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Title	6 ways you and your family can take action now on climate change
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Publication date	2021-08-17
Original Citation	Mintz-Woo, K. (2021) '6 ways you and your family can take action now on climate change', RTÉ Brainstorm, 17 August. Available at: https://www.rte.ie/brainstorm/2021/0817/1241229-individuals-family-climate-change-action/ (Accessed: 18 August 2021)
Type of publication	Contribution to newspaper/magazine
Link to publisher's version	https://www.rte.ie/brainstorm/2021/0817/1241229-individuals-family-climate-change-action/
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Download date	2026-10-13 12:32:51
Item downloaded from	https://hdl.handle.net/10468/11753

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6 ways you and your family can take action now on climate change

Updated / Tuesday, 17 Aug 2021 09:48

"The good news is that there are many ways you and you family can contribute to fighting climate change." Photo: Getty Images

You have no doubt read already about the newest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report or perhaps you are thinking about how we can improve the world for our children or grandchildren. Whatever the reason, you might be someone who wants to know how you can contribute to fighting climate change, but aren't sure where to start. The good news is that there are many ways you can contribute—supported by research—and many could even save you money.

(1) Cut back on meat

One of the easiest ways to reduce your own emissions is to cut back on meat eating. Research found that a shift to a pescatarian (vegetarian with seafood) or fully vegetarian diet compared to conventional diets can reduce 45% or 55% (respectively) of agricultural emissions. Even reducing meat to weekends or one day a week can gain a large percentage of those emissions savings and, in most cases, save on grocery costs.

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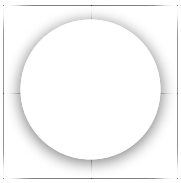

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From RTÉ Radio 1's Today show, Prof Jessica Fanzo and Eddie Punch of the ICSA discuss a Lancet report on reducing meat consumption

(2) Watch your food waste

You might not realise how much food goes wasted, but Project Drawdown estimates that roughly a third of the world's food is never eaten. That's both a waste of resources and a climate contributor, as uneaten food contributes to emissions at each point in production. The solution is simple: try to be conscious not to buy, cook, or order more than you need. Once again, doing this effectively could save you money as well.

(3) Limit driving and flying

Another way to reduce your emissions is to limit driving and flying. Cycle or walk when possible; reduce your flights (which in a Covid-19 contexts means fewer contacts as well). These decisions are amongst the most significant shifts individuals can make, as Seth Wynes and Kimberly A Nicholas found in their research. How significant? Living car-free can save the equivalent of 2.4 tons of carbon dioxide annually, while avoiding just *one* roundtrip transatlantic flight saves 1.6 tons—not to mention the cost and complexity of flying.

(4) Talk about climate change to others

Another free thing you can do is think and talk about climate change with others in your daily life. The climate scientist Katharine Hayhoe has argued that talking about climate

change—what it means for your community or for Ireland as a whole—makes it clear to others something already true: most people care about climate change and take it seriously. If you don't know how to talk about climate change, or want to learn more about it, she has produced a number of helpful videos.

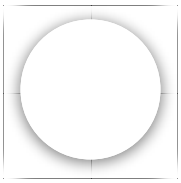
From TED, Katharine Hayhoe on why the most important thing you can do to fight climate change is to talk about it

But communicating your interest in climate change does not need to be limited to just talking in person. It can include voting for green policies, calling into radio shows or writing letters to the editor in response to articles. All of these can signal that you are a citizen who cares about this issue.

(5) Look around your home

When you are upgrading your house or replacing old appliances, making climate-smart choices for your house can make a massive difference in your climate impact. On a smaller scale, replace old incandescent light bulbs with CFL or LED lights. That might cost more now, but newer lights last longer and cost less in energy over time—and those energy savings are climate benefits.

For most people, air conditioners and refrigerators are a major contributor to their climate impact, since older appliances use something called "HFC refrigerant gases", which are extremely effective warming gases. If Irish consumers demand alternative chemicals like NH3, CO2 and N2, the coming shift from harmful appliances to climate-smart appliances can become easier for the country as a whole.



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From RTÉ Radio 1's Ryan Tubridy Show, Declan McElwaine from WEEE Ireland takes questions on common house appliance problems

(6) Support environmental groups

Even if you have limited time or energy to change your own behaviour, you can contribute to helping others do so by donating to effective environmental groups. There are several ways of thinking about effectiveness in environmental charities. For instance, you can select the best climate solutions and see which charities are working on those top solutions, such as the Coalition for Rainforest Nations for saving tropical forests, or Population Services International which empowers women and girls with respect to reproductive health—activities which come with climate benefits.

Or you can look at organisations which are effectively changing policy, where the Clean Air Task Force, which Founders Pledge (a charity evaluator) estimates prevents a ton of CO2 for something like €0.02-0.61 in donations. Another policy charity is Citizens' Climate Lobby, which is trying to bring carbon taxes—a policy we already successfully have here in Ireland—to the United States.

The Irish response to Covid-19 has been to care about protecting others, from wearing masks to getting vaccinated. These ways of contributing to fighting climate change will also contribute to protecting others—both around the world and those not yet born.

The views expressed here are those of the author and do not represent or reflect the

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