

## Revise, reuse, recycle: how to be a sustainable student

### Level 3 • Advanced

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*From cutting out beef to repairing old clothes, here are some tips for freshers who want to be green at university*

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- 1 As university doors opened in September for a new year, an estimated six million people across the world took to the streets in a historic week of climate action. The power of this youth-led uprising reflected the urgency for action on the environment. So what now? For freshers starting a new chapter at university, deciding how to live your life is vital. Here are some ideas for how you can be sustainable as a student.

#### Eating

- 2 What you put on your plate matters: nearly a quarter of all greenhouse gases come from agriculture, and most of those are from meat and dairy. Cutting out meat (if you're able to) is an easy way to reduce your carbon footprint, and you'll save money too.
- 3 A meat-free diet has been recommended as the "single-biggest way" an individual can reduce their impact on the planet. Meat and dairy consumption result in excessive land use, industrial emissions, methane, water use and deforestation.
- 4 Universities are now reacting to this: Goldsmiths in London has scrapped the sale of all beef products from its campus as it seeks to become carbon neutral by 2025. "The growing global call for organizations to take seriously their responsibilities for halting climate change is impossible to ignore," the university's warden, Frances Corner, said.
- 5 In 2019, scientists devised a planetary health diet, presenting a way to address the environmental (and health) impact of our food choices. It recommends the global average consumption of red meat should be cut by half, while vegetables, fruit, pulses and nuts should double.
- 6 Whatever you choose to eat, try to shop locally and seasonally. You'll most likely avoid the plastic packaging you find in supermarkets, and these products will have a lower carbon footprint. If

you have the space – even just a windowsill will do – try growing some of your own herbs or vegetables; it's amazing what you can get from just a window box planter. You can also reduce food waste by planning meals in advance, eating leftovers and sharing meals with friends.

#### Dressing

- 7 Forget fast fashion: keeping your clothes for as long as possible has much more than just monetary value. In the UK, clothing has the fourth-largest environmental impact after housing, transport and food. We throw away more than half of our fast-fashion items within less than a year.
- 8 So recycle your clothes, mend them or accessorize them. If you don't have those skills, see if there's a sewing society you could join, or head to a repair café where people mend clothes for free. Try clothes swaps with friends, and instead of buying new items, head to a charity or second-hand shop.
- 9 If you want to buy new clothes, says Ynes Patat, a fashion student at the University of Northampton, "look at brands that appeal to your style, but research to see if they have sustainable qualities, like Patagonia or Pact (they pride themselves on being organic, fair trade and eco-friendly). Even some high street stores are turning to more sustainable fashion."

#### Living

- 10 For some freshers, this will be your first time living alone, which means doing your own washing, cooking and cleaning. There are simple ways you can change your habits to live more sustainably. Wash your clothes at a lower temperature, and opt for a bamboo toothbrush or more eco-friendly sanitary products. Invest in a clothes horse so you stop using a tumble drier (you'll be surprised how much your energy bill goes down). When shopping, see if there's a zero-waste shop nearby – Sheffield students' union has opened a shop selling dried food, household products, toiletries and kitchenware all free from plastic packaging. Just turn up with your own container.
- 11 Of course, the easiest way to make a difference is to cut out flying. A return trip from Manchester to Berlin produces about 214 kg of CO<sub>2</sub>; there are 15 countries where the average person

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produces less CO<sub>2</sub> in a year. If you're planning a weekend away with new friends, try to travel by train or bus instead.

#### Campaigning

- 12 Individual actions matter, as they demonstrate commitment and provide an alternative to how we can live. But campaigning and activism are important, too. University campuses can be the perfect place for this: 91% of students are now concerned about climate change, according to a survey from the National Union of Students.
- 13 If you don't know where or how to start, see if there are any societies at your university like

Extinction Rebellion or UK Student Climate Network. Look at People and Planet's university league – where does your university rank, and what needs to change? Students of the Fossil Free campaign, for example, have brought on huge changes by calling on their institutions to divest from fossil fuels – and 76 UK universities have now committed to divest.

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