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New Year Resolutions: how to make environmentally friendly lifestyle changes

Many of us vow to become healthier, more active and organised at the start of a new year, but an increasing number of people are making environment-related resolutions too. Whether it's creating less food waste or improving sustainable eating, there are plenty of ways we can make a difference to the environment as individuals.

Why make environmental lifestyle changes?

[Climate change](#) threatens people with food and water scarcity, increased flooding, extreme heat, more disease and economic loss. However, there has been a renewed focus on the environment and preserving a liveable climate - and there are plenty of [lifestyle](#) changes we can make to help.

Research carried out at the start of 2021 suggests more people are making New Year's resolutions and lifestyle changes to reduce their impact on the environment. The [environmental](#) charity Hubbub surveyed 3,000 adults and found that one in six planned to live more sustainably.

The green resolutions ranked even higher than the usual resolutions, such as taking up a new hobby. Recycling topped the list, with over half of the group claiming they wanted to get better at it. Then came plans to [eat](#) a more sustainable diet and less meat (49%), cycling or [walking](#) more (38%) and wasting less [food](#) (36%). Although most people struggle to stick to their [resolutions](#) past January, the survey suggested many people wanted to commit to a greener way of living in the long term.

How to change your lifestyle in the new year

Sustainable eating

[Research](#) suggests [meat](#) production – especially red meat – is one of the largest contributors to global warming, as it releases greenhouse gas emissions such as methane, carbon dioxide –CO₂, and nitrous oxide. Although fewer people are eating [meat](#) in general, studies show it will take more people cutting back to make a significant difference to the planet.

"Working on consuming less meat and [dairy](#) as part of a balanced diet are two of the changes that can make a big impact on our environment," says Reema Patel, registered dietitian at [Dietitian Fit](#). "If you do choose to enjoy meat in your [diet](#), try to choose local produce such as cows raised on grass pasture in the UK, compared to meat that comes from overseas."

Going from eating meat three days a week to one or two can make a big difference and make it easier to adjust your [diet](#). "Opting for more beans and lentils in some dishes – such as a chilli with half mince and half beans or a lentil Bolognese – can be great ways to reduce meat consumption overall," says Patel. "Increasing our intake of [vegetables](#) is also key. Fruit and vegetables also have a much smaller carbon footprint compared to meat and dairy."

Of course, there are also many [health benefits to a plant-based diet](#) and eating more plant-based foods. An entirely [vegan diet](#) is more suitable for some than others and if you have underlying medical conditions, you should consult a dietitian before making huge changes.

Try to avoid food waste

Many of us waste [food](#) without meaning to, whether it is by accidentally cooking too much and forgetting to eat the leftovers, or by buying too much produce.

"Another key area of change we can make is to work towards preventing [food](#) waste," says Patel. "Try to plan meals in advance and only buy what you need to help prevent items from going out of date or being wasted and ending up in the bin."

Eat locally

What we eat can have a huge carbon footprint, depending on where we get it from. Many [supermarkets](#) advertise goods that have been sourced in the UK, so it's easier to shop more sustainably.

"Locally grown and seasonal produce is the best choice for the environment and to support our local farming industry," advises Patel. "Try a local veg box delivery to help give you easy access to a variety of fruits and vegetables."

Use the car less

Sometimes, using the car is unavoidable. However, leaving it at home and [walking](#) or cycling when possible can make a big difference to the planet and is more eco-friendly, while doing physical activity to improve your health and [fitness](#) too.

A [study](#) published in 2020 found that among those who didn't exercise regularly, taking an extra 4,000 steps per day may help reduce the likelihood of developing [heart disease](#) – even when walking at a leisurely pace. Simply being [outdoors](#) can provide a significant boost to our physical and [mental health](#), by lowering [stress](#) and reducing [blood pressure](#) and heart rate.

Cut back on disposable plates and cups

According to [estimates](#), England uses 1.1 billion single-use plates and 4.25 billion items of single-use cutlery – most of which are plastic – per year. However, only 10% are recycled upon disposal.

If you tend to grab a [coffee](#) on your way to work, bringing your own reusable cup can make a big difference. Additionally, cafés sometimes offer a reduction if you bring your own cup too. If you get takeaways at lunchtime, bring your own cutlery.

Buy second-hand

According to the charity [Clothes Aid](#), around £140 million worth of used but still wearable clothing goes to landfill in the UK every year. Giving up on '[fast fashion](#)' in favour of only buying things you need that will last a long time can make a big impact. It can also help to check second-hand websites such as Ebay or Vinted before buying new items, or arrange regular clothes swaps with friends.

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