

14 things you should never flush down the toilet

When you flush things down the toilet that you shouldn't, you're risking serious damage to your pipes that might require a professional to fix. Many common household items should never be flushed down the toilet.

Pipe blockages occur more often than you might think. In 2024, RACV Trades plumbers were called out 9,398 times to unblock a pipe or drain in homes across Victoria.

Like your kitchen or laundry sink, being careless with what you flush down the toilet can result in blocked pipes that not only require a costly repair by a licensed plumber but breed nasty bacteria that puts the health of your household at risk.

"Items that don't break down easily are at risk of getting caught on joins in pipework when flushed down the toilet, causing an obstacle for anything following behind," says RACV Head of Trades, Kieran Davies. "Blockages can also lead to the toilet water building up in the pan and flooding onto your toilet or bathroom floor, causing water damage to the room."

Davies also has some advice about items you think might be okay to be flushed but are not, such as those branded as 'flushable'.

"Just because it says 'flushable' doesn't mean it should be flushed," he says. "If you do flush something down the toilet and water doesn't drain, continually drains slowly or excessive gurgling noises can be heard, as tempting as it might be to try and fix it yourself, it's time to call in the professionals."

14 common household items you should never flush down the toilet

1. Tissues

You can't flush tissues down the toilet. Unlike toilet paper, which is designed to easily break down when wet, tissues are designed to be strong and absorbent so they don't tear as soon as you blow your nose. That's why flushed tissues often get wadded up, bloated with water, and stuck blocking pipes when flushed down the toilet.

2. Paper towel

You can't flush paper towel for similar reasons to tissues. It's made to wipe up spills by absorbing liquids, not to break down in water. Flushing paper towel down the toilet can

cause it to clump together in wads and block pipes.

3. Wet Wipes

You can't flush wet wipes or baby wipes down the toilet. In fact, baby wipes are a textbook case for items that may be marketed as 'flushable' but should still never be flushed down the toilet. Wet wipes will remain in a 'solid' state when travelling through the pipe system because they take a long time to break down. They could easily block a pipe in your house - and even if they don't, they could end up clogging our sewer system.

4. Tampons and menstrual products

You can't flush tampons down the toilet - and the same goes for other menstrual products like pads and liners. Tampons are designed to absorb blood and expand to hold the absorbed liquid. If you flush tampons, they will expand even further in all the water and potentially block a pipe. Disposable menstrual products also aren't biodegradable, so flushing them down the toilet is also an environmental concern. To dispose of tampons and menstrual products, place them in the rubbish bin. There's usually a designated sanitary bin for used menstrual products in public women's bathrooms.

5. Nappies

You can't flush nappies down the toilet because the primary role of nappies is to trap liquid, meaning there is little chance of these breaking down if flushed. In fact, nappies will continue to absorb water in the toilet and can lodge in the plumbing system, leading to clogged pipes.

6. Dishcloths and sponges

You can't flush dishcloths and sponges down the toilet as they are made to retain their strength when wet and will expand when flushed. If a dishcloth or sponge does get flushed down the toilet, it's important to call a plumber immediately. Unless a sponge is so small that it can easily get through toilet pipes, it will get stuck. This will mean the toilet could flush sluggishly, clog or possibly overflow.

7. Ear cleaners and cotton pads

You can't flush cotton pads and other cotton products down the toilet. They don't break down when flushed and can accumulate in pipes, contributing to a blockage.

8. Dental floss

When dental floss is flushed, it can turn into a 'net' in your pipes and hold onto other debris, causing a blockage.

9. Hair

Hair, like dental floss, can cause a 'net' effect when flushed, catching other debris and causing blockages. Hair also never dissolves, meaning it can potentially sit in your pipes for

years, slowing causing damage - so always put stray bathroom hairs in the bin or vacuum them up.

10. Condoms

Latex doesn't break down in water making condoms un-flushable.

11. Chewing gum

Chewing gum doesn't dissolve and therefore cannot be flushed, chewing gums sticky consistency can also cause it to accumulate in your pipes over time which could lead to a blockage.

12. Chemicals and detergents

You can't flush oils, paints, lubricants, pesticides, insecticides and fertilisers down the toilet, as they all contain chemicals that can damage plumbing systems and corrode pipes. Flushing chemicals down the toilet also means they have a direct path to groundwater, such as lakes and streams, potentially endangering wildlife.

13. Cooking oils and fats

You can't flush cooking oils and fats down the toilet, or pour them down your kitchen sink, because when they cool down, they quickly solidify, sticking to the walls of pipes and clogging them up. Instead, let cooking oils and fats cool down after cooking and dispose of them in the rubbish bin.

14. Fish

You can't flush dead fish down the toilet because they don't break down in water, leading them to blocking pipes. Not only that, but flushing fish down the toilet can spread bacteria in your bathroom and may be detrimental to wildlife and waterways.

What to do if your toilet breaks or blocks

A broken toilet can be an unpleasant experience that requires fast fixing. If you have a blocked toilet that's causing overflow or backup, always call an emergency home assist service for help. Do not attempt to rectify a plumbing issue yourself.