would shift to that of a *choleh she-ein bo sakana*, like one who has a headache and has a tendency for migraines…it is permissible for him to take medicines.

Meichush Be-alma

Rambam, and Shulchan Aruch paraphrasing him, rule that the decree against healing applies only to the generally healthy person (*bari*), who can function fairly normally, even in the presence of a minor ailment (*meichush be-alma*).

Rambam, Laws of Shabbat 21:20

…It is prohibited for a healthy person to undertake healing on Shabbat, a decree lest he crush herbs.

Shulchan Aruch OC 328:1-2

One who has a minor ailment and holds himself together and goes about like healthy person, it is prohibited to perform any healing for him, even through a non-Jew, a decree on account of grinding herbs…

Light cramping, or a light headache that is not expected to worsen greatly, would usually be considered a *meichush be-alma*. It should follow that a woman with such a condition should not take pain relievers on Shabbat.

*Shemirat Shabbat Ke-hilchetah* 34:18

One should not take on Shabbat any preparations for preventing pain or minor illness, and there are those who are lenient when one needs to take them for some days in a row, and Shabbat is among them.

As Rav Neuwirth notes, however, there are exceptions to this rule. If we look again at Rambam and Shulchan Aruch, they both specify that the decree applies to **healing**.[[9]](#footnote-9) Rav Eliezer Waldenberg argues that pills taken solely for pain relief or as relaxants are permissible even for a *meichush be-alma*, because they do not truly heal, but merely alleviate symptoms.

Responsa *Tzitz Eliezer* 14:50

Sedatives that do not heal at all and are used only to calm nerves and tension, or [medicines] to relieve aches that disturb one, but do not heal, there is room to permit taking these types [of medicines] on Shabbat.

It can sometimes be helpful for a person concerned that pain will develop or worsen over Shabbat to take a pill before Shabbat comes in. This could head off discomfort for some. When it doesn’t, having begun treatment before Shabbat helps establish that one will not come to grind medicine on Shabbat, and thus provides some grounds for leniency.[[10]](#footnote-10) Tzitz Eliezer and other authorities also mention possible alternative grounds for leniency, such as taking medicine in an unusual fashion,[[11]](#footnote-11) or treating cases of distress more leniently than those of minor discomfort.[[12]](#footnote-12)

Ongoing Treatment

The Talmud notes that a medical treatment begun prior to Shabbat may be compromised if discontinued on Shabbat.

*Shabbat* 140a

Since he drank [the medicine] on Thursday and on erev Shabbat, if he doesn’t drink it on Shabbat, he endangers himself.

Accordingly, many rule that the decree also does not apply to ongoing medical treatments, such as antibiotics, when the treatment’s efficacy may be negatively affected by missing a day.

*Shemirat Shabbat Ke-hilchetah* 34:17

One who is obligated according to doctor’s orders to take medicines for some days in a row, and Shabbat is among them, there are those who are lenient to take them also on Shabbat.

Thus, for example, a person on a daily pill regimen is generally permitted to take them at the regularly scheduled time on Shabbat, when taking it just before Shabbat begins and right after it ends would not suffice medically.

Based on all that we’ve learned, there are a number of ways to permit taking medicines for pain relief on Shabbat, even for a *meichush be-alma*. A person in this situation should not assume that she cannot take pain medication on Shabbat without consulting a halachic authority.

Hot Water Bottle

The hot water bottle may entail other concerns, beyond *refu’a*. The Talmud quotes a Baraita that permits using a dry, hot compress upon one’s stomach on Shabbat, but not a container filled with hot water:

*Shabbat* 40b

Our Rabbis taught in a Baraita: A person may heat up a towel and place it over his intestines on Shabbat, as long as he does not bring a hot water kettle and place it over his intestines on Shabbat. And this matter is prohibited even on a weekday on account of danger.

The passage implies that there is an additional reason to prohibit using a hot water bottle on Shabbat, aside from concern for the danger of scalding.

Tosafot suggest two possible concerns: that one would come to violate the prohibition of *sechita*, wringing, on Shabbat, or that using a hot water bottle falls under the decree against *refu’a* on Shabbat.[[13]](#footnote-13)

Tosafot *Shabbat* 40b s.v. So long as he not bring a kettle

Meaning, as long as the towel is there, lest the water fall onto the towel and he come to *sechita* [wringing]. Alternatively, he should not bring it because of healing. And they [the sages] made a decree lest he crush herbs [that applies with a kettle] more than with a towel, for that [use of the towel] does not look so much like healing.

Now that we have more spill-proof containers, only the decree of *refu’a* remains potentially relevant.[[14]](#footnote-14) Some halachic authorities do not apply it here, since the pain remedy is not medicinal:

Responsa *Or Le-Tziyyon* II 36:1

It is permissible to use a hot water bottle on Shabbat to relieve pain, and it is even permissible to fill up the bottle on Shabbat.

Others do view the decree of *refu'a* as a practical concern, but still permit using a hot water bottle on Shabbat for a *choleh she-ein bo sakana*, to whom the decree does not apply, or for a someone with a *meichush be-alma* in a case of great need,[[15]](#footnote-15) or in locales in which hot water bottles are also used for non-healing purposes:[[16]](#footnote-16)

*Shemirat Shabbat Ke-hilchetah* 34:11

A *choleh she-ein bo sakana*, it is permitted for him to use a hot water bottle (and one should take care that the bottle be totally dry at the time that he fills it from a *keli rishon* [vessel directly on the heat], or that he fill it from a *keli sheni* [vessel not directly on the heat]) against a strong stomach ache…One who normally heats his bed with a hot water bottle even when he is healthy, or even if he himself does not normally do so but other people in his locale do, is permitted to place one in his bed or even on his stomach, even when he has a stomachache, so long as it is not recognizable that his intention is entirely for healing.

# Cleaning Off

Menstrual blood can easily find its way onto the body and clothing, leaving women with the question of how best to clean it off on Shabbat. Before we look at the parameters for washing and wiping, we should note that Halacha makes special allowances for *kevod ha-beriyot*, human dignity. *Kevod ha-beriyot* overrides rabbinic injunctions in the case of great physical indignity.[[17]](#footnote-17)

For example, on account of *kevod ha-beriyot* our sages permitted people of their day to bring the small stones that they used for wiping (as we use toilet paper) into a bathroom, even though moving them would otherwise be rabbinically prohibited as *muktzeh*. In the modern-day equivalent, we are permitted to tear toilet paper as necessary for wiping, in a way only prohibited rabbinically on Shabbat (e.g., with the back of one’s hands).

Shulchan Aruch OC 312:1

Because of *kevod ha-beriyot*, they [our sages] permitted carrying rocks for wiping [in the bathroom] …

*Shemirat Shabbat Ke-hilchetah* 23:19

…If he needs the toilet paper, there is room to be lenient out of *kevod ha-beriyot* to tear the toilet paper in an unusual way…

The need to clean off menstrual blood is analogous to the need to wipe after using the toilet. Moving forward, we should keep in mind that the halachic factor of *kevod ha-beriyot* can sometimes provide grounds for leniency with regard to rabbinic edicts on Shabbat.

Bathing

The *melacha* of *bishul*, cooking, limits heating water up on Shabbat. Even if water was heated up prior to Shabbat or in a permissible manner on Shabbat, bathing one's whole body in hot water on Shabbat is prohibited by a rabbinic decree. This decree was instituted in response to unscrupulous bath attendants who would heat up water **on** Shabbat and lie about when they heated it:[[18]](#footnote-18)

*Shabbat* 40a

For Rabbi Shimon ben Pazi said Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said in the name of Bar Kappara: Originally, they would wash in hot water that was heated on erev Shabbat. The bathhouse keepers began to heat [water] on Shabbat and say it was heated on erev Shabbat. They [the sages] prohibited the hot water [for bathing]…

With menstrual blood, it is usually only necessary to clean off part of the body, so that will be our focus here. (Learn more about washing the whole body on Shabbat [here](https://www.nishmat.co.il/Uploads/files/Ask-Rav-Sperling-Washing-on-Shabbat-and-YT.pdf).) What are the parameters of washing part of the body on Shabbat? For starters, the Talmud teaches that water heated in advance of Shabbat (and kept hot on Shabbat) may be used to wash one’s face, hands and feet:

*Shabbat* 40a

It was said: Hot water that was heated on erev Shabbat…Shmuel said: They [the sages] did not permit washing [with it] except for one’s face, hands and feet.

We find a similar halachic discussion regarding bathing in water heated on Yom Tov. Rabbeinu Asher (Rosh) states that women preparing for immersion on Motza’ei Shabbat that falls out on Yom Tov would heat up water on Yom Tov to clean the body’s “hidden places and folds”:

Rosh *Nidda*, Laws of Mikva’ot 37

That case when it is not possible to perform *chafifa* [mikveh preparations] on Motza’ei Shabbat, as when Yom Tov falls on Motza’ei Shabbat, then she performs *chafifa* during the day on erev Shabbat, and so practice the women nowadays, and they are careful on Shabbat not to feed their children [sticky] food, and not to involve themselves in something that will lead to a *chatzitza* [barrier to immersion]. They heat up a flask of water to wash their hidden places and folds in accordance with Beit Hillel, like Beit Hillel who permitted heating water on Yom Tov for one’s feet, but not one’s whole body.

One might have thought Rosh’s ruling would be limited to cases of washing for the sake of a mitzva, such as preparing for mikveh. Beit Yosef, however, applies Rosh’s ruling more broadly, to washing in general, and infers that the terms “face, hands, and feet” in the *halachot* of bathing on Shabbat includes other body parts as well.

Beit Yosef OC 326

My understanding is that "his face, hands, and feet" is not specific, that this is also the halacha for other limbs, that it is permissible as long as he does not wash his entire body…From what Rosh wrote in the last chapter of *Nidda* (Laws of *Mikva’ot* 37 97a) “She heats a flask of water to wash her hidden places and folds in accordance with Beit Hillel, who permitted heating water on Yom Tov for one’s feet but not one's whole body.” Therefore, the meaning of "his face, hands, and feet" is not specific, for even though there it refers to Yom Tov and here to Shabbat, this is not one of the matters of halachic difference between Yom Tov and Shabbat…

Rema cites this ruling.[[19]](#footnote-19) His contemporary, Mas’at Binyamin, summarizes how these laws apply to a woman bathing in preparation for her clean days on Shabbat and Yom Tov:

Responsa Mas’at Binyamin 5

On Shabbat and Yom Tov, it is obvious that a woman can wear and make her bed with whites as she normally does on a weekday [in preparation for her seven clean days] and wash even her entire body with cold water or with water that was heated before Shabbat—or before Yom Tov—to wash a few of her limbs but not her entire body….And [she may wash] with hot water specifically her genitalia and between her thighs, and specifically with hot water that was heated before Shabbat or before Yom Tov. She should also take care with the prohibition of *sechita* [wringing], that she not wash with a cloth, just with her hands, and all of this is in accordance with the halacha. But it seems to me that women do not have the custom to wash or to wear whites on Shabbat and Yom Tov ….

Mas’at Binyamin writes that some women had the practice of delaying cleaning until after Shabbat or Yom Tov, though he makes it clear that this is not the fundamental law.

A woman is thus permitted to use water heated in **advance** of Shabbat and Yom Tov to clean individual body parts of menstrual blood (or other matter), as necessary. This can be for her own hygiene or to attain a *hefsek tahara*, which is ideally preceded by washing up. () Cold or lukewarm water may be used more freely.[[20]](#footnote-20) Lukewarm water is typically prepared on Shabbat by letting water from an urn cool, or by adding cool water to a container of water from an urn. (Using a hot water tap on Shabbat is usually prohibited, and entails questions beyond the scope of this piece.[[21]](#footnote-21) Whether a woman can use water heated **on** Yom Tov for this type of washing is a matter of debate.[[22]](#footnote-22))

Washcloths and Wipes

Note that Mas’at Binyamin stipulates that a woman use her hands when cleaning herself with water, and not a cloth, lest she come to wring out the water.[[23]](#footnote-23)*Sechita*, wringing, came up in Tosafot’s discussion of hot water bottles as well. It can describe extracting a liquid for use, like squeezing grapes for juice, which falls under the *melacha* of *dash*, threshing. Alternatively, it can describe a stage of laundering, *melaben*, where wringing is part of the cleaning process.[[24]](#footnote-24)

Ran (on Rif) *Shabbat* 41a

Rabbeinu Tam explained that there are two types of wringing: one is a *tolada* [Torah-level sub-category] of *melaben* [laundering] and one is a *tolada* of *dash* [threshing]. And that which is a *tolada* of laundering is specifically with a cloth that becomes clean and with liquids that clean. And that which is a *tolada* of *dash* is with any liquid, as long as one needs the liquid that is wrung out, similar to threshing…

Water absorbed by a washcloth when washing would in some sense dirty the washcloth, so it would be difficult to characterize this *sechita* as a type of laundering of the cloth.[[25]](#footnote-25) Rather, the concern about using a washcloth likely centers on *sechita* as a type of *dash*, to retrieve liquid. Some early halachic authorities maintain that there is a Torah-level prohibition of *sechita* from a cloth, because typical use of a wet cloth involves pressing liquid out in order to make use of the water within it to clean the skin.

Rosh *Shabbat* 22:4

A liquid which is absorbed within a cloth, one who wrings to extract [the liquid] from it [the cloth] is obligated [in a sin offering, i.e., violated Shabbat on a Torah level].

Therefore, one should not deliberately wring out even a cloth towel used for drying on Shabbat. Rav Tzvi Pesach Frank, however, permits wiping on Shabbat with a wet paper product, in large part because he views any possible halachic concern as rabbinic. The water is not a natural part of the paper (in the way that juice is naturally part of a fruit) and paper, unlike cloth, is not typically wrung out:[[26]](#footnote-26)

Responsa *Har Tzvi* OC 1:190

Regarding the question of whether it is permitted to wipe on Shabbat with paper wet with water, from the perspective of *sechita*…. One can say further that in our case it is not a Torah level prohibition even if he wrings it, because the water is not naturally absorbed within it [the paper]. Clothes, even though the liquids don't originate within them, are still … often wrung out (as explained in Rosh 22:4), which is not the case with paper that has absorbed water but is not typically wrung. And since even if he wrings [the paper] it is only rabbinic, again one can say that we do not make a decree lest he wring, for this would be a decree atop a decree.

Thus, wiping with wet paper is widely permitted, as long as one takes care not to wring it out:

*Shemirat Shabbat Ke-hilchetah* 14:38

It is permissible to wet paper a bit, but he should be careful not to wring the water from the paper.

Using wipes has historically been more contentious, though they have become more widely accepted in recent years. According to some authorities, they are permissible when merely damp and used without great force, since then it would be difficult to wring any liquid out.[[27]](#footnote-27) According to others, they are generally so wet that it is impossible to avoid *sechita*:[[28]](#footnote-28)

Responsa *Shevet Ha-Levi* 8:59

They pointed out to me again that given that today the wipes are made very wet, it is nearly impossible to follow the above suggestion of not applying a lot of pressure…therefore we should be stringent with this until we know that the facts have totally changed.

Most recently, Rav Asher Weiss has conducted research on wipes and reached the conclusion that they do not result in *sechita*:

Responsa *Minchat Asher* 1:14

For in the many checks that I undertook, I was given to know that in standard use of the wipes that are found today in the market there is no *sechita* whatsoever…And it further was further clarified to me by the owner of a factory for manufacturing wipes that they check that the material be non-absorbent in order that it not disintegrate and not swell…and further, isn't it a clear halacha that one may wipe his face on Yom Kippur with a cloth that has slight dampness from before Yom Kippur…rather, since there are no liquids recognizable here, there is no *sechita* here and so it is in this case…in typical and standard use there is no *sechita* at all.

In recent years, increasing numbers of *posekim* and families follow views that permit wipes for babies. Baby wipes specially prepared to meet some authorities’ halachic specifications (e.g., all synthetic so there is no question whatsoever of their being cloth) have even begun to appear on the market with *hechsherim*, though many who permit wipes do not require certification. *Kevod ha-beriyot* is an additional consideration for leniency, especially for women who feel a need to clean off with them.

# Blood and Dyeing

*Tzovei’a*, dyeing, is another prohibited labor of Shabbat. [[29]](#footnote-29) On a Torah level, it is typically defined as an act of dyeing which specifically serves to improve or beautify the object being dyed.[[30]](#footnote-30) It is prohibited rabbinically when performed in a destructive manner.

Some halachic authorities, including Shulchan Aruch, [[31]](#footnote-31) even rule that wiping a berry-stained mouth on a cloth napkin is prohibited rabbinically as *tzovei’a*:

Yere’im 274

If they[people] drink staining drinks on Shabbat, such as red wine or berry juice… they should be careful that they do not stain their cloths and sheets and clothing. A person who has cut his finger should be careful not to put anything on it, since it stains, for even though it is destructive and destructive acts are exempt [on a Torah level] there is a rabbinic prohibition.

Based on this ruling alone, we might be concerned that a woman’s options for wiping off menstrual blood are limited. Others, however, including Radbaz, rule against this stringent view:

Responsa Radbaz 4:131 (1201)

Question: You asked if a person must be careful when he eats on Shabbat fruits that stain, such as berries and peaches and pomegranates, that he not wipe his hand with a cloth, since it is dyeing. And we have not seen anyone in our days who is careful with this and it is certainly an excessive stringency, for this is not the manner of dyeing but the manner of dirtying…one need not be concerned, but one who is stringent merits a *beracha*.

Mishna Berura maintains that one may rely on Radbaz as necessary:

Mishna Berura 320:59

There are those who are lenient with all of this, since it is done in a dirtying fashion, and one may rely on them where it is impossible to be careful about this.

Therefore, a woman need not be concerned about wiping off her menstrual blood with **any** item when necessary. Even those who generally regard wiping off hands or face on a cloth as a rabbinic prohibition may limit the application of the prohibition to **objects that are typically dyed**. Shulchan Aruch Ha-Rav (the Alter Rebbe) points out that, without distinguishing between typically-dyed objects and other objects, it would be difficult to permit a woman to use menstrual protection on Shabbat. Since halachic authorities allow the use of menstrual protection on Shabbat, it must be that dirtying objects not typically dyed is fully permissible. (See more below.)

Shulchan Aruch Ha-Rav OC *Kuntres Acharon* 302, note 1

Rather it is certain that a change in appearance [in an object] is not at all halachically significant when one does not want it at all, and it is also not the way of the world to want it at all. And that which it is prohibited to touch a cloth with his stained hands, this is because it is normal for cloth to be dyed, and if one were to do this **not** in the manner of dirtying, it would be a full-fledged *melacha* ….And know that otherwise it would be prohibited for a woman who became *nidda* on Shabbat to place any *moch* that she had prepared for *nidda* out of concern for dyeing…but there is no one who is concerned for it on account of dyeing….

It follows that a woman may perform a *bedika*, or absorb or wipe menstrual blood, with anything not typically dyed (e.g., an item designated for *bedikot* or wiping), without concern for a rabbinic-level violation of *tzovei’a*. By the same logic, *tzovei’a* is not even of rabbinic concern with respect to staining disposable products, since they are not typically dyed. A similar halachic ruling commonly applies to cleaning off a bleeding wound.[[32]](#footnote-32)

Washing Clothing

Washing clothing on Shabbat is typically prohibited under the *melacha* of *melaben*.[[33]](#footnote-33)

The Talmud draws distinctions, between hard and soft leathers, and between rinsing and rubbing. Hard leather is treated most leniently. Soft fabrics are subject to the most restrictions, since merely soaking them even without rubbing can be defined as laundering:

*Zevachim* 94b

For Rav Chiyya bar Ashi said: Many times I stood before Rav and rinsed his [leather] shoes with water. Rinsing—yes, but scrubbing—no. If [the story] regards soft [leather], [only rinsing] was in accordance with all opinions. If with hard [leather], [only rinsing] was in accordance with the other [more stringent] opinion. If so, a [fabric] garment also [may be rinsed]? A garment, soaking it is its laundering.

Therefore, clothing with blood on it (and reusable cloth menstrual pads, and period underwear) should generally be left until after Shabbat or Yom Tov. The best way to clean blood from fabric is typically by soaking or rinsing it as much as possible under a tap, and that is forbidden on a Torah level as *melaben*.

What other steps can be taken to mitigate a stain? It is permissible to remove the surface layer of wet blood from a garment with a paper towel or rag.

Shulchan Aruch OC 302:9

A cloth that has dirt on it, it is prohibited even to rinse it, for this is its laundering, rather one wipes it with a rag, gently and not forcefully, lest one come to wring it.

A baraita teaches that we may also scrape off a stain from fabric with our fingernails:

*Shabbat* 141a

Mud that is on his shoe, he scrapes it with the back of a knife; and on his clothing, he scrapes it with a fingernail, so long as he does not rub. Is it not that he shouldn’t rub it at all? No, that he should not rub it from the outside but only from the inside.

Halachic authorities permit scraping stains on fabric, certainly when they’re wet, and allow using a knife as well. Scraping can even be permitted on the outside of a garment, since it doesn’t resemble washing as rubbing does:

Shulchan Aruch OC 302:7

Mud that is on his garment…and he scratches it with his nail. And there are those who explain that these words are regarding wet [mud], but dry is prohibited because it is grinding

Mishna Berura 302:34

He scrapes it with his fingernail: From the outside, for this is not considered *melaben*. And it follows that it is permissible to scrape it with the back of a knife, and possibly even with its blade.

Synthetic Fabrics

Rav Moshe Feinstein writes that, in principle, the concept of laundering should not apply to non-absorbent synthetic materials like plastic. He permits cleaning objects made of such materials for same-day use on Shabbat:

Responsa *Iggerot Moshe* YD 2:76

Regarding the matter of plastic tablecloths, it stands to reason that it is not similar to leathers, for this [plastic] is a substance that water does not penetrate at all, rather just [sits] on its surface like wood and metal, and even the soft [plastics] in this regard are like hard [objects], so therefore this is not a matter of laundering. And one should not compare conceptually different types [of materials] to leathers, check yourself for even with hard leathers there is he who says in *Zevachim* 94 that there is a prohibition of laundering, and many early authorities rule that this is the halacha, see Bei'ur Halacha OC 302:9 s.v. *Aval*. In any case we do not compare different substances to them [leathers], for it is permissible to wash dishes, even those that are no harder than hard leathers, thus, we only have [concern with] leathers. Still, in any case, since it would be impossible to find this halacha discussed explicitly, for it is a new type [of material] that the generations before us never saw, it is fitting to be stringent not to rub forcefully it with one's hands, for this is like scrubbing its sides together. and one can be lenient according to all opinions only to clean it lightly with water.

Since it is a firm, hard surface, and the rinsing is to permit same-day use, this argument justifies rinsing out a menstrual cup with water, much as one can wash a dish with water for Shabbat use.

More to our point, based on this type of argument, one could also argue that it is permissible to rinse out a stain from a fully synthetic piece of fabric (e.g., 100% polyester) where the stain does not overlap natural fiber or thread at the seams.[[34]](#footnote-34) Tzitz Eliezer explains that such a fabric is not absorbent and thus may be rinsed:

Responsa *Tzitz Eliezer* 5:10

The reason for the matter is that regarding other clothes, we say that soaking them is laundering them, and we don’t say thus also regarding a leather garment, it seems we can explain that this is because with other garments there is already laundering action through rinsing in water alone, and this is insofar as the water is absorbed within the garment and inside the dirty area, and therefore this on its own is already considered laundering…In any case, with this we conclude with all that was said, that one should permit rinsing a nylon garment, similar to the permission with a leather garment.

Rav Neuwirth rules accordingly, on condition that one not wring out or rub the fabric:

*Shemirat Shabbat Ke-hilchetah* 15:7

A garment made totally of synthetic fibers with no mixing of natural fibers …, and it is also not sewn with thread made of natural fibers, it is permissible to soak it in water, when the intention is to use it that day. But when it is still wet, it is prohibited to rub parts of it against each other, or to rub it with one's hand or with a towel; indeed, the use of a wet rag [on it] is prohibited in any event, as above 6. And it is prohibited to wring out this garment made of synthetic fibers to remove the water that is in it, or to shake the water out of it with force.

# Menstrual Products

Tampons and pads often come individually wrapped. In general, opening packages on Shabbat raises questions about several *melachot*, including *korei’a* (tearing), *asiyat petach* (making an opening), and *mochek* (erasing).

The Mishna states that one may open a container of food as long as one does not intend to create a vessel:

Mishna *Shabbat* 22:3

A person can break a barrel to eat figs from it, so long as he does not intend to make it into a vessel…

Tosafot limit the permissibility of opening a container to a *musteki*, a flimsy one that will not be fit for future use:

Tosafot *Shabbat* 146a s.v. *Shover*

Here, that it is permissible to break the barrel, is because it refers to a *musteki* [flimsy one]…and for this reason specifically a barrel is permissible, for because of its poor quality one does not care about it and there is no concern lest he intend to make it a vessel…

In practice, it is preferable to open packages before Shabbat and Yom Tov when possible. However, many halachic authorities permit opening wrappings and packages on Shabbat and Yom Tov

*Shemirat Shabbat Ke-hilchetah* 9:1-3

*Le-chat'chila* (from the outset), it is fitting and correct to open all sealed containers whose contents one wishes to use on Shabbat and on Yom Tov on the day before…There are those who are lenient to open boxes, drink cans, bags12, and packages such as one is not accustomed to reuse, if indeed it is not his intention to reuse them after removing their contents. And one opens them in a fashion that he does not intend to make a good opening for use. Note 12: And one normally uses a bag just for storing the contents, the milk or the juice, and for transferring it from place to place, and then discards it when one is done using it, and this is like a flimsy vessel like a *musteki*. And therefore one can say that this is permissible according to everyone, so long as one not intend to make a good opening, as described later. And so one should not open in the place it was sealed, but cut it open a bit in the body of the package, and also not cut it in the place of letters. So I heard from Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach…

Since the menstrual products will be used on Shabbat and their packages are designed to be thrown out after being emptied, both the larger and the individual packages may be opened on Shabbat as necessary. Both should preferably not be opened at a perforated opening. Many halachic authorities express a preference for the larger packages to be opened prior to Shabbat or in a destructive manner on Shabbat. Otherwise, opening them on Shabbat would enable them to function as receptacles in the future.[[35]](#footnote-35)

Sticking

Using a pad or pantyliner generally entails removing the covering from an adhesive strip, affixing the pad to a garment with the adhesive, and unsticking the pad from the garment after use. Here the *melachot* potentially involved include *tofer*, sewing, and *korei’a*, tearing. The primary *melacha* of *tofer* entails sewing with two or more stitches in a way that will be lasting:

*Shabbat* 74b

“And one who sews two stitches” [has performed a *melacha* of Shabbat]. But this is not long-lasting? Rabba bar bar Channa said: It is when he ties them.

Rashi *Shabbat* 74b

But this is not long-lasting: Like this, and since it is not long-lasting, it is not a *melacha*.

Sticking objects together or separating them are *toladot* (Torah-level sub-categories) of *tofer* and *korei'a.* Depending on the circumstances, they can be considered a Torah-level violation as well:

Rambam, Laws of Shabbat 10:11

One who sticks papers or skins together with scribes’ glue and the like, this is a *tolada* of *tofer* and he is obligated [in a sin-offering for performing a Torah-level *melacha*], and so one who separates papers stuck together or skins stuck together and did not intend merely to act destructively, this is a *tolada* of *korei’a* and he is obligated [in a sin offering].

The essential question becomes whether one may create or break a bond meant to be temporary.[[36]](#footnote-36)

Magen Avraham permits separating pages that became stuck together by wax on Shabbat, because the wax adhesion was not intended to bind the pages together or to be lasting:

Magen Avraham 340:18

A Torah-level sub-category of *korei’a*. it seems to me that if the pages were stuck together with wax or at the time of binding them it is permissible to open them…for it is not done to be long-lasting, how much more so in this case when it happened on its own.

Rav Moshe Feinstein adds that *tofer* and *korei’a* only apply when the objects are joined to the point that they become as one and separating them would tear a unified object. Otherwise, Rambam would have mentioned them as *melachot* performed when twining or separating strands of a rope:

Responsa *Iggerot Moshe* 2:84

For here Rambam wrote in 10:8: “one who twists rope from flax or from wool threads or from flax threads or hairs and the like, it is a *tolada* of *kosher* [tying] and he is obligated [in a sin-offering], and one who separates the strands, this is a *tolada* of *matir* [untying] and he is obligated [in a sin offering].” And on the face of it, what is the reason this is not also a *tolada* of *tofer*? For they were attached with a more lasting attachment than three stitches, and also it is an attachment that all the threads are made into a single strand, that even according to my reasoning is relevant to the attachment of *tofer*, like one who sticks papers together with glue, which is a *tolada* of *tofer*…And therefore one must say further that the *melacha* of *tofer* is only what creates a single entity to the extent that when one wants to separate them he needs to perform the *melacha* of tearing.

Based on the above, and considering that the adhesive on pads is designed for the items to be separable and not truly to become as one, it is widely permitted for women to affix and remove adhesive pads on Shabbat:[[37]](#footnote-37)

*Chut Shani Shabbat* I 17:9

It is permissible for a woman to stick a pad onto underpants in order to absorb bleeding, and there is no *tofer* or *korei’a* in this.

Some authorities, including Rav Neuwirth, recommend un-sticking and re-sticking the adhesive covers before Shabbat where possible.[[38]](#footnote-38)

This preference reflects a concern that, since the covers are attached to the adhesive indefinitely (from the pads' manufacture until their use), the bond is considered *shel kayyama*, long-lasting. This is another area in which *kevod ha-beriyot* might provide additional grounds for relying on lenient opinions.[[39]](#footnote-39)

Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach argues that removing the covers is not of concern since the covers are made from the start to be separated. He adds that something used and disposed of within a day is not considered lasting:

*Shemirat Shabbat Ke-hilchetah* 35 Note 67

Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach said further …regarding sticking on the paper that covers a band-aid, the adhesion is so that, when one needs the band-aid, the adhesive won’t be ruined, and it is all done only for the need of separating it later. And the paper that is stuck on the stickers of diapers is the same thing, and therefore it is not considered long-lasting…In any case, from the perspective of reasoning, it seems in my humble opinion that what one throws into the garbage is also considered not long-lasting….

It follows that there would be no concern with closing a used pad with adhesive fasteners before disposing of it. Nevertheless, it is common to be stringent not to seal used diapers and pads closed. Since those seals are meant to remain indefinitely, this could raise the question of a lasting bond:

Responsa *Tzitz Eliezer* 16:6

For if one removes the diaper by pulling it down [without opening it]…and the adhesive remains stuck, it comes out that the adhesive that he originally stuck remains as a long-lasting attachment …and if so, then only then does one stumble over the prohibition of *tofer*.

Carrying

The Torah prohibits carrying on Shabbat in the public domain, and our sages extended the prohibition to intermediate spaces. In practice, many Jewish communities have established an *eiruv* that technically defines areas within it as a single "private domain" to allow carrying in settled areas. So, for example, it is prohibited to **carry** a pad or tampon in one’s pocket where there is no eruv. Does **using** menstrual products in a place without an *eiruv* violate the prohibition of carrying on Shabbat?

A series of *mishnayot* discuss the accoutrements with which a man or woman may leave the private domain:

Mishna *Shabbat* 6:5

A woman is permitted to go out [on Shabbat]…with wadding that is in her ear, and with wadding that is in her shoe, and with wadding that she placed for her menstruation.

*Mishnayot* on this model also take into account whether a person is likely to end up carrying an item they were originally wearing. For example, one might pick up and carry something that has fallen off. This concern takes central stage when the Talmud explains the rationale behind permitting a woman to go out with the menstrual wadding where it is prohibited to carry on Shabbat:

*Shabbat* 65a

Rami bar Chama thought to say that it is permissible [specifically] when it is tied between her thighs [so she won’t come to carry it]. Rava said: Even though it is not tied for her, since it is soiled, she will not come to carry it.

Because the wadding is soiled, a woman will not come to carry it, even if it falls as a result of not being tied in place.

But why isn't having it on her person considered carrying to start with? Because she is wearing it. Ran explains, and he cites an important distinction along the way:

Ran *Shabbat* 64b

With wadding that she placed when she was *nidda*. Rashi explained that it is for absorbing the blood so that the clothes not get dirty, and Ri raised the difficulty that we conclude above in the first chapter [of the tractate] that anything [put in place] to save [clothing] from dirt is considered an act of carrying and for this reason is not considered to be in the manner of wearing. Therefore, he explained that it [the wadding] protects against the blood falling on her flesh and irritating her, and for this reason it is considered wearing.

Something used to protect one’s **clothing** from becoming dirty is typically considered carrying and not wearing.[[40]](#footnote-40) However, something used to protect one’s **body** from discomfort is effectively acting as an added layer of clothing, and thus permissible.

There is some halachic debate about carrying with respect to a *moch dachuk* (a cloth inserted vaginally right before the beginning of the seven clean days to establish that bleeding has ended), since it is not there to prevent discomfort but rather as a halachic measure.[[41]](#footnote-41) In practice, a woman who follows the stringent position, and has reason to go out in a place without an *eiruv* when the relevant evening falls on Shabbat, can usually omit inserting the *moch dachuk* that month.

The practical *halachot* of using menstrual products on Shabbat outside an *eiruv* derive from two rulings of Shulchan Aruch based on the Talmudic discussion. One, a woman is permitted to go out on Shabbat with wadding in place to prevent discomfort, since it fulfills a function of clothing.

Shulchan Aruch OC 303:15

She [a woman] goes out [on Shabbat]…and with the wadding that she placed for her menstrual bleeding. Rema: So that blood not fall upon her and cause her discomfort. Shulchan Aruch: Even if it’s not tied, for since it is soiled, we are not concerned that perhaps she will carry it, even if it has a handle.

Two, she can use a cloth even just to protect herself from soiling,[[42]](#footnote-42) so long as it’s so well attached that it can truly be considered a garment.

Shulchan Aruch OC 301:13

A woman in *nidda* who ties a cloth [only] in front of her that she not become dirty with her menstrual blood is prohibited from going out with it [on Shabbat] if it not be an apron-tied pant (*sinar*) fashioned in the way of clothing. But if she attaches it so that the blood will not cause her distress, it is permitted to go out with it.

The rough equivalent nowadays would be considering a tampon or a pad or even a menstrual cup, as **functioning like clothing**, and thus not an issue of carrying, as long as the purpose is **to prevent discomfort**. One could also argue that a pad attached firmly to a garment temporarily attains the halachic status of an **article of** **clothing**, and thus is permissible to keep in place even if only **to prevent** **soiling** or as a precaution in case a period will begin.[[43]](#footnote-43)

A comment by Tosafot opens the door to defining discomfort more broadly:

Tosafot *Shabbat* 50b s.v. *Bi-shvil*

On account of his distress - And if he has no other distress except that he is embarrassed to go among people, it is permitted, for there is no distress greater than this.

Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach expands on this logic. He explains that a woman’s sense of discomfort and embarrassment lead to permission to use menstrual products in general on Shabbat:

*Shemirat Shabbat Ke-hilchetah* 18 Note 43

I heard from Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach…that if it were not because one is embarrassed and in distress, we are not [otherwise] accustomed to be particular about [discomfort from] a little bit of wetness. And Rav Auerbach even added that this is also the case for all soiling (on the body) that a person cannot tolerate and is embarrassed by it, it is considered as one in distress…

In practice, it is widely accepted that a woman in the midst of her period can go out even without an *eiruv* with a pad or tampon, etc.:

*Shemirat Shabbat Ke-hilchetah* 18:20

A woman is permitted to go out with a tampon and with a sanitary pad in order to preserve the cleanliness of her body, as during her period.

Concluding Thought

Some issues of women and *mitzvot*, like dancing with a *sefer Torah*, make the headlines. Others, like lighting Chanuka candles, find their way into conversation or *shiurim*. But there are also day-to-day questions that regularly affect the lives of halachically observant women that tend to fly under the radar, like the halachic parameters of dealing with menstruation on Shabbat. We hope that our study provides some peace of mind, and that those who read it will feel more confident about addressing personal concerns about discomfort and hygiene while remaining true to Halacha.

# Further Reading

Rav Yeshoshua Neuwirth, Shemirat Shabbat Ke-hilchetah

Rav David Sperling, “Washing on Shabbat and Yom Tov.” Available here: <https://www.nishmat.co.il/Uploads/files/Ask-Rav-Sperling-Washing-on-Shabbat-and-YT.pdf>

Rav Avraham Steinberg, “Shabbat.” In Encyclopedia of Jewish Medical Ethics VII (Jerusalem: Schlesinger Institute 2007), pp. 382-533. Available here: https://www.medethics.org.il/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/%D7%A9%D7%91%D7%AA.pdf

1. Bartenura *Shabbat* 14:3

That is not food for the healthy - And it is proven that he eats it for healing, and it is prohibited to eat it on Shabbat, a decree lest he grind herbs, which is a *tolada* of *tochen*. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Mishna *Shabbat* 7:2

The arch-categories of *melacha* are forty, less one: planting and reaping and making sheaves and threshing and winnowing and selecting and grinding…. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The practical shift in how we procure medications leads more to leniency than to stringency.

*Tzitz Eliezer* 50:7

Apropos of our discussion regarding taking medicines on Shabbat, one should in my opinion be careful about exaggerating stringencies with this…[There is] room to be more lenient nowadays, when crushing herbs isn’t common and we are not expert in this. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The Talmud Yerushalmi makes this point after quoting the above mishna:

Talmud Yerushalmi *Shabbat* 14:3

One person asked Rabbi Shimon bar Karsena: what is the halacha of drinking resin-flavored wine on Shabbat? He said to him: If it is for pleasure, it is permitted. If it is for healing, it is prohibited…with the exception of a matter of danger. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. There are dissenting opinions. For example, the Talmud Yerushalmi supra states that the decree applies whenever a person is not in mortal danger. Mordechai also takes this approach:

Mordechai *Shabbat* 380-382

Rabbi Meir was asked by a woman who had a wound on her body…And he responded that with this there is no question that on a weekday it is permissible…but on Shabbat it is prohibited if there is no life-saving aspect, as a decree on account of grinding herbs… [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Shulchan Aruch OC 328:17

A sick person who has become bedridden due to his illness and is not in danger. Rema: Or who has an ailment and is in distress and his whole body is sick from it, for then even though he walks about, he is like one who has become bedridden [Ha-maggid 82). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Here’s how Rambam describes the concern of one’s condition worsening, as drawn from *Shabbat* 140a infra:

Rambam, Laws of Shabbat 22:7

We do not soak asafoetida [on Shabbat], neither in lukewarm water nor in cold water, but one may soak it in vinegar, and if he drank it on Thursday and Friday, he may soak it on Shabbat in cold water and place it in the sun until it becomes warm and drink it, in order that he not become sick if he cease to drink. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. All references to *Shemirat Shabbat Ke-hilcheta* are to the third edition, 5770. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. In his Bei’ur Halacha, Mishna Berura points out that this leaves room even for consuming healing substances on Shabbat if not for the purpose of healing, regardless of whether they are typically used by a healthy person:

Bei’ur Halacha 328:37 s.v. *Aval im*

It sounds from his [Rambam’s] language that he wrote “it is prohibited for a healthy person to heal himself on Shabbat, a decree lest he come to grind herbs” it implies that if he does not intend to heal himself, naturally this decree lest he come to grind herbs does not apply. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Rav Yitzchak Yosef cites Tzitz Eliezer's leniency, though he limits it to cases in which a person has become dependent on taking pills for their pain. In a note, he elaborates on the additional leniency based on beginning a treatment before Shabbat:

*Yalkut Yosef* Shabbat 4 Laws of Taking Medicines on Shabbat 52

There are those who say that any medicine whose purpose is not for healing but only to relieve pain, such as "Acamol" [paracetamol, the Israeli parallel to Tylenol], is not included in the decree of crushing herbs, and it is permitted to swallow this medicine even with a minor ailment. And there are those who disagree. And in any case, one who has become accustomed to swallow sedatives for pain relief, and needs them to the point that his body is addicted to them, and if he does not take them feels weakness and pain, it is permitted to take them on Shabbat. Note 60: For since he began to take them before Shabbat, even if we consider this thing a minor ailment, one can say that it is not included in the decree of crushing herbs, since whoever began before Shabbat presumably prepared the medicine in advance, and naturally we are not concerned lest he come to crush herbs to prepare the medicine on Shabbat. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Responsa *Tzitz Eliezer* 8:15:15

…For I found in the book Orchot Chayyim on OC Chol Ha-moed 532 in the third gloss of Maharsham that his view is generally to permit taking healing on Shabbat in an unusual manner… [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Rabbi Akiva Eiger OC 307:5

It [Shulchan Aruch] implies that one in distress is permitted to wash even his full body in water heated prior to Shabbat, and that this rabbinic prohibition is more lenient than others because it’s only a decree.

*Shemirat Shabbat Ke-hilchetah* 34 note 7

See 307:5 in Rabbi Akiva Eiger, that anything prohibited as a decree, we permit for one in distress. However, I heard from Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach that they decreed the decree of grinding herbs from its inception [to apply to] one in distress. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. According to Rashi, the issue is that a spill would cause one to violate limitations on *rechitza*, washing, with hot water on Shabbat. (We discuss *rechitza* later, infra):

Rashi *Shabbat* 40b s.v. As long as he not bring a kettle etc.

Lest it spill on him, and he finds himself washing on Shabbat in hot water. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. *Korban Netanel* Shabbat 3:9

He should place it over his intestines on Shabbat. Rashi explained, lest [the water] spill on him and he find himself washing on Shabbat in hot water. And Tosafot explained, lest the water fall on the towel and he come to *sechita*. And according to these two rationales, if the hot water is in a closed container like a warmflesch, it is permissible. But according to the other rationale that Tosafot wrote, on account of healing and they [the sages] made a decree on account of crushing herbs more than with a towel, for it [the towel] does not look so much like healing, even with a closed container it is prohibited. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Mishna Berura 326:19

Even on a weekday…but for a great need one can be lenient. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Rambam does permit some acts of healing that have no connection to grinding medicine. Taz explains that this does not include acts of healing that are sometimes accomplished using medicine, as would be the case with cramps:

Rambam, Laws of Shabbat 21:31

We do not induce vomiting food on Shabbat. Regarding what was this said? Regarding an herb lest one come to grind herbs, but to put one’s hand into his mouth and to vomit is permissible…and it is permissible to place a cup over the navel on Shabbat in order to raise it up…for all of these and the like are not done with herbs that one should be concerned for grinding, and he is in distress from them.

Taz OC 328:28

Since healing through grinding herbs is not applicable to these things at all, we do not decree. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. *Berachot* 19b

Come and learn: *Kevod ha-beriyot* is great, for it pushes aside a Torah level prohibition. And why? Let us say, “there is no wisdom and no understanding and no counsel against God!” Rav bar Sheva defined it before Rav Kahana as the prohibition of “*lo tasur*” “not straying [from the words that they (the sages) tell you]” (*Devarim* 7:11). They laughed at him: The prohibition of *lo tasur* is on a Torah level. Rav Kahana said, A great man said a matter, don’t laugh at him. [The rabbis] supported all rabbinic matters on the prohibition of *lo tasur* and because of [a person’s] *kavod*, our sages permitted it. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. In practice, this decree does not apply to immersion in a heated mikveh:

Responsa Noda Bi-Yehuda, Second Edition, OC 24

In my opinion, bathing in lukewarm water was never prohibited, only in hot water…And so I caution the attendants here that they put hot water for the mikveh when it is still the middle of the day, so that by the time it gets dark it will in any case only be lukewarm. And in the substance of the halacha I saw in the book Korban Netanel in the second chapter of Shabbat 2, that he wrote that immersing in a hot mikveh is not included in the decree of bathhouses. …And I said perhaps they specifically prohibited washing, for the primary reason is lest one heat it up on Shabbat. But immersion, which we only find close to the beginning of Shabbat night, for it needs to be adjacent to preparation, we don’t find immersion in hot water that was heated on Shabbat…But in any case, even though we draw a comparison, we rule only to permit putting [in] hot water when it is still a few hours until nighttime, so that they be only lukewarm at night. And indeed it would seem that the attendants are not careful with this, and I ignore this, and it is better that they sin unwittingly and not wittingly. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Shulchan Aruch OC 326:1

It is prohibited to wash one’s whole body [on Shabbat], even limb by limb, even with water that was heated before Shabbat…but it is permissible to wash one’s face, hands, and feet with it. Rema: Or other limbs, so long as he does not wash all of his body (Beit Yosef in the name of Rosh). [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. See below, as well as Noda Bi-Yehuda in note 18.

Responsa *Iggerot Moshe* OC 4:75

…We have not found at all that there is also a custom like this to prohibit putting cold water on one’s head and body to cool off on Shabbat, for that is the matter of showering from the shower, which there is in every home here. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. For a discussion of the *halachot* of washing and bathing on Shabbat, including some discussion of the issues involved in using the hot water tap, see here: <https://www.nishmat.co.il/Uploads/files/Ask-Rav-Sperling-Washing-on-Shabbat-and-YT.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. See Bei’ur Halacha 511:2. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. A Talmudic discussion of wetting a cloth before a fast day (to use during the fast in a manner that doesn't violate the restrictions on washing) concludes that the relevant halachic issue on Yom Kippur is *sechita*:

*Yoma* 78a

When Rabba bar Meri came, he said: On erev Tish’a be-Av they bring him a cloth and he soaks it in water and places it under his head and in the morning wipes his face, hands, and feet [with it]. On erev Yom Kippur they bring him a cloth and he soaks it in water and makes it like a dried cloth and the next day passes it over his eyes. Rabbi Ya’akov said to Rabbi Yirmiya bar Tachalifa: You told us the opposite, and you responded to us [that it was a problem of] *sechita*. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Tosafot *Ketubot* 6a s.v. *Hai*

Rabbeinu Tam says that one should not say that it is prohibited because of *mefarek* [a *tolada* of *dash*] since the [liquid] wrung out goes to waste, even though it is a certain outcome. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. This is how Rema rules as well:

Shulchan Aruch OC 302:10

One who washes his hands, it is good to wipe them forcefully against each other and to remove water from them in accordance with his ability before drying them with a cloth. Rema: There are those who wrote that one should not be concerned for this, for we do not say that soaking a cloth is washing it in this case, for this is only in the manner of dirtying, and so we practice. And therefore, it is permissible to dry his hands with a cloth that a baby urinated on, in order to nullify [the urine], for this is merely in the manner of dirtying. But it is prohibited to actually put water on the urine in order to nullify it. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Rav Moshe Feinstein permits it for similar reasons: the liquid is not fully absorbed in the paper as it would be in a cloth or fruit, rendering the matter rabbinic, because it is not customary to squeeze paper in order to gather liquid absorbed within it, and because squeezing to the point of wringing out droplets is uncertain:

Responsa *Iggerot Moshe* OC 2:70

To soak paper in water to wipe something and throw [the paper] in the garbage, it is simple that [the *melacha* of] *melaben* [laundering] is not applicable with paper that goes to waste, and even if it is paper that is kept, it also is not laundered by the water but ruined…But perhaps it is similar to a sponge, which requires a handle [to permit use] since *sechita* of *dash* also applies to water…And it is possible that this *sechita* also applies to paper. But it makes sense that with paper one should not consider this as *sechita*, for it [the liquid] is not absorbed within the paper and even though in any case one should prohibit it rabbinically…In any case, since it is not within a vessel and also it is not habitual use to squeeze water from paper at all, neither for need of the water nor for laundering, and he does not intend to do this, there is room to permit it…And it is also possible that there is no certain outcome with paper, since one does not hold it with force but based on the [information] available, one certainly should not prohibit it without intention to squeeze. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. *Shemirat Shabbat Ke-hilchetah* 14:37

There is room to be lenient and to wipe a baby or to wipe the face or the hands with wet tissues (those made from paper, not from fabric!), as long as he does not wring out the wipe with his hands and also does not wipe with force. For then the liquid will not be wrung out through his actions, and therefore this involves no prohibition of *sechita*. Note 99: I heard from Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach that the liquid is not squeezed out of the wipes, since if he does not wring them, no substance from within them will emerge [and it is similar to Mishna Berura 613:28 since he only runs the damp towel over his eyes] and even if a little [liquid] comes out, this is not a certain outcome.

Rav Auerbach reportedly drew an analogy between wipes and halachic permission on Yom Kippur to wipe one’s face with a cloth that became damp only when used for toweling off prior to Yom Kippur.

Ran *Yoma* 2a

On the day before Yom Kippur one can wipe with it [a damp handkerchief] his hands and feet and the next day pass it over his eyes and he need not be concerned, but he may not soak it in water from the outset for there is a concern of *sechita* then when he passes it over his face, and this is the halacha. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. The beginning of this responsum takes a more lenient approach:

Responsa *Shevet Ha-Levi* 8:59

Regarding the recent innovation to use wet wipes made from paper or non-woven cloth in order to clean a baby prior to re-diapering him, and as is seen that the wetness drips on the surface when one removes them from the box, and the surface moisture clings to the body of the infant, but on a weekday it is typical also to apply pressure a bit at the time of wiping, for through this the water is wrung out more onto the skin, and many say that one does not need to apply pressure at all and the surface moisture certainly suffices…The suggestion is to use such paper in a way that does not apply a lot of pressure to the point of wringing and for the needs of a baby one tends to the side of being lenient…and those who are stringent have reason to be stringent, and for a totally healthy person who only does it for pleasure there is no need to be lenient.. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Mishna *Shabbat* 7:2

…And one who dyes it…. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. The Yerushalmi writes that a person who makes an intelligible mark has performed the *melacha* of *kotev* (writing), while the one who follows up by coloring it violates *tzovei’a*:

Talmud Yerushalmi *Shabbat* 7:2

One who draws a form, the first is obligated [in a sin offering for a Torah-level violation] because of writing, and the second is obligated because of dyeing.

Penei Moshe ad loc.

One who draws a form. And the way of doing it is that one marks the shape with lead or with some object and afterwards puts the color that he wants in the outline…

Kehillot Ya’akov *Shabbat* 40

For the matter of *tzovei’a* is improving the object dyed, for he makes it better and beautifies it through this. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Shulchan Aruch OC 320:20

There is one who said that one who eats berries or other staining fruits must be careful not to touch his stained hands to his clothing or cloth, out of concern for *tzovei’a*, but if he stains his bread with the fruit juice, there is no issue, for there is no *tzovei’a* with foods. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. *Shemirat Shabbat Ke-hilchetah* 35:19

A bleeding wound, from the outset one may place upon it gauze, a bandage, a wet wipe, or anything that is ready for this and designated for it. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. A mishna teaches that leather cushions may be rinsed with water, but that fabric should only be wiped with a dry rag:

Mishna *Shabbat* 21:2

…Coins on a cushion, he shakes the cushion and they fall. If dung were upon it, he wipes it with a rag. If it [the cushion] was leather, we put water on it until it [the dung] is finished. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Most period underwear incorporates cotton, and thus would not be considered synthetic for these purposes. Synthetic underwear and stockings often have cotton stitching or gussets. This leniency is more likely to apply to a skirt or slip that is 100% synthetic, if the stain is not on a seam sewn with natural thread. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. *Piskei Teshuvot* OC 340:40

Regarding the matter of opening their outer wrapper, then with pads and band-aids where one removes the wrapping and immediately throws it into the garbage, there is no concern with this at all (so long as one not tear in the place of letters [note 356, and above in note 10 it was explained that one can be lenient with this in a pressing situation]). And with a package of diapers and the outer package of pads and band-aids, one should open through destroying it and tearing (without ripping the letters), and move the contents to another container. [Note 357, and see above 314:2 that there are opinions that are lenient with this also, since it is only made to contain its contents and afterwards we throw it into the garbage and it is not made to store other things in it afterwards.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. The Talmud states that on Shabbat one may not open up the collar of a shirt for the first time:

*Shabbat* 48a

We unfasten the collar [of a shirt] on Shabbat, but do not open it [for the first time].

Mordechai explains that this is a debate among early halachic authorities. Riva ruled that one may not open a collar that was stitched shut, while Rabbeinu Yoel and Rashbam permit it because it was not intended to be permanent:

Mordechai *Shabbat* 457

We unfasten the collar of a shirt etc. Riva explained “the collar that if it is for laundering, we untie it, but if it was stitched at the neck or as leatherworkers stick together a pair of shoes, it is prohibited to separate one from the other, for we have not found a distinction between permanent and temporary stitches. And it is weak in my hands.” And Rabbeinu Yoel permitted even with stitches since it was not made to be permanent, and so we say later on in the seventh chapter of Shabbat and so wrote Ra’aviyah in the name of Rashbam… [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Available here: https://hebrewbooks.org/pdfpager.aspx?req=47739&st=&pgnum=139&hilite= [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. *Shemirat Shabbat Ke-hilchetah* 15:87

Diapers (disposable diapers) (and so sanitary pads) that have an adhesive that is meant to stick them [together] when they are used…One should open the sticker of the adhesive before Shabbat and cover the adhesive again with its protective cover, as was done in the factory, and then on Shabbat one can open up the adhesive again and stick it as he wishes on its regular place, and at the end of use, one can open it and throw out the diaper. After the fact, if one did not open the adhesive before Shabbat, there is room to be lenient and to open it on Shabbat. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. *Piskei Teshuvot* OC 340:40

Note 347: Even according to the position of those who are stringent above, that even temporary sticking is halachically equivalent to sewing and it is prohibited to do it before the unlearned, in our matter under discussion which also has an element of *kevod ha-beriyot* it is fitting to be lenient from the outset with this…Regarding an object which one uses for less than a day and afterwards one throws it into the garbage when it is stuck closed, if its halacha is like a permanent adhesion or like a temporary adhesion, here, where there is an element of *kevod ha-beriyot* or illness, those who are lenient have something to rely on…And also when there are multi-use sticky tabs, it is correct to be careful after removing them from a person's body not to stick them together prior to throwing them into the garbage (in order that they keep the dirt and filth inside), for behold it will stay thus and he does not separate it again, and it is fitting to be concerned for those who think (as above 317) that this is considered permanent. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Rashi there, however, seems to explain the Talmud as permitting the wadding to prevent soiling her clothing. According to Rav Moshe Feinstein, Rashi permits a woman to wear wadding to prevent getting her clothes dirty because it also serves a clothing function in the moment:

Responsa *Iggerot Moshe* OC 3:47

For the permission according to Rashi is [because the wadding is there] in order to beautify the wearing of the other clothing that she is wearing then. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. *Shemirat Shabbat Ke-hilchetah* 18 note 86

I heard from Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach…It is possible to say that since this carrying is only rabbinic, and since religiously observant women need this every month, it is possible that it is considered like one of her clothes, even though this is only in order to see later if it is clean, it is possible that it is correct to call it a garment, to consider the *moch dachuk* which is for the purpose of the *hefsek tahara*…from the need that she become permitted to her husband, and it is not like the wadding that she place for her period, for that is simply to protect from dirt.

Other authorities, however, including Rav Moshe Feinstein, ultimately rule that this should not be done:

Responsa *Iggerot Moshe* OC 47

But since placing the *moch dachuk* is not the fundamental halacha but a mere stringency, and many times there is no need to even be stringent at all and it is mere carrying, one should not consider it as the standard manner of carrying, and it is applicable to prohibit it only rabbinically, and therefore there is a great reason that with carrying like this, which is in the lower concealed place where it is not the standard manner of carrying at all, and it is an uncommon matter regarding which our sages did not issue a decree even on Shabbat, and how much more so at *bein ha-shemashot* [between sunset and nightfall] when for many matters of rabbinic prohibitions they did not decree at *bein ha-shemashot*. But in any case, since we did not find an explicit source to permit it, it is fitting to be stringent as long as there is no clear proof to permit it. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Bei’ur Ha-Gera OC 301:13

For an article of clothing is permissible even for the purpose of protecting against soiling.

Levush OC 301:13

An object which is in the manner of clothing even if one only wears it now to protect from soiling, is permissible to go out in on Shabbat. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Responsa *Be’er Moshe* (Stern) 2:66

Rema 301:23 wrote it is permissible to go out with a handkerchief with which one wipes the nose that they call a *patzoulit* if it is attached to his clothing. And the reason is that the *patzoulit* is nullified with respect to the clothing. Since through attaching it, it is as though sewn, if so the Tampax [menstrual pad] is nullified with respect to the pants, for the name of clothing is upon it. And to stick it on on Shabbat is prohibited, for it is like *tofer* and to remove it is prohibited, for it is like *korei’a*…

Note that Be’er Moshe assumes that this ruling comes along with stringency regarding construing sticking on the pad as *tofer*. One could argue, however, that this is not the case, because the pad’s status as a garment is impermanent and its being “nullified with respect to the clothing” does not mean that pad and undergarment have become one unified object with respect to *tofer*. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)