

A RACE TO NET ZERO – Part 2

Quick fixes around the home to reduce your carbon footprint.

What is a carbon footprint?

A carbon footprint is the greenhouse gases (particularly carbon dioxide) released into the atmosphere through the activities of an individual, community or organisation.

The whole idea of reducing your carbon footprint isn't as daunting as it sounds. Taking strides to become more carbon neutral can start with steps smaller than you think, it doesn't have to require massive financial investment or effort at all. In fact, you can even begin at home. We have collated some of the easiest ways that you can achieve small wins around the house to offset your carbon footprint.

An excellent first step would be to do an energy audit of your home, which will show you how energy is wasted and used around the home, and demonstrate ways in which you can become more energy efficient.

Following on from this, there are many good practices such as switching off unnecessary lights (a lot of people keep lights on even when they're not in the room, changing this habit will instantly reduce your footprint), unplugging appliances when they are not in use, and turning them off at the switch, that can help decrease your energy usage and effectively this will make offsetting your carbon footprint a lot easier.

Swapping your incandescent light bulbs and compact fluorescent lamp bulbs to light emitting diodes (LEDs) can be much more economical. Whilst they can cost more to buy, they use up to 85% less energy and last up to 25 times longer, therefore they are cheaper to use in the long run and much more energy efficient (the planet and your bank will thank you too).

Heating is a huge hindrance when it comes to being energy efficient. Turning your water heater down to 120 degrees F can save up to 550 pounds of CO₂ every year! But there are other ways to keep the heat in your home. The gaps underneath doors, whether that's your front door, back door or even your bedroom doors, placing a draught stopper against gaps can stop your valuable heat from escaping and will keep your home warmer in these colder months. Another quick fix that will keep your home warmer is sticking aluminium foil behind your radiators so that the heat is reflected back into your house, rather than being absorbed into the walls and wasting valuable heat energy.

Installing a shower head that promotes low-flow reduces the amount of water you use. It can save 350 pounds of CO₂. As much as we all enjoy those karaoke showers, they normally mean we spend a lot more time in the shower (also wasting a lot more water) than necessary. So taking shorter showers helps, too, so why not invest in a shower timer which will encourage you to shower within a certain amount of minutes.

Ensuring you know how to use your thermostat correctly can save you a ton of money but also can save tonnes of CO2. Dependent on what kind of thermostat you have, you can programme it to suit your daily lifestyle in regards to heating your home. Let's say you aren't normally in your home between 8AM-5PM, then ensure you programme your thermostat to switch off between those times (bonus points: programme your thermostat to switch off 20 minutes before you leave your home because there will still be heat in your home).

Use less air conditioning in the summer; instead opt for fans, which require less electricity. And in the winter, use more natural gas sources of heat where possible. But what we could all take into consideration is something you have probably heard before from your dad... "just put a jumper on". As annoying as it was, it's true. Putting on another layer, whether that's socks, a jumper, another T-shirt, is probably one of the easiest ways to reduce your carbon footprint.

Tumble dryers are one of the leading culprits that increase your carbon footprint. If possible, air dry your clothes after you wash them. Installing a washing line in an outside space is a great way to dry your clothing naturally. However, during the winter period, this may be impossible. So buying a clothing airer and placing it in a warmer area in your home. If you do heat your home, placing it near radiators is an ideal way to heat your home and dry your clothes at the same time. Talk about hitting two birds with one stone...

But there are a few things you can invest in that will end up keeping you and your home warm and energy efficient but it will also save you some money too. Signing up to get your electricity from clean energy through your local utility or a certified renewable energy provider is a slightly big ever change but it will be well worth it. [Simply Switch](#) can help you find certified green energy providers. Also investing in double glazing is a great way to keep heat in your home. It is quite a pricey process but it really does keep the heat in, which is something we all appreciate during the winter months.

Believe it or not, your fridge can be one of the biggest energy hogs in the house, especially old fridges, between 15-20 years, which can cost much more to run each year. Opt out of setting your fridge and freezer temperature lower than necessary (The optimal fridge temperature in the UK is between 3°C and 5°C, according to the UK food standards, and -18°C is the correct freezer temperature to safely store frozen goods) Additionally, unplug any unused fridges to save energy.

Lastly, carefully consider the food choices in your home, as your food consumption can contribute heavily to your carbon footprint. Livestock such as meat and dairy are globally responsible for 14.5% of man-made greenhouse gas emissions. So eating more of a plant based diet is a great way to reduce your carbon footprint. Or even lowering your meat consumption is a perfect way to still enjoy livestock produce. If you still want to eat freely, then buy your produce locally as there will be a reduced carbon footprint from field to fork.

At the end of the day, reducing your carbon footprint is quite an easy task as long as you know where to start. These quick fixes are a great opportunity for you to start decreasing that footprint, with these small steps, your journey to reducing your carbon footprint will be a lot easier than you think. And they will make such a difference. Your home will be more energy efficient, you will probably save some money in the process too and you will feel happier knowing that you're doing something to help this wonderful planet.

References:

The Which table mentioned in Episode 2 can be found here:

<https://www.which.co.uk/news/2019/09/how-green-is-your-energy-tariff/>

About this resource

The Race To Net Zero is a feature of the Race Against Climate Change with Amy and Ella; an educational series created by Kids Against Plastic in collaboration with Envision Virgin Racing.

