

## Protecting the Environment

Plastic Free July is a global movement that helps millions of people be part of the solution to plastic pollution – so we can have cleaner streets, oceans, and beautiful communities. In this article you'll find easy ways to reduce your plastic consumption.

### Takeaway coffee cups

Most coffee cups aren't recycled. By bringing your own reusable coffee cup, or taking the time to dine-in at your favourite café, you can make a huge difference.

#### **What you can do**

Choose to refuse single-use takeaway cups.

#### **How can you do it**

You can easily avoid takeaway coffee cups by bringing along your own reusable alternative. There are many reusable coffee cups available on the market. Keep it in your bag or on your desk at work; wherever you'll remember to use it. Many people choose socially and environmentally-friendly reusables made of ceramic, glass, plastic or stainless steel. You don't even need to purchase a special cup. You can bring a mug or jar from home – just be conscious of using items that can heat up or don't travel well if you're going far.

#### **The impact**

- Coffee cups are not recyclable in most locations. Even 'compostable' cups are rarely composted as they require very specific facilities and conditions.
- Bringing your own cup shows others how easy it is to reduce their waste and creates a new trend.

### Sanitary items

There are many fantastic and cost-effective alternatives to single-use tampons and pads, which can help you make a positive impact.

#### **What you can do**

Choose to refuse single-use tampons and pads.

#### **How you can do it**

These days, there are many reusable alternatives to single-use sanitary items. This includes the increasingly popular menstrual cups, which are made by numerous brands and can be purchased online and in many health stores and chemists. These cups are inserted like a tampon, and typically need to be emptied and cleaned out a couple of times a day. Period underwear and washable cotton pads and liners are also reusable alternatives, again with many brands available to choose from. These work more like pads, and can all be washed in the washing machine.

#### **Taking the next steps**

Choosing natural materials, and avoiding plastic based products such as microfibre, for reusable pads ensures a totally plastic free solution. There are also a range of social enterprise and ethical online stores that ensure sustainability benefits beyond reducing your plastic use.

#### **The impact**

- The packaging used for applicators, tampons, and sanitary pads all contain single-use plastics. A huge number of these are flushed down the toilet, blocking sewerage pipes and waste water treatment plants.
- Reduce the impact to wildlife by choosing to refuse these items. They can end up in our rivers and oceans and cause ingestion issues for animals.

## Dental care

You can go plastic-free with your dental care, by finding more sustainable alternatives to toothbrushes, toothpaste, and dental floss.

### What you can do

Choose to refuse single-use plastic dental products.

### How you can do it

More and more people are choosing toothbrushes made from sustainable, compostable materials, such as bamboo. Be aware though, bristles are usually still made from plastic, so you'll need to cut them off before composting or reusing your bamboo toothbrush handle. Purchasing a toothbrush with a replaceable head can eliminate the need to continually purchase a new plastic brush every few months, too. When it comes to toothpaste, many health and organic stores sell plastic-free alternatives. There are also recipes available online for making your own.

### Taking the next steps

Companies are starting to offer more and more plastic-free alternatives to dental floss, from the packaging to the actual product. The labelling can be confusing, but dental floss in cardboard or glass packaging with silk thread is generally plastic-free, while some dental floss made from bamboo fibre can contain polyester (a plastic fibre).

There are even vegan friendly dental floss options, available from many online specialists, switching silk for plant fibres and bees wax for plant oils.

### The impact

- Reduce plastic waste and the use of our natural resources in creating it.
- Prevent the chance of plastic waste entering into our natural surroundings, where it will stay forever.
- Protect our wildlife who can mistake plastic as food.

## Balloons & decorations

Swapping balloons and other single-use plastic party decorations for reusable and eco alternatives is the way to celebrate in style without having a devastating impact on the environment.

### What you can do

Choose to refuse balloons and other single-use plastic party decorations.

### How you can do it

With a little bit of creativity, you can easily plan a party that's free from balloons and other harmful single-use plastics. Popular decorations that can be reused time and time again, include bunting, tassels, tissue pom poms, lanterns, fresh flowers, and more. Having a theme for your party can help you to draw inspiration for making your own, borrowing or buying reusable party decorations. With crafting making a comeback, many people find it easy and fun to make decorations from old fabric and scrap paper, too. Friends and neighbours are a great source of reusable decorations or materials for that home-made creation. Before buying anything, simply put the word out and see what you can borrow. Many people use Facebook for finding decorations. Local groups – such as Buy Nothing – often have a bank of decorations available to share amongst the community.

### Taking the next steps

Your zero waste, plastic-free event is a great way to inspire others to celebrate without balloons and other harmful decorations. As the alternatives catch on you can start to advocate for your community to join those that already ban the release of balloons. You can add your voice to a local group or start a petition at your school, workplace, club, or neighbourhood.

### This is a great time to switch to popular alternatives to other single-use plastic party items, such as:

- Swapping glitter for confetti made out of dried leaves.
- Choosing paper lolly bags by sourcing treats from the bulk food store, or make gifts of crayons, chalk, seeds, plants, second hand books, and homemade playdough.
- Disposable cups/ plates/ cutlery are easily replaced by reusable items borrowed from neighbours or friends. People who have a lot of parties often invest in reusable bamboo sets.
- Choosing to refuse single-use plastic water bottles can be as simple as filling a water jug or dispenser from the tap.
- Opting for paper straws or reusable ones made from metal, glass, or bamboo.

### The impact

Celebrating without disposable plastics is a great way to empower others to care:

- Plastics, including balloons and glitter, are easily blown down drains, into rivers and our oceans where they remain in the environment forever, even 'biodegradable' latex balloons.
- Balloons are a choking hazard and can be fatal to children and animals.
- Helium is a precious resource, needed for medical procedures, so it's important to save it wherever possible.

### Bulk food shopping

Often pre-packaged food and drinks can be avoided by shopping at a bulk food store or choosing the loose option at the grocery store.

### What you can do

Choose to refuse groceries that use single-use plastic packaging.

### How you can do it

From produce to cereal, drinks to snacks, the shelves of grocery stores can be filled to the brim with plastic packaging. When beginning your plastic-free journey, this might have become alarmingly apparent to you.

Bulk and loose foods can offer a solution to this. Many people keep a shopping list and visit their bulk food store just once a month, to stock up on items such as flour, nuts, dishwashing liquid and more, in a way that doesn't use single-use plastic. Most bulk food stores and many general stores have paper bags that you can fill, or you can bring your own reusable produce bags, containers, and glass jars. You, or the counter assistant, can weigh your container before you fill it, so that you're only paying for the product, not the weight of your container.

### Taking the next steps

As well as making your local bulk food store part of your routine shopping habits, many people head along to bakeries, butchers, delis and fishmongers, too. Remembering to bring your own container to these retailers will help them to wrap your purchase without single-use plastic.

### The impact

- Choosing bulk and loose product will help you to avoid food waste by buying only what you need.
- Reduce waste and pollution by avoiding plastic packaging.
- Protect our wildlife who can mistake plastic as food.

### Useful sources & Information:

Some of the information sourced for this article was originally published by Plastic Free July® If you would like to access this and further information in more detail please follow the links below –

[www.plasticfreejuly.org](http://www.plasticfreejuly.org)

### How can Care first help?

If you feel you may need some emotional or practical support, you can contact Care first on the Freephone number. Care first is a leading provider of confidential, professional counselling, information and advice services. Whilst our BACP accredited Counsellors are available 24/7 to provide support with emotional issues, our expertly trained Information Specialists are also available 8am-8pm Monday-Friday to provide advice on any practical issues that may be causing you a stress or worry and help you feel more in control of a situation.

All employees are eligible to use Care first, our services include; telephone counselling, information services and online support. Call Care first on the Freephone number provided by your organisation and you can speak to a professional in confidence.