APS Australian Psychological Society
Believe in Change

101 THINGS YOU CAN DO TO HELP ADDRESS CLIMATE CHANGE

Climate change is the biggest threat to the wellbeing of future generations and to the world we love. If we work together, we can stop its worst effects.

Sometimes climate change seems too big a problem for any one person to tackle. This is one of the big psychological barriers that hinders action on climate change. But in fact we all can do something, and these contributions all add up. Psychologists working on behaviour change know that just starting somewhere helps us to engage with the issue and start to create the world we want to see. It also helps us realise how much we need the community to get on board to pressure for bigger social and political change to tackle the scale of the problem.

Acting personally and collectively to reduce our carbon footprint is a significant coping strategy. Our actions not only contribute to the solutions to climate change but also help us to feel we are part of the solution, not just the problem, and help manage the distressing feelings aroused by this grave threat to our future. Action is the best antidote to despair and helplessness. It is also the case that speedy action on climate change will not happen unless we create the political will, and that requires action by all of us beyond the context of our personal lives.

Getting active is one of the eight strategies outlined in the Climate Change Empowerment Handbook, an APS resource which helps people come to terms and cope with the profound implications of climate change and participate in speedy societal change to restore a safe climate. The Handbook draws on decades of research in social, environmental, community and developmental psychology about how to promote behaviour change, activate pro-social values and engage people in effective sustainability actions while also increasing their personal wellbeing.

This series of everyday green action tips is based on an extensive body of research. Some of the ideas come out of research into the importance of social norms in helping to promote sustainable behaviours. Some are based on research into 'psychological restoration' and the importance of spending time in nature to restore attention and wellbeing. Others use environmental psychology research about prioritising high impact actions over lower impact actions, and group actions over individual actions. Developmental psychology research on the importance of teaching children skills for civic responsibility provide the basis for others.

Some of the common-sense green action tips in this list appear in other lists as well – we wanted to give you plenty of options for things you can do, so you can feel your own capacity to make change and build your sense of efficacy. We can all do many things, and enormous changes are possible when we all contribute to a sustainable world and urgently address climate change.

You can read more about the psychological research underlying this resource in the APS Climate Change Empowerment Handbook and other resources listed at the end.

101 GREEN ACTION TIPS

In the following pages are some ideas about what you can do to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and help to limit climate change. Which of these can you do? Consider setting yourself a goal each week, or choosing 5 things to commit to. And reward yourself each week when you achieve your goal!

Some actions have a greater impact on reducing greenhouse gas emissions than others. As a consumer, you can make a big impact on your own emissions by things like getting rid of your car, flying less, and switching to a plant based diet. As a citizen, lobbying governments and big businesses for policy change is an important way to impact on global emissions. Try to take on some of these stronger actions because these will have the biggest effect on greenhouse gas emissions overall.

TRAVELLING

1. Use public transport to get to work and leisure activities.
2. Carpool to get to work, or to get to events that friends are also attending.
3. Share a car with your neighbours or friends.
4. Reduce your car and plane travel for work – use teleconferencing.
5. Reduce your vacation travel – take local holidays.
6. Park your car at a friend’s house so it’s easy not to use it every day.
7. Buy carbon offsets when you have to fly.
8. If you really need a car, buy a smaller and more efficient one, or better still, an electric or hybrid vehicle.
9. Put climate change stickers on your car or bike.
10. Maintain your car with regular tune-ups and correct air pressure.
11. Drive smoothly, avoid sudden acceleration.

AT HOME

12. Use less electricity and gas – buy energy-efficient light bulbs and appliances, turn off lights.
13. Insulate your house, starting with the roof space.
14. Wear warm jumpers and thick socks in winter and turn down your heater thermostat in winter to 18 degrees or cooler.
15. Cool yourself before you cool your home in summer, and turn up your air-conditioner thermostat to 24 degrees or warmer, but try to just use a fan.
16. Recycle everything you can.
17. Follow a ‘climatarian’ diet - eat less sheep and beef (they produce most methane); compost your food waste.
18. Install solar power panels and solar hot water.
19. Buy renewable energy.
20. Plant trees in your garden and wherever you can. Grow your own fruit and vegetables.
21. Use less water – time your showers, install rainwater tanks.
22. Put up signs on your garden fence or letterbox about climate change.
23. If you're building, use an eco-friendly design and builder.
24. Replace heating and cooling units with more efficient models.
25. When you move house, go small - prioritise energy efficiency and public transport.
26. See http://shrinkthatfootprint.com for more ideas about reducing your energy use at home.

AT WORK

27. Join or form a green team at work.
28. Ask your workplace to divest from companies that invest in fossil fuels.
29. Develop a sustainability policy with guidelines for energy efficiency, paper use, procurement policies, catering, recycling, energy providers etc.
30. Make your environmental values clear to your colleagues.Ride a bike or walk to work and to visit friends.

VALUE NATURE

31. Spend time in the natural places that you love.
32. Notice the wild, natural world around you wherever you are.
33. Spend time with others in nature or join a social group with a shared interest like tree planting, weed removal or bird watching.
34. Donate your money or time to nature conservation activities.

AT THE SHOPS

35. Buy less! Do you really need it?
36. Walk or ride to the shops.
37. Refuse plastic bags when you shop and tell them why – take your own cloth bags.
38. Buy local, organic, seasonal food.
39. Buy recycled goods.
40. Reduce your food miles.
41. Get hold of a sustainable supermarket guide and be a wise consumer.
42. Avoid products in non-recyclable containers.
43. Buy energy-efficient appliances when you need them.
44. Take your money out of banks and other financial institutions that support the fossil fuel industry – and tell them why you are doing so.
45. Give your friends and family gifts that support the environment and social justice - e.g. bze.org.au/shop and www.oxfamshop.org.au.

COMMUNICATION

46. Tell people that 97% of climate scientists agree that climate change is happening and is caused by human behavior.
47. Remind people that there's still time to take action on climate change and prevent the worst harms.
48. Show other people that it's normal to be green.
49. Tell stories of people doing positive things for the environment.
50. Show pictures and talk with people about the natural places you love.
51. Tell people how good you feel when riding your bike to work.
52. Leave visible (behavioural) traces of the things you do to protect the environment so that people can learn from your example (E.g., keep-cup on your desk, bike helmet swinging from your backpack).
53. Be obvious about your environmental values.
54. Break the silence on climate change by bringing it up whenever possible. This help others to see that people just like them are concerned and taking action.
55. Encourage other people to express their concerns about climate change, and make it 'normal' to do so.

WITH KIDS

56. Plant a tree for the future with them.
57. Let them walk or ride to school and after-school activities (perhaps with you).
58. Show them how you are working on climate change so they can have a better world to grow up in.
59. Talk about ways you can reduce your carbon footprint as a family.
60. Encourage teachers to talk about climate change (but without being scary).
61. Encourage the school to model sustainability (paper recycling, energy efficiency).
62. Encourage the school to engage students in climate change projects – e.g. tree-planting, letters to politicians about their hopes and fears for the future, putting on a play or concert on climate change, studying the effects on the Great Barrier Reef).
63. Find ways of letting children have unstructured, unsupervised time in wild, natural places.

FOR ENTERTAINMENT, OUT AND ABOUT

64. Refuse to buy bottled water. Take your own water bottle with you, and your own travel cup for take-away coffee.
65. When you can, choose to eat in the restaurant rather than getting takeaway. Restaurants tend to use less packaging waste when dining in.
66. When treating yourself, consider choosing services, like massages or dining out, rather than buying more ‘stuff’.

DO THINGS WITH OTHERS

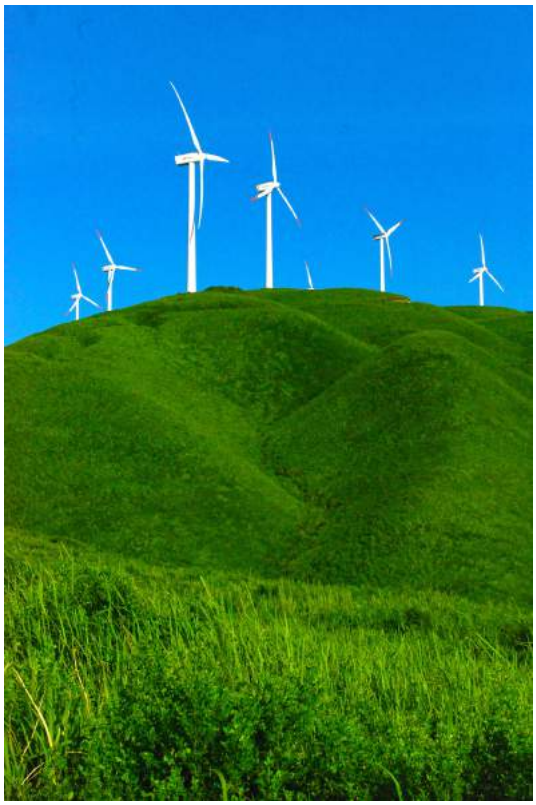
67. Get your school or college to start projects on climate change.
68. Get your choir to sing climate change songs.
69. Get your book club to read books on climate change.
70. Have a dinner party with friends, family, colleagues or neighbours with a speaker on climate change (see www.climateforchange.org.au).
71. Put up posters on climate change at work.
72. Invite your friends and colleagues to talks, films and other activities which focus on climate change.
73. Use social media to share your concerns.
74. Get onto email lists and social media platforms to keep in touch about climate change events.

LOOK AFTER YOURSELF

75. Acknowledge any painful feelings about climate change – anger, fear, despair, grief, guilt – and talk about them with others.
76. Spend time with others who are actively working to prevent climate change.
77. Choose climate change activities which make you feel good!
78. Celebrate small successes.
79. Remember taking action is the best remedy against anxiety about an issue.
80. Look for and write out wise and motivating sayings - put them on your fridge and computer. For example 'Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.' (Margaret Mead) 'When we feel responsible, concerned and committed, we begin to feel deep emotion and great courage'. (The 14th Dalai Lama).
81. Notice when you try to avoid thinking about climate change. It's ok to take a break from time to time, but not helpful if we start to minimise or deny the problem and stop taking action.
82. When you feel hopeless – do one of the easier things on this list, and notice the sense of accomplishment from just doing something!

JOIN IN AND GET POLITICAL

83. Join your local climate action group. (1)
84. Donate money to help climate groups.
85. Sign petitions on climate change (e.g. about coal mines, dirty power stations).
86. Lobby against policies that place profit before the environment.
87. Pressure your bank and superannuation fund to divest of fossil fuels.
88. Tell your local, state and federal politicians that your vote depends on their climate policies.
89. Lobby your local council to divest of fossil fuels.
90. Join groups pressing for the closure of coal mines, ports, dirty power stations.
91. Lobby for measures of progress which don't just rely on economic indicators.
92. Join groups advocating for higher renewable energy targets.
93. Join groups advocating for higher energy efficiency ratings for houses.
94. Support groups that advocate for just climate policies that protect the most vulnerable in our society.
95. Join in marches and rallies and protests, and bring your friends and family.



LEARN MORE

96. Learn some key facts about climate change and its impacts in Australia and around the world which you can share with others. (2)
97. Learn about which companies are the worst emitters of carbon and which are the best - and boycott the worst ones, tell them why, and tell your friends.
98. Learn which banks and other businesses support the big carbon emitters - and boycott them, tell them why, and tell your friends.
99. Learn about ways to prevent the worst climate change from occurring.
100. Learn about the climate policies of political parties, share information with other people and use your vote to protect the climate.
101. Learn about non-violent direct action.

1) As more and more people are realising the urgency of working on climate change, there are lots of groups you could join. Many of these are listed under ‘Members on the Australian Climate Action Network website (http://www.cana.net.au).

(2) Some good places to learn more about climate change are: The Climate Council (https://www.climatecouncil.org.au/), Skeptical Science (https://www.skepticalscience.com/), and Beyond Zero Emissions (bze.org.a). The Australian Psychological Society website (https://www.psychology.org.au/for-the-public/Psychology-topics/Climate-change-psychology) has lots of resources.

RESOURCES

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