

1. **Use reusable grocery bags.** According to No Impact Man, Colin Beavan, humans trash four to five trillion plastic bags worldwide. They are the world's most ubiquitous consumer item, leaving stores in quantities hundreds of times greater than any other piece of merchandise. Humans recycle these bags at a rate of less than one percent, and when trashed, they either burned in incinerators and poison the air, leach BPA and other chemicals into the soil, or wind up floating for hundreds of years in the ocean.

Plastic shopping bags are incredibly wasteful and totally unnecessary. The solution? Bring your own bags with you, especially to the grocery store. I have used the three bags below for every one of my grocery trips in the last year, keeping tons of plastic bags out of the trash.

2. **Don't use individually packaged items.** Items that are individually wrapped require more packaging per product than items sold in large quantities. Anything travel-sized, miniature, or single-serving have a much lower product to packaging ratio and will produce more waste per use than larger items. Stay away from things like Kraft singles, hotel bottles of shampoos (don't bring a handful home with you!), single-serving peanut butter packets, etc.

3. **Shop bulk bins.** This is the opposite of #2; bulk bins allow you to bring home a lot of product with minimal packaging. I buy my oats, rice, nuts, cocoa powder, coconut flakes, dried fruit and quinoa from bulk bins. It's ideal to have your own cloth baggies to reuse, but even if you have to use the plastic bags provided in the bulk aisle, it's almost always better and less wasteful than the packaging a food company would use.

4. **Reuse Ziploc baggies.** While Ziploc baggies are not environmentally friendly in any way, I bet that most people still have a stash of them in their kitchens. There's no point in throwing them away, so if you have them, you might as well use them – efficiently. Keep one bag as your sandwich bag for the week (or multiple weeks), and instead of dropping it in the trash once you've eaten your daily sandwich, *bring it back home with you.* Rinse it if it got dirty, air it out, and use it the next day. Delegate several bags to different types of foods and make them last! You would be surprised at how many uses you can get out of one baggie.

5. **Stop buying plastic Tupperware.** Along the same lines as Ziplocs, I would bet that most of us have plastic Tupperware at home. While it may not make sense for your family to immediately recycle or give them all away, make it a point to not purchase any more.

Heating plastic causes it to release harmful BPA 55 times faster than normal, contaminating your food with chemicals, so I don't like to do any reheating in Tupperware. I am very slowly transitioning to glass storage containers. I started by saving glass salsa and spaghetti sauce jars – I take my oatmeal to work in glass jars, I

use them to store beans and grains and sauces at home, and I recently started making cucumber water in them!

6. (For ladies) use the bag you're already carrying. I can't count the number of times I've run into a store for a quick one or two item trip and have not needed a plastic bag because of my large purse. I know it is almost instinctual for employees at the checkout to drop your purchases into a bag, but for *so many* shopping trips, you don't need a bag. If you are simply going into Target to buy a new toothbrush, walking to your car, and then carrying the toothbrush from your car into your house, do you really need a bag? And if you needed to buy several items, say several toiletries that would be awkward to carry in your hands, carry some or all of the items in your purse.

*On the note of instinctual bagging, if the cashier drops your single toothbrush into a bag before you've had a chance to tell him/her you don't need a bag, simply fish it out and leave the plastic bag hanging on the rack! Just because he/she gave you a bag, doesn't mean you have to take it.

7. Don't buy drinks in plastic bottles. 60 billion single-use drink containers were purchased in 2006, and 75% of them were thrown into the trash directly after one use. Besides possibly leaching BPA and polychlorinated biphenyls(PCBs) into your drink, plastic bottles take a lot of time, energy and resources to break down.

If you're buying bottled water, buy no more! The majority of tap water in America is safer and held to more stringent tests than bottled water, and it's *free*. Buying bottled water is a waste of your money and a waste of natural resources. If you're buying another drink in a plastic bottle, I'm going to guess it's not that good for you, anyway. (Think soda, juice, sugary sports drinks...) And if you're stuck on plastic bottles because of convenience, train yourself to keep a reusable water bottle with you at your desk, in your car, or wherever you frequent; you will save both money and your health.

8. Bag your trash more efficiently. Yes, the garbage bag in which you dump your trash is garbage, too. Make sure you fill your trash bags all the way up before taking them out. This will ensure you are being as efficient as possible with them and are not creating excess, unnecessary waste in the form of your bag. Also, if you live in a place where you can dispose of trash piece by piece, consider not using bags and just emptying your can right into the dumpster. Finally, consider using biodegradable bags to further reduce your plastic consumption.

9. Stop accepting plastic utensils. An estimated 40 billion plastic utensils are used every year in the United States, and the majority of them are thrown away after just one use. At work, I keep two sets of plastic utensils and reuse them every day. I keep one spoon for my oatmeal at breakfast, a fork for my lunch, and a knife for anything

that needs cutting. I wash them in the break room sink after each use, and they have lasted for months! If I ever pick up food during the work day, I don't accept plastic utensils – I just wait until I get back to my desk to use the ones I already have.

10. Think before you get your coffee in a to-go cup. Because of the inner plastic layer of Starbucks' paper to-go cups, they are not recyclable in most paper recycling systems. Three billion of Starbucks' paper cups alone are thrown into landfills each year. And while the company's plastic to-go cups are recyclable, they still require energy to be produced, energy to be broken down, and are often thrown in the trash anyway when someone can't easily find a recycle bin. So, it's best to bring your own reusable mug wherever you go for coffee.

11. Don't use plastic produce bags. Those pull-and-rip bags near the fruits and vegetables at the grocery store? You don't need 'em. It's totally fine to drop produce that you're going to peel anyway (like bananas and oranges) right in the bottom of your cart. I'll even drop things like apples and peaches into my basket without bags, because I wash them thoroughly at home anyway. For anything that absolutely requires a bag (like grapes, broccoli, or bulk grains), consider these reusable options.

12. Buy from the farmers market. One very noticeable different between farmers markets and conventional grocery stores is the lack of packaged foods. At every farmers market I've been to, food is sold at open-air stands, and nothing comes in a box, plastic bag, or shrink-wrapped package. This means a lot of great things for your health (no preservatives necessary for farmers market food!), but it also means less of an environmental impact. And instead of using the plastic bags often provided by the farmers, bring your own canvas bags to make your trip *totally* plastic free.

13. Stop using straws. Now that you know a little more about plastic and its harmful chemical make-up, do you really want to slurp your drinks through a tube of potentially hormone-disrupting BPA? Hopefully not. But McDonalds alone still passes out about 60 million straws per day. They are all used one time and tossed into the trash. That huge number, combined with all of the other fountain drink serving restaurants, adds up to an immense amount of plastic waste just in the form of straws each day. Start saying no to straws at restaurants, and if you like to use them at home, consider glass or stainless steel.

14. Buy bar soap instead of body wash. Bar soap usually has much less packaging in general than body wash, and it never requires a big plastic bottle. Bar soap is typically less expensive per wash than liquid soap, so you'll save some money with this switch, too! This rule applies for other bath and beauty products; if you can buy a product not sold in a plastic bottle or dispenser, opt for that product!