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5 Very Simple, Practical Things You Can Do to Curb Climate Change

Cutting carbon emissions in your own life is easier than you think.

“Climate change is a defining issue of our time and there is no time to lose,” proclaimed Ban Ki-moon, United Nations Secretary-General, during last month’s U.N. Climate Summit. “There is no Plan B because we do not have a Planet B.”

Since you’ve already converted from a gas-guzzling SUV and always BYOB (bring your own bag) to the supermarket, try making these tweaks to your everyday lifestyle. All will help the U.N. achieve its goal of keeping the earth’s temperature from rising no more than 2 degrees Celsius by 2100 and, in turn, keep the planet from facing even more treacherous changes like famine, disease and water shortages.

1 Eat less meat

Before you stock the freezer with hot dogs and rib eye, consider this: Livestock generates more greenhouse gas emissions than all forms of transportation combined. “You’ll do less damage to the environment driving a Hummer as a vegan than driving a Prius as a carnivore,” says Dean Ornish, M.D., founder of the Preventive Medicine Research Institute, a nonprofit. Red meat is one of the primary sources of human-induced methane (a byproduct of manure), which is more than 20 times more toxic than carbon dioxide. Nosh on a quarter-pound burger with cheese for lunch? Your meal just used up 26 ounces of petroleum and left a 13-pound carbon footprint, which is the same as **burning 7 pounds of coal**.

According to the [Center for Biological Diversity](#), the average American consumes 270 pounds of meat each year, but cutting this amount by a third can save the greenhouse gas equivalent of driving 2,700 miles. And while adopting a plant-based diet gives our planet a boost, you don’t have to opt for tofu and greens from now on. Skipping red meat just once a week also cuts more greenhouse gases than relying on all locally sourced products, report [Carnegie Mellon University](#) scientists.

2 Mind your waste

Behind the oil and gas and agriculture industries, landfills are the third largest source of methane emissions in the United States, according to the Environmental Protection Agency. To mitigate this, consider composting. Whether you create a composting corner in your backyard or find a local compost-collecting program (Denver; Austin, Texas; Portland, Ore., and New York City already have them in place and other cities are rapidly following suit), you’re taking part in reducing this noxious gas.

And chances are, you already toss paper, plastics and cans into a separate bin. Keep at it. (And if you're not, start doing so now.) **Recycling** has a significant impact on future energy expenditures. For instance, just one recycled aluminum can saves 95 percent of the energy needed to make a new one from scratch — that's enough power to watch three hours of TV — and repurposing a glass pasta-sauce jar saves enough energy to light a 100-watt bulb for four hours. And when it comes to your spent electronics, tossing them in the trashcan is a big no-no. About 40 percent of the heavy metals in landfills — including lead, mercury and cadmium — come from electronic equipment, **according to the Electronic TakeBack Coalition**, which promotes green design and recycling. Instead, take your old TV **to Best Buy for trade-in or recycling**, and if you can't sell your old iPhone on **Capstone Wireless** or **Gazelle**, simply drop it off at your carrier.

3 Redecorate

Start your eco-makeover by checking to see that your furniture isn't blocking the flow of air from your vents; otherwise you'll be wasting energy heating and cooling your home. Then consider painting your rooms with a light-colored paint (choose VOC-free). Why? "Dark-colored walls need more lighting to keep the room illuminated," says Danny Seo, founder of Naturally, Danny Seo, a sustainable living magazine. "You'll be using more energy because you need a lot more lamps." Plus, lighter colors in a flat finish need less colorant and fewer chemicals than dark glossy options. Investing in lined thermal drapes to block heat in the summer and drafts in the winter can be a huge energy saver (**think: as much as 20 percent off your bill**) as well. And when shopping for new home accouterments, look for items made by artisans, not polluting factories. Most recently, **West Elm committed to paying \$35 million to artisans** (including ones in North Carolina and Mississippi) who use handcrafted techniques to make their products.

4 Travel green

Granted, planes, trains and automobiles leave a huge carbon footprint, but it's still possible to travel responsibly. For many, air travel is the most egregious ecological sin, and while you're not likely to boycott air travel anytime soon, you can make up for it by purchasing carbon offsets through [TerraPass](#). (A four-hour flight carbon offset is about \$6.) It's also smart to keep an eye out for green-minded air operators, like Finnair, that use environmentally sustainable biofuel on select flights.

To further reduce car pollution and oil use, “[be like Bob Dylan and go electric](#).” Car rental companies like [Enterprise](#), [Hertz](#) and [Avis](#) are jumping on the green wagon by offering hybrid and electric cars. And once you arrive at your destination, forgo cabs for [Bikeshare](#) (available in almost 50 major U.S. cities) and stay at a LEED (leadership in energy and environmental design) certified hotel. According to the [U.S. Green Building Council](#), green buildings, on average, use 26 percent less energy, emit 33 percent less carbon dioxide, utilize 30 percent less indoor water and send 50 to 75 percent less waste to landfills. As of 2015, hospitality giant [Hyatt](#) has vowed to follow enhanced sustainable design guidelines and LEED certification for all new construction and major renovation projects. The chain is also boosting their recycling efforts by challenging every hotel to keep at least 40 percent of their waste out of landfills.

5 Cook consciously

Dishwasher, stove, refrigerator, blender, coffee maker, waffle maker, toaster, food processor. This lengthy list of appliances is what likely makes your kitchen one of the biggest energy drains in your home. Fortunately, you don't have to forsake dinner to help the planet. The simplest and easiest trick to conserve energy is to unplug anything that is not in use. While you can't disconnect your stove, you can use it more efficiently by matching pot to

burner size — for example, using a 6-inch sauce pan on an 8-inch burner wastes 40 percent more heat. You can also save up to 5,000 gallons of water annually by only running your dishwasher when it's full instead of slaving away at the sink. And to alleviate your refrigerator's vast energy consumption, keep its freezer adequately stocked — even if it's just full of water bottles. Otherwise, each time you reach in for a few ice cubes or a pint of Ben & Jerry's, large amounts of warm air will fill the empty space, prompting it to use even more energy in order to maintain its cold temperature.



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