

Reducing Plastic Pollution Requires Habit Change

I wake up to a sunny morning, and I immediately fall into my daily routines. Have breakfast, brush my teeth, do homework. Almost everything I touch is made of plastic. The cap to my toothpaste, the keyboard for my computer, the plate I eat from. As I go through the habits that I've practiced for years, I never would have stopped to think just how much plastic is around us, until recently, when I heard of this notion of "plastic pollution".

It's amazing how long I've gone without knowing plastic is actually a problem in our world. I'm days away from turning thirteen, and I've probably touched a million pieces of plastic in my lifetime. It's not like I didn't know plastic existed. I was well aware that a lot of the things I relied on were made of the material. Unfortunately, I hadn't stopped to think about where all that plastic went after throwing it out.

I began to research more about this durable material that was apparently causing a problem. Plastic is impacting the environment around us. Our food chain is delicately balanced: if one species were out of place, the whole thing would fall apart, eventually affecting us humans.

Plastic is made to last so that we can use it repeatedly. Ironically, the average plastic bag is only used for five minutes. It's not biodegradable, which means bacteria can't decompose it like food waste. Instead, it slowly degrades into tiny pieces that still cause harm to the environment. Plastic is often swallowed by animals mistakenly thinking it's food, potentially resulting in their death. Since plastic can take up to a thousand years to fully break down, and burning them isn't an option due to harmful toxins that are released in the process, most of the plastic that has been produced is still on our Earth in some form.

Since plastic is such a problem, why hasn't the problem been solved? Shouldn't plastic production be discontinued? Unfortunately, the answer isn't that simple. Plastic is so integrated into our lifestyle, giving it up would mean taking away the things we rely on each day. To tackle the issue, we must first address the plastic that we are using everyday, especially the disposable kind that ends up in landfills and oceans, where it damages our environment. When considering my daily plastic use, I realized that I used the same plastics often, like my computer or plate. I decided to look at disposable plastic first, because this kind of plastic is more likely to end up in landfills.

I started monitoring the plastic I used everyday. I kept record of it, and also made a note of when I did or didn't recycle my plastic. I found that I used about four disposable plastic products (any kind of product made of plastic or packaged with it) everyday, and only recycled a third of what I could have recycled. After noticing this, I decided to try harder to recycle, and come up with alternatives for the plastic that I use. I did much better the second time, and after a week I saw that I was recycling more consistently. For the last week of my test, I tried to drastically reduce the amount of plastic I used each day. At the end of the week, I used an average of two plastic products per day. Monitoring the amount of plastic I used each day helped me be more aware of it, and I made more of a conscious effort to reduce that amount. But this wouldn't solve the problem. I needed to look at other people as well, and how they viewed plastic use in our world.

I created a survey that a total of 124 people took. I asked questions like, "How much plastic do you think you use?" and, "Do you think you're using the same types of plastic everyday?" Many of the results that came back said the same thing: people weren't always aware of the plastic around them, but almost all of them said plastic was harmful for our environment. What I also found interesting is that ninety-nine people said they use the same plastics regularly, everyday. This is similar to what I found

out when monitoring my plastic usage: that we use the same plastic products because they are part of our daily routines. I realized this could lead to a potential solution. If we were all aware of the plastic we used, and specifically targeted the plastic we use regularly, we could change our habits and reduce the amount going in landfills.

There are many alternatives to plastic that are available in our world. Options like stainless steel water bottles and fabric bags instead of their plastic counterparts are easy switches and can save money, too. So why don't we all use them? The problem is that we often forget, because our habits kick in, and starting new habits is challenging. But if we all tried to change even one step in our routines, it would mean reducing plastic usage drastically. Also, as consumers, we can choose to buy products using little plastic or none at all. Subsequently, manufacturers will be forced to use less plastic in their products.

Imagine that plastic pollution isn't a problem. There is no plastic in oceans. Landfills aren't mountains in the distance. There is more wildlife that isn't getting choked by plastic poison. It would be a better world, one that may happen if we all choose to be aware and change our habits. We can't solve a problem if we are adding to it at the same time. If we could get to the point where we're not using any plastic at all, and stop plastic production, then we can deal with the plastic that's already on our Earth. After all, if all good things must come to an end, and plastic doesn't have an end, then how is it good?

Works Cited:

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Link To My Survey:

- https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSew_sSRnaW9ycurvXP7KwTFCBRJkqnY_7CmkfeXGRTSy80HxA/viewform?usp=sf_link