

Penguin  Readers

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How To Give Up Plastic



Simple steps to living
consciously on our
blue planet

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INTRODUCTION

In the last few years, people have become extremely worried about the problem of **plastic pollution**. We read about it in newspapers, and we hear **politicians** talking about it. Famous people **encourage** us to buy **products** that are good for the environment. Tens of millions of people around the world watched *Blue Planet II*, David Attenborough's TV series. They were shocked to see a bird feeding pieces of plastic to its babies because it thought that the plastic was food. We visit our favourite beach or we walk along a river and we see plastic in the water. The problem of plastic affects us all.

When I was on a Greenpeace ship in the Antarctic, we were many hundreds of kilometres from any towns or cities, but we found **tiny** pieces of plastic in the ocean. I and other Greenpeace workers were sad but not shocked because we already knew that plastic is everywhere.

I have been a campaigner against plastic for years and the most common question people ask me is "What can I do to help?" *How to Give Up Plastic* helps you **get rid of** plastic in your own life. It also gives you information about the problem and teaches you how to encourage others – friends, family, businesses and politicians – to use less plastic.

Usually, when I talk about plastic in this book, I mean single-use plastics – that is, plastics that are used once and

then thrown away, often taking centuries to **break down**. They include plastic bags, **straws**, coffee cups and plastic **packaging**.

We must remember that plastic is not always bad. Some people need it, for example if they are **disabled** and can only drink through a straw. But plastic is everywhere and it is a big problem for the oceans. If we continue like this there will be more plastic in the ocean than fish by 2050. So we have to do something because we all share **responsibility** for this problem. This book shows you how you can help. Each of us can make a big difference in the fight against plastic. We can use less plastic in our homes and, even more importantly, we can work with other people to try to change how our **communities** think about plastic.

**We all share responsibility
for this problem.**

MY TOP FIVE TIPS FOR GETTING RID OF PLASTIC

1 **Go shopping.** Why am I telling you to get rid of plastic by going shopping? Because there are some things you need for a plastic-free life: a nice water bottle, a **reusable** coffee cup, a reusable bag for your shopping, a lunch box and some kitchen **containers**.

2 Check what plastic you already have in your house.

Look in your bathroom, your bedroom and your kitchen. Find products with **microbeads** in and single-use plastics like cutlery (knives, forks and spoons) or straws. What should you do with them? You could send them back to the shop with a message: "In my house, we don't use single-use plastic any more."

3 Talk to people. Tell friends and family that you are trying to stop using plastic and encourage them to do the same.

4 Make a plan and write it down. Living without plastic needs planning. Which shops near you use less plastic? Can you stop buying takeaway food? This is when you buy food to take away with you and it usually comes in lots of plastic packaging. Make your own lunch instead.

5 Start a plastic-free campaign. Go and talk to businesses that use too much plastic, and ask your friends or a parent to join you (see note on page 4). Ask questions like "Why do you use plastic cutlery and single-use coffee cups?"

CHAPTER ONE

A short history of fighting plastic

Banning microbeads and plastic bags

A few years ago, nobody had heard of microbeads but now people all around the world want to **ban** them. They are tiny plastic balls, less than 5mm wide, which are in many products, like **shower gel** and **toothpaste**. These microbeads go into our lakes and oceans when we wash them down the **drain**. For example, in Lake Ontario in Canada and the United States of America, there are around 1.1 million microbeads for every square kilometre. The Americans were shocked by this and they banned microbeads.

Greenpeace is famous for trying to help the environment, so in 2016, Greenpeace UK started a **petition** against microbeads. Customers were angry because they had not realized that the beads were in many of the products they used. Hundreds of thousands of people signed the petition and in 2018, microbeads were banned in the UK.

But these were not the first plastic **bans**. In 2002, Bangladesh became the first country to ban plastic bags. And since 2015, shoppers in the UK have to pay a small price for every plastic bag, which has **reduced** the number of plastic bags used by more than 95%.

Plastic bottles

Many people are angry about plastic bottles. They understand that it is silly to buy a bottle of water or **fizzy drink** and then throw the bottle away after only one use. Still, just in Britain, we use thirty-five million plastic bottles every day and less than half of those bottles are **recycled**.

Coca-Cola is the world's largest producer of plastic bottles, making over 100 billion a year. If you put all those bottles in a line, they would go around the Earth nearly 700 times. Too many of the bottles we use go into our rivers and oceans.

What can we do about this? The first thing we must do is reduce the number of them. Even the best recycling system in the world cannot recycle all our plastic **waste** because there is too much. Companies that make the bottles must find ways to help. For example, they could **produce** drinks **fountains** or bottles that customers can **refill**.

Next, there are deposit schemes – you pay a little extra for the bottle and then get that money back when you return the bottle to the shop. In Germany and Norway, where they have deposit schemes, over 90% of plastic bottles are returned and recycled.

Another thing that companies can do is increase the amount of recycled plastic in their bottles. Lots of companies now realize that they must do something to get rid of plastic, and that is great. Usually, people do not listen to campaigners but it seems that everyone is worried about plastic. If we all work together, huge changes are possible.

Taking responsibility

I started to **campaign** on plastic pollution with Greenpeace because I could see that most other campaigns made ordinary people feel guilty about how much plastic they use. But this is not fair because it is nearly impossible to stop using plastic completely. Companies are producing too much plastic; politicians are not making **them** take responsibility and some of the plastic in your nearest supermarket cannot be recycled. So, although **we** can each do something to help, ordinary people cannot take all the responsibility.

Ordinary people cannot take all the responsibility.

Sharing the responsibility between ordinary people, companies and **governments** from all countries is fair and also the only way to reduce plastic.

Who are you?

I'm Luke Massey from Greenpeace. I work to help the oceans.

Why do you care about plastic so much?

It makes me sad to see the **effects** of plastic pollution on animals. We have to stop throwing everything away and reduce our **footprint** on the Earth.