

# Why we should “reduce” (and why it isn’t so bad)

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There are many reasons why we should reduce our consumption of things: we eat more than we need, we purchase more than we use, we waste a lot of the energy we burn, we damage our environment without even realising it, and we consume more resources than the earth can cope with. The result is that we are suffering from an obesity crises, a biodiversity crises, a climate crises, a cost of living crises and a well-being crises.

Given all this, the obvious question is why? There are of course multiple reasons, including the fact that people are bad at change, our society is designed around the fallacy of never-ending growth, and while (almost) everyone recognises the problems (at least to a degree), those with the capability to act are not prepared to accept responsibility for doing what’s needed.

However, individuals do at least have some control over their own consumption and there are things they can do. In fact, there are a lot of things that people can do and I’ve collated 145 suggestions and tips for how you can reduce your energy consumption, your carbon emissions from food, consumer goods, travel & transport. These include some small, painless things which require little more than a bit of know-how, time and motivation, up to some more substantial changes to habits requiring some short term pain, but which over time can become a new normal.

While re-using and recycling are important, many of the most effective changes require reducing. However, given the amount that is wasted, for most people there should be some largely pain free things that can be done. Some of the relatively easy things involve re-purposing or simply not replacing things as often. Clothes are very often discarded and replaced well before their end of life and the days of repairing damaged clothes seem like ancient history now. Wanting to keep up with the latest fashion is partly to blame for this. Mobile phones and other bits of tech are constantly being improved and consumers pressured into regular unnecessary upgrades.

The COVID-19 pandemic seemed to remind many people of the importance and power of nature, and the benefits of experiencing the natural world. It does seem though that we're slipping back into pre-pandemic behaviours and people need reminding of these benefits and some help in being able to readily access green spaces.

One thing the pandemic clearly did was to switch people onto the benefits (and limitations) virtual meetings and remote working. Although many employers are now looking to bring employees back into the workplace, an attraction of remote working is that they can reduce the need to travel, both for commuting and travelling for work. Replacing business flights with virtual meetings is particularly attractive from an emissions point of view, while also reducing transport costs.

Virtual meetings can't really help with replacing leisure and holiday travel (though they can enable families and friends to keep in touch), so to reduce this source of emissions requires travelling shorter distances and using more sustainable means of transport such as rail instead of air. For the 50% or so of the UK population which do fly, no longer taking a cheap flight to catch the sun can seem like a major loss of freedom. While a few people might be encouraged with suitable nudges to forego their summer sun or winter escape, substantive reductions are likely to require a significant 'push', such as the introduction of enforced and regulated carbon offsetting, bearing in mind that the current system of partial and voluntary offsets is almost entirely ineffective. Incidentally, the same should apply to cruising which is even worse than flying.

All in all, it seems that most people have the opportunity to lower their carbon footprints by reducing their consumption whilst at the same time lowering their energy costs, improving their health and wellbeing, and helping to reduce climate anxiety by increasing the sense of empowerment and community. There are significant barriers to overcome before people will start to make changes, but once the process has been begun, with suitable nurturing and support it is hoped that a positive movement will be created.

## Further reading

### Degrowth

#### Degrowth - Uneven Earth

#### LESS - the journal of Degrowth in Scotland \* Enough!

### Circular economy

The global economy is now only 7.2% circular; and it's getting worse year on year—driven by rising material extraction and use. The global economy increasingly relies on materials from virgin sources. In the six years of the Circularity Gap Report, the global economy extracted and used more than in the entire 20th century—improving people's living standards, but at the same time breaking through the safe environmental limits of the planet. The first edition of our Report in 2018 was the first ever to measure global circularity, finding it was 9.1%. It dropped to 8.6% in 2020 and has now fallen to 7.2%.

[https://www.linkedin.com/posts/ljordanova\\_circularity-gap-report-2023-activity-7021415896787079168-AxLe?utm\\_source=share&utm\\_medium=member\\_desktop](https://www.linkedin.com/posts/ljordanova_circularity-gap-report-2023-activity-7021415896787079168-AxLe?utm_source=share&utm_medium=member_desktop)

### Food waste

More than 900 million tonnes of food is thrown away every year, according to a global report. The UN Environment Programme's Food Waste Index revealed that 17% of the food available to consumers - in shops, households and restaurants - goes directly into the bin. Some 60% of that waste is in the home.

#### Food waste: Amount thrown away totals 900 million tonnes - BBC News

"We produce more than enough calories to feed all humans, but 77 percent of global farmland 'efficiently' fattens meat for the wealthy, while rich-world pets are less food insecure than 2.37 billion people, or one in three humans. Meanwhile 150 million kids are permanently stunted by malnutrition".

#### Economists' Obsession With "Efficiency" Is Just an Endorsement of Greed (jacobin.com)

### Obesity

Among children in year 6 in England, 21.6% were living with obesity. obesity prevalence is highest among children living in the most deprived areas.

#### Obesity Profile: statistical commentary December 2022 - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

Obesity is a problem that is becoming more and more common all over the world. This problem is also very common in the United Kingdom. 68% of men are obese or overweight, compared to 60% of women. Moreover, 29% of men and 27% of women are considered obese. These rates have risen dramatically in recent years.

**[► Obesity Statistics 2022 • Facts and Figures in the UK \(healthexpress.co.uk\)](#)**

### **Fast fashion**

The fashion industry is responsible for 10% of annual global carbon emissions.

Half a million tons of plastic microfibers are dumped into the ocean every year, the equivalent of 50 billion plastic bottles.

Around 300,000 tonnes of textile waste ends up in household black bins every year, sent to landfill or incinerators. Less than 1% of material used to produce clothing is recycled into new clothing at the end of its life.

More than 50% of fast fashion clothes will be discarded within one year of purchase thanks to fast-moving trends; a trending design can become obsolete within two weeks of its launch.

**[New Shocking Facts about Fast Fashion | Oxfam GB](#)**

**[37 Fast Fashion Facts & Statistics \(trvst.world\)](#)**

### **Wasted toys**

According to the British Heart Foundation, more than a quarter (28%) of UK parents admit to discarding toys that are in perfect working order... children have an average of four toys they've never even played with – which would add up to as many as 162 million unused toys in the UK.

**[Millions Of Toys Are Binned Because Kids Don't Play With Them | HuffPost UK Life \(huffingtonpost.co.uk\)](#)**

### **Phone upgrades**

The average amount of time people keep their phone for is 12 – 24 months, despite the fact that they can normally run for 5 – 10 years.

Smartphone manufacturing has a tremendous environmental cost because of its materials. When you look at your device, you only see plastic, glass, and aluminium. But that's just the screen, casing, and chassis. Inside, it contains several other elements like tungsten, tin, gold, lithium, and other rare earth elements. These metals don't just exist on the surface of the earth. Instead, it must be mined and refined, requiring the movement of tons of earth, plus more resources to get pure minerals from the dug-up rocks.

## **What Is the Environmental Cost of Upgrading Your Smartphone? (makeuseof.com)**

### **The environmental cost of smartphones - Across The Green**

#### **Benefits of nature**

Across multiple studies, researchers have found a fascinating link between access to green space, such as fields, forests, parks and gardens, and a reduced risk of mental health problems, improved mood, and increased life satisfaction. Other benefits include reduced stress, increased physical activity, and better physical health.

Besides the benefits for our physical health, exercising and staying active is also good for our mental health. We know that physical activity may reduce the risk of mental health problems, like anxiety or depression, and exercising in green spaces can have an extra added benefit.

#### **Prescribing nature: the restorative power of a simple dose of outdoors | Access to green space | The Guardian**

#### **Birdsong boosts mental wellbeing for 90% of people, UK poll finds | Birds | The Guardian (ampproject.org)**

#### **Thriving with Nature | Mental Health Foundation**

#### **Carbon offsetting**

**[https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:7013863359397699585?utm\\_source=share&utm\\_medium=member\\_desktop](https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:7013863359397699585?utm_source=share&utm_medium=member_desktop)**

#### **Carbon offsetting: How to reduce the impact of flying - Which?**

#### **Cruising**

#### **Is cruising any greener than flying? | Travel | The Guardian**