How to Reduce your Carbon Footprint

What is your carbon footprint?

Your carbon footprint is the total amount of carbon dioxide emissions that you produce in the course of your day-to-day life. In the UK, the biggest contribution to our carbon footprint is from burning fossil fuels to meet our home energy and travel needs, but how we work, play, eat and shop all have direct and indirect impacts on our footprint too.

In order to avoid the potentially disastrous effects of runaway climate change, the global average carbon footprint needs to be less than 3 tonnes per person per year. Currently in the UK, the average is 13 tonnes per person per year.

Many small actions make a big difference

Fortunately, there are lots of things you can do as an individual or as part of a community to help to reduce your carbon footprint.

Many individual steps to reduce carbon emissions often result in **saving money,** and support your local economy too.

Through **local initiatives,** you can work with others in your community to come up with new and exciting ideas to reduce your total carbon footprint and combat climate change. This collective action reconnects you with your neighbours and with local goods and services, as well as being a very effective way to reduce overall emissions.

Calculating your Carbon Footprint

A good place to start when reducing your carbon footprint is to find out what it is now. There are many online calculators available to help you do this.

This quick and simple calculator provided by WWF allows you to calculate your carbon footprint in terms of the amount of planets that would be needed to sustain your current lifestyle if everyone lived as you do.

For a more detailed estimate, the official Government Act on CO2 calculator measures your footprint in tonnes of CO_2 emissions, focusing on home energy and transport use (the main contributors to individual carbon dioxide emissions). This calculator also produces a plan to help your reduce your carbon footprint.

The Act on CO2 website also contains a wealth of further information and ideas on how to reduce your carbon footprint.

Energy

Home Energy

In the UK, home energy contributes around 22% of the average carbon footprint, with over half of this from our heating systems. This means we can significantly cut our carbon footprint through a few simple home energy efficiency improvements.

The Energy Savings Trust has developed a tool to calculate how much CO_2 and money you can save by applying some simple home energy saving measures. Examples of 12 easy, effective, cost-saving actions are listed here, with figures based on a three-bedroom, semi-detached, gas-heated house.

	Energy Saving Measure	saving (£/year)	CO_2 kg saving
1	Turn off lights when you leave a room	£6	23
2	Change 3 light bulbs to low energy	£9	32
3	Turn off all standbys	£32	130
4	Wash laundry at 30° C	£10	45
5	Walk if the journey is less than a mile	£10	22
6	Top up loft insulation to a depth of 270mm	£45	300
7	Boil only the amount of water needed	£6	29
8	Turn the thermostat down by 1° C	£50	330
9	Buy Energy Saving Recommended Appliances	up to £34	up to 142
10	Insulate the hot water tank to a depth of 75mm	£30	195
11	Draught proof around doors and windows and cover letter boxes and keyholes	£25	150
12	Install cavity wall insulation (Mostly homes built between 1920-1980)	£120	800

Much more information and advice is available on the Energy Savings Trust website.

Green Energy

Switch to a renewable electricity supplier. You can get up to 100% of your electricity from renewable sources, making a significant reduction to you carbon emissions. For impartial information about suppliers, visit www.greenelectricity.org.

Energy Efficiency at work

The Carbon Trust helps organisations of all sizes to cut their energy bills and carbon emissions with practical advice, publications, interest-free loans, and on-site surveys. http://www.carbontrust.co.uk/energy

Energy Efficiency at School

Carbon Detectives' Kit is an online resource for schools in England to calculate their footprint and set targets for reduction, and includes practical advice and comparisons with other schools. http://www.carbondetectives.org.uk

Further Home Energy Inspiration

The Yellow House is a renovated 1930's ex-council house where energy

consumption was reduced by more than 60%. The website contains lots of clever ideas and information.

Travel

Transport is the third largest (and fastest growing) source of UK greenhouse gases, with land and air travel contributing almost a third to the average carbon footprint in the UK. For almost any journey, there are greener and healthier alternatives to cars and planes.

Walking
The Government's recommended level of daily activity to transform health is just 30 minutes walking a day during the week. With zero carbon emissions, it's a win/win for shorter journeys.

Why not walk to school or work? Young children can even take a walking bus to school.

Cycling
Cycling is also carbon neutral and keeps you fit. If you are new to cycling, then organisations such as the Cyclists' Touring Club (CTC) provide cycle training, maps, routes and advice. National Cycle Network is an easy to follow numbered national route system.

Your place of work may participate in the Cycle To Work scheme, and offer tax-free employee bike loans.

Bus/Train/Ferry
Rail and coach travel are around five times more efficient than car travel, while passengers who fly between London, Paris and Brussels generate up to 10 times more emissions of CO_2 than travellers who go by rail.

Compare emissions for different vehicles and modes of transport over any distance at Travel Footprint

Seat 61 has details of travelling across UK and Europe by rail, coach and ship.

Ferry crossing information is available at www.aferry.co.uk

National Express is the UK coach network with many low-fare routes.

Car
Some trips by car may be unavoidable. However, according to Transport for London, you can follow a few simple tips and suggestions to reduce your engine's workload, which means it will burn less fuel, produce fewer emissions and save you £120 a year. Tips include:

- Carshare - fewer cars on the road means less carbon emissions

- **Walk** or **cycle** shorter journeys – cold engines use twice as much fuel as warm engines, and catalytic converters take six miles to become more effective

- Buy a fuel efficient and low CO2 emitting car – save up to three months-worth of fuel in a year

Buying Habits – Food and other consumables

Almost 20% of the UK's total greenhouse gas emissions are associated with the food and drink we consume (source: Food Climate Research Network). The emissions come not just from the food miles (carbon emissions associated with the transport of our food), but from every stage of the supply chain – growing, processing, distribution and waste.

Buy Local
There is a wealth of opportunities to buy seasonal local food, from farmers markets to vegetable box schemes. Seasonal food generally has to be transported less and has a higher nutrient content due to its freshness.

Grow your own
You can grow your own food in an area as small as a window box. Contact your local authority about possible allotment space, or if you can't find a growing space, join the Landshare scheme to find someone in your area with an unused garden or plot that you can use.

Buy Organic
Organic farming uses less energy than intensive farming because it uses less fertilisers and chemicals, the manufacture of which creates greenhouse gases. Buy organic where possible and look out for the Soil Association certification label.

Eat Less Meat
According to the United Nations, livestock generate more greenhouse gases than transport, so eating less meat reduces your carbon footprint.

Less Packaging and waste
Only buy what you need. A third of the food we buy in the UK is thrown away. Don't buy over-packaged products, and don't place loose items, such as vegetables, into separate plastic bags. Buy fresh rather than frozen produce – keeping items chilled or frozen uses energy.

Buy a reusable bottle or flask to store drinks instead of buying bottled water and beverages in disposable cups.

Other consumables
All consumer items require energy throughout their lifecycle, from the extraction of their raw materials, to their manufacture, distribution, sale, use and final disposal.

Buying less stuff, and buying long-lasting durable items, will save money, and carbon emissions in the short and long term.

Buy second-hand, or even find stuff for free on Freecycle or Virtual Skip. If you don't like what you've got, why not swap it? You can swap books, clothes and general goods.

Recycle everything you can - two thirds of household goods can be reused or recycled, thus reducing the carbon emissions from producing more goods.

Local Initiatives

There are many initiatives that your community can become involved in to reduce your collective carbon emissions. Here are some of the most popular.

Transition Towns

A transition town is a community group that comes together to develop local practical projects for a low-carbon future. These can include food, health, energy and much more. Each transition town is unique to its particular community, and encourages creative and innovative initiatives for reducing the local carbon footprint.

Green Communities

Green Communities is a programme from the Energy Saving Trust that aims to support, facilitate and promote community-based energy projects. It includes free training and advice focused on project planning and funding, technical support and a website of resources.

British Gas Green Streets

This competition aims to motivate communities to reduce energy usage, cut carbon emissions and generate renewable energy from local sources, with the chance to win a prize worth up to £100,000 to invest in your community.

British Gas will provide the funding, support and technical expertise to community groups, with innovative ideas around saving energy or generating energy from local, renewable sources, and will help develop and implement these ideas.

Greening Campaign

Households are encouraged to take a branded information card, which gives them a list of ways to save energy in the home and at work. Once they take a number of these actions, they mark the card and display it in a front window. This creates a powerful visual aid, and allows estimates to be made of the amount of CO2 the community has saved. It gives all members of the community a sense that they

have contributed through small, inexpensive actions. Further actions follow on from this.

3 tonne club

The Women's Environmental Network (WEN) has produced a well researched booklet to support its Three Tonne Club. This provides step-by-step advice on how to reduce your carbon emissions from the average of 13 tonnes to the 3 tonne ideal. It provides in-depth information and ideas on reducing your individual footprint as well as ideas forcollective action.