

## Everyday ways to fight climate change

By Julia Haskins

**E**very day, we face countless choices when it comes to being environmentally conscious. Drive or take public transportation? Take a long bath or a quick shower? It may not seem like these decisions add up to much, but they matter a lot for the environment, and in turn, reducing climate change.

If you think your actions don't make a difference, consider this: Research finds that your carbon footprint, or total greenhouse gas emissions, can shrink by taking simple steps like

eating less meat, cutting down on air travel and not driving a car.

We're experiencing the effects of climate change in both big and small ways, and it's our responsibility to do everything we can to

curb it. Don't know where to begin? Check out these tips for being an environmental protector on a daily basis. It's easier than you think!

### Reduce, reuse, recycle

You've probably heard this phrase before, and may not have thought much about it. But it continues to be one of the best ways to help the planet and its climate.

To reduce, consider the ways that you use more than you need. Instead of getting a plastic bag when you go shopping, bring your own reusable tote. Only take as many napkins

as you need at a restaurant and carry a water bottle instead of wasting money on disposable cups and bottles. You can often do more with less if you take a moment to stop and think about what you really need.

Reusing means getting the most out of a product that you can before recycling it. It's a great opportunity to take something you would normally throw away and find a new use for it. Don't just toss food containers — use them for storage. Learn how to fix things around your home before throwing them out.

It's always a good idea to ask yourself whether an item can be recycled instead of thrown in the garbage. Paper and plastic products can almost always be recycled, as well as aluminum, cardboard, wood and textiles in some cases. If you're unsure whether something can be recycled, look for the



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symbol with arrows in the shape of a triangle that will tell you what kind of recyclable it is and how it should be separated. Also, check with local stores to see if they participate in recycling programs.

### Be a thoughtful consumer

How you choose to spend your money has a big influence on the environment. Research your favorite companies to find their policies on the environment. If they don't do much to protect the environment in their manufacturing or distribution processes, see what other companies are doing to leave a smaller carbon footprint on the planet.

Another great way to be a more thoughtful consumer is to shop locally. Farmers markets, for example, allow you to try a range of fresh, delicious produce that didn't have to travel far to get to your plate.

"We really like to buy stuff, and oftentimes

we don't really think about where it's made or where it comes from or how it gets to us," says Surili Patel, MS, deputy director of the Center for Public Health Policy at APHA. "Shopping at a local supermarket or farmers market can greatly reduce our carbon

footprint and impact on the environment because things are brought to us locally rather than shipped all the way from another country or across the country."

### Make little changes

Natasha DeJarnett, PhD, MPH, an APHA environmental health policy analyst, recommends walking around your home to audit your energy use and see where you can scale back. You may need to turn down the temperature on your hot water heater or reprogram your thermostat, she says.

Go from room to room and unplug any electronics that aren't in use and be sure to remove chargers entirely. Also, switch out your incandescent light bulbs for LED bulbs, which are much more energy efficient.



### Make a difference with mindful travel

Getting around with the environment in mind is often good for your health as well as your wallet. For shorter trips, ditch your car for public transportation, or better yet, walk or bike to your destination. You can also set up a carpool with neighbors or co-workers. Most ride-sharing services also have a carpool option. If your job requires traveling for meetings, ask if you can take part in teleconferences. You'll be saving time, money and energy while curbing climate change.

"Telework is a really great way of reducing the carbon footprint, since you're not going into the office," Patel says. "Use technology like videoconferencing so you still feel connected to your colleagues but don't necessarily have to travel a long way to get there."



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