Climate change - what you can do
Summary

We can all make a difference to climate change.
Start simply with things you can change in your everyday environment – with a bit of practice, it’s possible for everyone to live a more sustainable lifestyle.
Get children involved and provide ways for them to take positive action. It is important to talk about climate change with your child and listen to their ideas.
Take action as a family or as a community. It’s fun and it also builds strong relationships and resilience for the future.

It is easy to get disheartened or fearful about climate change. Australia has one of the highest rates of greenhouse gas emissions per person compared to other industrialised nations. We also consume relatively large amounts of the world’s water, food, energy and fuel resources compared to people living in less industrialised countries. If we continue as we are now, the effects of global warming around the world could be catastrophic.

Some aspects of climate change may already be irreversible. Yet many scientists believe that by taking positive action now, it is possible to slow the pace of climate change and reduce further global warming. Changing our lifestyle and our behaviour will help reduce the human impact on the environment.

We can all make a difference to climate change. Here are some suggestions for a healthier, more sustainable approach to living in our environment.

Reduce car emissions

Suggestions include:

- Leave the car in the garage and walk or cycle for short trips.
- Use public transport.
- Keep your car tyres inflated to the recommended pressure.
- Drive slowly and smoothly.
- Car-pool with workmates.

Reduce energy expenditure in your home

Suggestions include:

- Turn off lights and appliances when not in use.
- Replace regular light bulbs with compact fluorescent bulbs.
- Insulate your home and reduce your heating and cooling bills.
- Install a water-saving showerhead and take shorter showers.
- Dry your clothes outside on the line rather than in the clothes dryer.
- Switch to ‘green energy’ for your electricity needs.

Reduce your ‘carbon footprint’ when you shop

Suggestions include:

- Buy local and seasonal food produce to reduce energy use in transport and storage.
- Buy items with minimal packaging whenever possible.
- If you buy new items, make sure they are made from sustainable, low-impact materials.
- Buy secondhand rather than new – from op shops, garage sales or over the Internet.

Recycle waste and reuse pre-loved items

Suggestions include:

- Recycle as much of your rubbish as you can.
- Compost vegetable scraps.
- ‘Detox your home’ – dispose of unwanted chemicals safely rather than pouring them down the sink or putting them in the rubbish bin.
- Be creative in finding new uses for ‘found’ or pre-loved objects.

Longer term choices that help the environment

Suggestions include:

- Buy energy efficient household appliances.
- Install a solar-powered hot water system.
- Install rainwater tanks.
• Buy a more fuel-efficient car or think about not owning a car – perhaps you can share one.
• Move to an area where your workplace, shops and schools are within walking distance.
• Make work changes so that you can ‘telecommute’ to work using the telephone and email.

Improve your physical and mental health

Studies show that a fit, healthy body is more resistant to hazards such as heat stress and a healthy mind is less prone to anxiety or depression. Suggestions include:

• Maintain a weight that is appropriate for your height and build.
• Reduce the amount of sugar, salt, fat and processed food in your diet.
• Exercise for at least half an hour on most days of the week.
• Don’t smoke.
• Limit your intake of alcohol.
• Get plenty of sleep and keep your mind active.
• Focus on the positive action you can take and try to avoid despair by connecting with others and looking after your mental health.

Talk with your children

Even young children can be affected by uncertainty or despair. It is important to talk about issues such as climate change with your child and help them find ways to deal with their fears. Some suggestions include:

• Listen to your child and take their concerns and feelings seriously.
• Explain the issues in a way that is appropriate to the child’s level of understanding, without too much graphic detail. Use language they understand.
• Check that your child hasn’t jumped to any wrong conclusions. If you try to protect them by keeping information from them, they may fill in the blanks using their imagination.
• Monitor their exposure to disturbing or sensational media, such as television news or disaster films about the end of the world – is it appropriate to their age?
• Provide positive, realistic information sources for them to learn about climate change – for example, a children’s book, video or educational website.
• Talk about the issue as a family and plan simple, positive actions that you can take together to make a difference.

Build strong communities

Join a group or get together with friends and neighbours to establish local, sustainable community-building networks. Some suggestions include:

• Establish a community garden and educate yourselves and others about sustainable food practices.
• Start a ‘share network’ to pool resources such as lawn-mowers, garden or shed tools, bottling kits, bikes and so on.
• Recycle unwanted goods through a local ‘swap meet’ or invite your neighbours to hold a joint garage sale.
• Get together with parents from your children’s school to start a Walking School Bus.
• Organise with others to hold community tree-planting days.
• Get involved in your local council activities or join a group to help design people and environment friendly public spaces.
• Create a sustainable ‘transition town’ to plan for and limit the effects of climate change on your local neighbourhood.

Where to get help

• Your doctor
• Your local council
• Sustainability Victoria Tel. 1300 363 744 – for advice about energy, waste and recycling
• Australian Government Department of Climate Change Tel. (02) 6274 1888
• Environment Protection Authority Tel. (03) 9695 2777 – to report pollution from motor vehicles or industrial pollution to Pollution Watch Line, 24 hours, seven days
• Environment Protection Authority Tel. (03) 9695 2722 – for air quality information
• The Australian Psychological Society Referral Service Tel. 1800 333 497
• Parentline Tel. 132 289

References

• Climate change – what you can do, Australian Psychological Society. More information here.
• Talking with children about the environment, Australian Psychological Society. More information here.
• What you can do - individuals, Australian Government. More information here.
• What is climate change?, Department of Sustainability and Environment, Victorian Government. More information here.
• Climate Change Health Check 2020, Doctors for the Environment Australia. More information here.

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More information

Environmental health

The following content is displayed as Tabs. Once you have activated a link navigate to the end of the list to view its associated content. The activated link is defined as Active Tab
Environmental health basics

- After a flood – animal and insect related hazards
  When returning to a flood-affected area, remember that wild animals, including rats, mice, snakes or spiders, may be trapped in your home, shed or garden.

- After a flood – returning home safely
  When returning to your home after a flood, take precautions to reduce the possibility of injury, illness or disease.

- Air pollution
  Around 75 per cent of Melbourne’s air pollution is caused by vehicle emissions.

- Allergies explained
  Allergy occurs when the body overreacts to a ‘trigger’ that is harmless to most people.

- Disease clusters
  Disease clusters are rare but can cause community concern about the possible effects of exposure to environmental hazards.

- Emergencies - floods
  You and your family should work out an emergency plan in case of flood.

- Food safety and storage
  High-risk food should be kept at 5 °C or below, and above 60 °C to avoid the temperature danger zone and food poisoning.

- Hazardous waste
  It can be dangerous to dispose of hazardous wastes through regular rubbish collections.

- Smoke and your health - science summary (video)
  Smoke and your health (video)

House and garden

- Asbestos and your health
  When asbestos fibres become airborne, people working with asbestos may inhale particles which remain in their lungs.

- Asbestos in the home
  Asbestos fibres breathed into the lungs can cause a range of health problems including lung cancer and mesothelioma.

- Bedbugs
  Bedbugs have highly developed mouth parts that can pierce skin.

- Edible gardens - saving water
  Saving water in the garden not only saves money, but also helps protect the environment.

- Gardening safety
  Gardening is an enjoyable form of exercise, but you need to take care.

- Gas heating - health and safety issues
  If you service your gas heater regularly and use it correctly, it will be safe and economical to use.

- Greywater - recycling water at home
  When handled properly, greywater can be safely reused for the garden.

- Hazardous waste
  It can be dangerous to dispose of hazardous wastes through regular rubbish collections.
Mosquitoes - protect your home a checklist
Use this simple checklist and take action to prevent mosquitoes from entering your home. The best protection from mosquito-borne diseases is to avoid mosquito bites.

Mould and your health
The way to control indoor mould growth is to control the source of moisture.

Passive smoking
Passive smoking means breathing other people's second-hand tobacco smoke. Passive smoking increases the risk of serious illness in both children and adults.

Pest control in the home
If you use pesticides to control pests around the house, make sure you use as little as possible.

Pest control services
If you have pest problems that you cannot manage yourself, you may need to hire an authorised pest control operator.

Sewage overflows at home
Sewage contains harmful microorganisms such as bacteria, viruses and protozoa.

Wood fires and breathing problems
The smoke from wood fires can affect air quality and may affect people's health.

Chemical and metal pollutants

- Hazardous waste
  It can be dangerous to dispose of hazardous wastes through regular rubbish collections.

- Arsenic mine tailings and health
  Mine tailings near goldmines may contain high levels of arsenic.

- Cadmium
  Low-level exposure to cadmium over a long period of time may cause health effects because cadmium can accumulate in the body.

- Chemicals and spray drift
  Sprayed chemicals can drift over neighbouring properties or water sources, and can affect human health, animals or the environment.

- Copper chrome arsenic (CCA) treated timber
  CCA treated timber should not be used to build children's play equipment, patios, new garden furniture, decking or handrails.

- Farm safety and handling agrichemicals
  To reduce risks on the farm, use hazardous chemicals according to manufacturer guidelines or replace them with less dangerous options.

- Lead exposure and your health
  Long-term exposure to low levels of lead may produce symptoms including irritability, lack of energy and loss of appetite.

- Look after your health at harvest time (slideshow)
  Farmer health, wellbeing and safety are often neglected when facing the pressures of harvest. Simple safety measures can dramatically reduce the risk of injury and illness.

- Mercury exposure and poisoning
  Preventing or minimising exposure to mercury in your environment is the best way to reduce the risk of mercury poisoning.

- Mercury in fish
  Pregnant women and young children should limit consumption of fish that contain high levels of mercury.

- Pest control in the home
  If you use pesticides to control pests around the house, make sure you use as little as possible.

- Pest control services
  If you have pest problems that you cannot manage yourself, you may need to hire an authorised pest control operator.

Air and water quality
- **Air pollution**
  Around 75 per cent of Melbourne's air pollution is caused by vehicle emissions.

- **Beaches and water quality**
  Water quality of natural water sources, such as beaches and rivers, can vary greatly. Keeping a lookout for poor water quality (such as water that is discoloured, murky or smells unpleasant) will help.

- **Cleaning up ash after a fire**
  After a fire, many homes may be affected by ash residue from smoke. This ash can be harmful, particularly for children or people with heart or lung conditions. This factsheet has tips and advice for...

- **Dental care - fluoride**
  Fluoride in your drinking water is like a constant 'repair kit' for your teeth...

- **Greywater - recycling water at home**
  When handled properly, greywater can be safely reused for the garden.

- **Groundwater**
  Groundwater quality varies across Victoria; in some areas, groundwater is not suitable for use...

- **Harmful algal blooms**
  Some types of blue-green algae produce toxins that can harm humans and animals when swallowed, inhaled or touched. People and pets should not enter the water at locations affected by blue-green algae.

- **Healthy swimming (video)**
  We can keep our pools safe, healthy, and most importantly fun.

- ** Legionnaires' disease**
  Legionnaires' disease is a rare form of pneumonia.

- **Look after your health at harvest time (slideshow)**
  Farmer health, wellbeing and safety are often neglected when facing the pressures of harvest. Simple safety measures can dramatically reduce the risk of injury and illness...

- **Passive smoking**
  Passive smoking means breathing other people's second-hand tobacco smoke. Passive smoking increases the risk of serious illness in both children and adults.

- **Smoke and your health - protect your health (video)**
  Learn how to prepare and cook food safely at home.

- **Smoke and your health - science summary (video)**
  Learn how to store food safely in your fridge at home.

- **Swimming - keeping the water clean**
  There are simple steps for all visitors to follow to keep pool water clean for healthy swimming.

- **Water from natural resources**
  Drinking untreated water, such as creek water, bore water and sometimes even rainwater can lead to illnesses including gastroenteritis.

- **Water quality in tanks, bores and dams**
  Make sure your private drinking water supply is safe.

- **Wood fires and breathing problems**
  The smoke from wood fires can affect air quality and may affect people's health.

**Food quality and safety**

- **Avoid food poisoning - Cook Safe (video)**
  Learn how to prepare and cook food safely at home.

- **Avoid food poisoning - Store Safe (video)**
  Learn how to store food safely in your fridge at home.

- **Eggs**
  The humble egg is a powerhouse of nutritional goodness. Eggs are full of things your body needs. They are a great source of protein, antioxidants, vitamins and...
• Minerals (such as vitamin A, vitamin D,)

• Fishing - eat your catch with care
  People who fish in the Lower Yarra and Maribyrnong rivers need to be careful about eating their catch because of the risk of chemical exposure.

• Food allergy and intolerance
  Food allergy is an immune response, while food intolerance is a chemical reaction.

• Food - pesticides and other chemicals
  Chemicals such as pesticides, antibiotics and hormones are used to boost food production and ensure adequate food supply.

• Food poisoning - prevention
  You can minimise the risk of food poisoning by taking simple precautions.

• Food safety and storage
  High-risk food should be kept at 5 °C or below, and above 60 °C to avoid the temperature danger zone and food poisoning.

• Travel health and safety tips (slide show)
  We all love travelling to new and exotic places, but unfortunately illnesses and unforeseen events can ruin the trip of a lifetime. With a little effort, take a few of these simple precautions to make...

Technology and man-made risks

• Asbestos and your health
  When asbestos fibres become airborne, people working with asbestos may inhale particles which remain in their lungs.

• Cancer and asbestos
  Long-term exposure to asbestos is a cause of lung cancer and other serious illnesses.

• Electromagnetic fields (EMF) and health issues
  The effect of electromagnetic fields (EMF) from power lines and other sources is a controversial issue.

• Legionnaires' disease
  Legionnaires' disease is a rare form of pneumonia.

Bushfires, floods and extreme weather

• After a flood – animal and insect related hazards
  When returning to a flood-affected area, remember that wild animals, including rats, mice, snakes or spiders, may be trapped in your home, shed or garden.

• After a flood – returning home safely
  When returning to your home after a flood, take precautions to reduce the possibility of injury, illness or disease.

• Bushfire aftermath - safety tips
  Houses, sheds and other buildings or structures burnt in a bushfire can leave potential health hazards.

• Bushfire preparation advice
  Being prepared for a bushfire helps you cope better in an emergency.

• Bushfires and water tanks
  Debris, smoke, ash and dead animals from a bushfire can contaminate water tanks.

• Bushfire smoke
  Bushfire smoke can reduce air quality in rural and urban areas, and may affect people's health.

• Cleaning up ash after a fire
  After a fire, many homes may be affected by ash residue from smoke. This ash can be harmful, particularly for children or people with heart or lung conditions. This factsheet has tips and advice for.

• Emergencies - floods
  You and your family should work out an emergency plan in case of flood.

• Extreme heat (video)
Extreme heat can affect anyone, including the young and healthy...

- **Heat stress and heat-related illness**
  Heat kills more Australians than any natural disaster. Find out how you can treat and prevent heat-related illness.

- **How to cope and stay safe in extreme heat**
  Know the effects of extreme heat, who is at risk and how you can prepare yourself and others.

- **Mould and your health**
  The way to control indoor mould growth is to control the source of moisture.

- **Sewage overflows at home**
  Sewage contains harmful microorganisms such as bacteria, viruses and protozoa.

- **Smoke from planned burns**
  Bushfire smoke can reduce air quality in rural and urban areas, and may affect people’s health. Planned burns are an important part of reducing the risk of bushfires.

- **Survive the heat**
  How to cope and stay safe in extreme heat.

**Climate change**

- **Beaches and water quality**
  Water quality of natural water sources, such as beaches and rivers, can vary greatly. Keeping a lookout for poor water quality (such as water that is discoloured, murky or smells unpleasant) will help.

- **Climate change and health**
  The effects of climate change will have a serious impact on the physical and mental health of people around the world.

- **Climate change - what you can do**
  There are many things you can do to tackle climate change and live a more sustainable lifestyle.

- **Edible gardens - saving water**
  Saving water in the garden not only saves money, but also helps protect the environment.

- **Urban flash floods - FAQs**
  Urban flash flooding can happen quickly and without warning. Heavy rain causes runoff to collect in dips, car parks and roads, and there is a risk of contamination, injury and disease.

**Public health and disease control**

- **Disease clusters**
  Disease clusters are rare but can cause community concern about the possible effects of exposure to environmental hazards.

- **Harmful algal blooms**
  Some types of blue-green algae produce toxins that can harm humans and animals when swallowed, inhaled or touched. People and pets should not enter the water at locations affected by blue-green algae.

- **Healthy swimming (video)**
  We can keep our pools safe, healthy, and most importantly fun.

- **Mosquitoes can carry diseases**
  You can reduce the risk of mosquito bites if you get rid of potential mosquito breeding sites around your home.

- **Mosquitoes - mozzie-proof your holiday a checklist**
  Use this simple checklist and take action to prevent mosquitoes from spoiling your holiday. Mosquitoes carry diseases be prepared and avoid mosquito bites.

- **Mosquitoes - protect your home a checklist**
  Use this simple checklist and take action to prevent mosquitoes from entering your home. The best protection from mosquito-borne diseases is to avoid mosquito bites.

- **Needlestick injury**
A needlestick injury means the skin is accidentally punctured by a used needle. Diseases that could be transmitted by a needle or needlestick injury include human immunodeficiency virus (HIV). ...
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