

Are Flushable Wipes Really Flushable?

Find out if these products are damaging your plumbing system.

By

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Updated on 03/23/24

If you use flushable wipes, you may wonder just how safe they are to flush. With the relatively recent introduction of flushable wipes to the market, people have supplemented toilet paper use with flushable wipes or even completely switched from toilet paper to wipes. However, despite the claim in the product title, flushable wipes may not be suitable for residential, commercial, or municipal plumbing systems. Learn more about whether or not flushable wipes are really flushable.

How Can Flushable Wipes Be Harmful if They Are Labeled as Flushable?

Even though the word "flushable" is on the label, there is no industry-regulated criterion to determine what does or doesn't make a wipe flushable. Instead, flushable wipe manufacturers have come up with their own loose, in-house criteria to separate flushable wipes from standard [cleaning wipes](#).

Without proper regulations to determine the viability of the claim, there is no way to know for sure whether a flushable wipe will be able to pass through a home plumbing system. Even if the wipe does flow out of the home, it can cause problems in the larger

municipal wastewater management system. In other words, some flushable wipes may not actually be flushable.

The Research

To test whether flushable wipes are truly flushable, Ryerson University gathered 101 products, including 23 wipes labeled as flushable. They conducted a series of tests to determine whether any of these products would actually fall apart or disperse safely through the sewer system. Not one flushable wipe product passed the tests.¹

These findings indicate that a rigorous testing process needs to be implemented before a manufacturer can claim their product is flushable to help protect the local infrastructure and residential plumbing systems.

What Does Flushable Really Mean?

Toilet paper is defined as flushable because it loses strength when it comes into contact with water, causing it to break down into small pieces and rapidly disintegrate within minutes. On the other hand, flushable wipes are stronger than toilet paper because they are made with paper pulp bound together with non-degradable plastic polymers.² The construction of flushable wipes means they remain in one piece as they pass through the residential plumbing system and out into the municipal wastewater system. Another study showed that numerous flushable wipes contained PET, a synthetic polymer that slows the breakdown process.³

What Can Be Safely Flushed?

It's imperative to understand the short list of what can be flushed so you can prevent clogs and damage to your system:

- Bodily wastes
- Toilet paper

With flushable wipes posing a risk to residential and municipal plumbing systems, as well as the hazardous effects of microplastics on marine life, it's clear that flushable wipes shouldn't be disposed of by flushing them down a toilet but must be thrown into the trash bin for proper disposal.³

What Not to Flush

The pipes in your home are narrow and made to handle only certain types of waste or they will [clog](#). In addition to flushable wipes, [avoid flushing these items](#), as well:

- Paper towels and napkins
- Period products
- Family planning products
- Cooking grease
- Household waste, like paint
- Hair
- Food scraps
- Medicine

Is It Safe to Use Flushable Wipes In Commercial Plumbing Systems?

The simple answer is no. The inability of flushable wipes to efficiently break down can cause clogs in the home plumbing system as well as lead to greater issues in commercial plumbing and municipal systems. In larger commercial and municipal systems, flushable wipes bind with other debris and form massive clogs, cause overflow, and reduce the flow and filtration capabilities of the wastewater system.

Alternatives to Flushable Wipes

If you prefer the extra clean feeling that wipes offer, you can achieve the same results with safer alternatives for your system and the environment.

- **Toilet paper foam:** Sewer and septic-friendly foam products, also called "liquid wipes," can be squirted onto a piece of toilet paper to soften and moisturize the sheets before use.
- **Reusable washcloths:** Also called cloth wipes, this concept is the same as using and [washing cloth diapers](#). Pieces of absorbent cloth replace your toilet paper and when you are done, you place the cloths in a sealed container, clean them, and reuse them.
- **Bidet:** Bidets direct a stream of water toward your rear for a good rinse after going to the bathroom. You don't need a separate bidet—there are [bidet attachments](#) for your existing toilet.

FAQ

- **Are any flushable wipes actually flushable?**

Wipes are stronger than toilet paper. Some flushable wipe manufacturers say that their wipes dissolve in water. Though some brands may begin to break down in water, they currently don't do so as fast as toilet paper.

- **Do plumbers recommend flushable wipes?**

Plumbers never recommend flushing these wipes down the toilet because they simply do not disintegrate quickly enough to pass easily through the plumbing system.

- **What happens if you flush wipes down the toilet?**

If you flush wipes down the toilet, they will accumulate in the pipes and likely cause a clog. If you have caught yourself flushing one and it immediately clogs the toilet, try using a plunger or another [method to dislodge it](#).