



Tips to reduce your carbon footprint

Achieving net zero carbon is a big challenge, but it is absolutely essential if we are to lessen the devastating impact of global warming for future generations. It requires actions at every level: by national governments and multi-national corporations, by local government, businesses and organisations - and by individuals.

Want to know how to reduce your carbon footprint?

1 Save energy at home

The most important is making sure your home is well insulated. Trapping heat effectively is the best way to trim down your energy usage – the biggest producer of carbon emissions in the home. You can also make additional efforts by draught proofing your house. A very cost effective improvement is to update your lighting with LED bulbs. Next on your list would be to replace an old inefficient gas boiler with a modern equivalent or even a renewable form of heating such as a heat pump.

2 Don't buy bottled water

Buying bottled water creates a huge amount of plastic waste. Using your own re-useable water bottle will reduce the amount of plastic waste, and you're not paying inflated prices for something that comes out of your tap.

3. Reduce the amount of food you throw away

4.5 billion tonnes of edible food is thrown away in the UK each year, a huge waste of the energy and other resources used to produce it. When it ends up in landfill, it produces methane. It is estimated that the average family could save £60 a month by reducing food waste. Plan meals ahead and buy only what you need to make them. Look out for shops that sell wonky vegetables and fruit. Buying these will not only save you money, it will reduce the agricultural waste resulting from some supermarkets' regulations on the size and shape of the produce that they will accept from farmers.

4. Eat local, in season

Air miles significantly inflate the carbon footprint of foods. The most deadly combination is a food which needs an intensive production process as well as air freight to reach shelves. For example, a 100g box of blueberries imported by ship will produce around 100g of CO₂. If it's flown in instead, this can increase by ten times, to 1kg. Each kilo of Peruvian asparagus has a carbon-dioxide equivalent of 8.9kg because it's transported by air. This is practically seven times more than bananas or avocados which can be ferried by sea.

5. Cut down on eating meat

It's inevitable that someone at some time will have urged you to go vegan. One thing is for certain, we have to reduce our red meat intake. The Lancet medical journal published a study that called on

Europeans to reduce their red meat consumption by 77 per cent in order to avoid “catastrophic damage to the planet”. It’s generally agreed that you could cut your carbon footprint by around 20 per cent by switching to a vegan diet.

If you can’t face going fully meat free, the best meats to cut down on are from sheep and cows, the animals that produce the most greenhouse gasses. Research from Oxford University found that if every family in the UK swapped out a red meat based meal for a plant-based alternative just once a week, the environmental impact would be equivalent to taking 16 million cars off the road.

6 Drive less – or switch to electric

Car ownership in the UK is on the decline, as people consider alternative means of travel. When it comes to short distances, jumping in the car quickly racks up your carbon output. While for people based in more rural areas, or those with poor public transport, a car might be the most sensible option, for most people living in towns there is generally always a better, more carbon friendly alternative. Weigh up your options: can you take a bus, tube or tram? Walk? Cycle? Or at the very least, car pool? If you own a car, you can also spread your carbon burden by inviting people to share your commute.

If you are a frequent car user, then switching to an electric car is the greener option. Although the electricity you feed into your vehicle will be partly produced by non-renewable energy, these vehicles are much more efficient meaning overall CO2 emissions will fall.

7 Buy second hand clothes or swap clothes with friends.

Fast fashion – is hugely harmful to the planet. Aside from the production process itself – which expels 1.2bn tonnes of CO2 a year (more than the aviation and shipping industries combined) – the wear-once-then-toss attitude of high street fashion means that racks of flimsy clothes are quickly transformed into one million tonnes of waste a year, much of will be incinerated or added to landfill.

This doesn’t take into account the vast number of microplastics contained in artificial materials, which are released into the water supply each time it’s washed. Up to 35 per cent of the microplastics in the ocean are from clothing. On water usage too, fast fashion is a vast drain – an estimated 79 billion cubic metres of fresh water is consumed each year by the industry, and 10-20,000 litres of water is swallowed in the production of a shirt and a pair of jeans.

8 Reuse and reduce

Beyond clothing, any new purchase comes with an embedded carbon price tag. The carbon in everything we buy, particularly single use or throw away items, has a real impact on our climate. By re-using and repairing items that we would normally throw away we can make a big impact on our personal carbon footprints.

9 Fly less

Flights can account for a huge proportion of your annual carbon footprint – particularly if you’re a habitual or long-haul flyer. One long-haul flight can produce more carbon emissions than the average citizen produces in a year in a number of countries. For example, a long-haul return flight from London to New York produces around 986kg of CO2 per passenger, more than the annual carbon emissions of citizens in over 50 countries.

These organisations can help you find out more:

<https://energysavingtrust.org.uk/>

<https://www.wwf.org.uk/>

<https://www.climateemergency.uk/>

<https://www.carbonfootprint.com/calculator.aspx>