

# Sustainability in Everyday Life

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It's time to work on YOU. So sit back and listen to practical, actionable advice to accelerate your progress.

The United Nations [defines](#) sustainable development as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”

In other words, sustainability is about finding a way to live that works for us today without causing problems in the future. It involves making choices that don't use up natural resources that we can't replace, as well as trying to limit the damage we do to the planet.

Sustainable isn't just another word for eco-friendly, though. Environmental concerns are only one part of the push for sustainability.

People often break sustainability down into three pillars: environmental, social and economic. That means sustainable choices need to protect the planet, support all the people involved and ensure economic stability.

Prioritising sustainability in everyday life is about finding adjustments you can make that are better for everyone in the long term but that still work for you right now. It involves being more conscious about the resources you use, as well as the impact your choices have on the planet and on other people.

In this track, we'll cover how to think about your choices with sustainability in mind and three areas of your everyday life where you can easily prioritise sustainability.

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First up, how much do you think about the sustainability of your choices? To really measure the sustainability of an action, you need to think about the lifecycle of the resources involved. That's the case whether you're using a product or a utility, like water or electricity.

Many of the natural resources required to create the fuel, food and materials we need are finite. That means once we use them up, we won't be able to get any more. Even for those that can be replaced, we're using them up more quickly than they can be replenished. [A study](#) published in the Nature Sustainability journal found that in 2017, global demand outstripped the planet's ability to renew by 73%. This is very bad news from both an economic and ecological point of view; it also has a huge social impact as competition for resources is growing, putting less wealthy nations at a serious disadvantage.

How we get these resources can also be problematic. The UN [estimates](#) that half of global greenhouse emissions come from how we extract and process natural resources. This is also the cause of over 90% of biodiversity loss and water stress. Biodiversity loss refers to the decline of the number of species in a particular area, whereas water stress happens when we take more water out of the environment than it can sustain.

There's also the social aspect of sustainability to think about. Were the people involved in the process fairly paid for their work? Were working conditions safe? What impact does the industry have on local and global communities?

Then there's the impact of manufacturing, packaging and transport. For instance, using fossil fuels to power a delivery truck releases greenhouse gases into the environment, contributing to climate change.

Finally, what happens to the resource once you're finished with it? Can it be recycled, or will it end up in landfill? The effect it has on the world once its useful life is over is just as important as all the other considerations.

This seems like a lot to think about and it's completely understandable to feel overwhelmed by it all. Don't get hung up on looking for perfect solutions, though. Even making small improvements in a few key areas can make a difference.

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Let's take a quick look at some specific adjustments you can make to your daily routine that can help you on your way to living much more sustainably.

Plastics are incredibly useful and have revolutionised life as we know it. Unfortunately, they're very difficult to get rid of.

[A study](#) published in the Science Advances journal attempted to work out what had happened to all the plastic waste ever created. They estimated that only 9% had been recycled, while 12% had been incinerated, and 79% had ended up in landfill or in the environment.

According to [National Geographic](#), around 8 million tons of plastic waste finds its way into the world's oceans every year. There, it causes serious problems for marine life as animals become tangled in it or become unwell from eating it. Not only is this a huge ethical issue, but it also introduces tiny particles of plastic - known as microplastics - into our diet via the fish we eat.

One major culprit is what is known as single-use plastic, the items we use once and throw away. Think of things like plastic cutlery, plastic bottles and plastic packaging. National Geographic estimates that single-use plastics account for at least 40% of the plastic goods produced every year.

It's vital to recycle when you can. An even better choice, though, is to try and avoid plastic as much as possible.

A more sustainable alternative to buying a single-use water bottle of water to have with your lunch would be to invest in a reusable one and fill it yourself. As well as cutting down on plastic, it will save you some money. You can do the same with coffee cups, shopping bags, straws and cutlery - a one-time investment can slash the amount of waste you're responsible for.

Speaking of eating and drinking, let's look at how to do it more sustainably.

In keeping with the different pillars of sustainability, a sustainable diet is one that's good for you, fits your budget and is also environmentally and socially responsible. So, you'll want to think about the health benefits of what you eat, where it comes from, how it was produced and who made it.

The Lancet published a [large-scale report](#) in 2019, aiming to identify what it would take for everyone in the world to be able to eat a healthy diet while keeping food production sustainable. It concluded that global consumption of red meat and sugar needs to decrease by over 50%, while consumption of fruit, nuts and legumes needs to double.

Other sensible steps to take are to try to eat things that are grown locally and that are naturally in season. That limits the amount of energy that's been used in the production, transportation and storage of your food.

You can also look out for sustainability certifications like Fairtrade. Certifications are a good indication that the people involved in the production were working in safe conditions and were paid fairly.

It's not just what we eat that's important, though; it's also what happens to the food we don't eat. [According to the UN](#), 17% of the food available to us as consumers goes to waste. It gets worse: food that goes to landfill generates between 8 and 10% of global greenhouse gas emissions.

So, take a look in your fridge tonight and see if there's something that needs to be used up to prevent it from being thrown away. If you can turn it into a delicious packed lunch for tomorrow rather than buying another plastic-wrapped sandwich at work, that would be a huge sustainability win.

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You've probably heard the phrase carbon footprint, but how about digital carbon footprint? Unfortunately, our video conferences, emails and spreadsheets have an impact that goes far beyond the energy needed to keep our devices running.

Devices have an impact before you even receive them due to the energy, finite resources and labour that go into making them. Protecting the health of your device so you can go longer without an upgrade helps to mitigate that. Members of Forbes' [Technology Council](#) offer several suggestions for prolonging the life of your devices. They include shutting them down daily, keeping them clean and working off the battery.

The digital world also relies on immense data centres, which require a lot of energy to keep us online. The International Energy Agency [estimates](#) that data and processing centres each consume around 1% of the global energy demand, and this is likely to increase.

The good news is that you can make a few easy switches to minimise your digital impact. Turning your camera off in online meetings is a great start. Regularly cleaning out your email inbox and limiting what you keep in your cloud storage are also essential steps. If you've been thinking about unsubscribing from all those newsletters you never read, now is the time.

Sustainability is a huge concept but living a more sustainable life doesn't require huge changes. Small shifts in how you do things can make a real difference to the impact you have on the planet, on other people, and on the future.

It's easy to feel as if there's a lot to contend with, so take it one small change at a time. Think about the things we covered today: plastic waste, sustainable eating and your digital carbon footprint. Choose one to focus on and decide on one small change you can make today that will help you live more sustainably.

Living sustainably has the power to create a world that's better for all of us, and that world gets closer with every sustainable choice you make.