

Many of my patients have expressed an interest in "going more green", but they don't know where to start, so I have generated a list of suggestions that may make a difference in the size of your carbon footprint in 2010. It is time to proclaim your *Green Year's Resolution*.

1. Eliminate the water bottles that enter the landfill/recycling centers. I was amazed when I evaluated how many half-liter bottles I was using per week for a family of 4. I went through at least two packs of 24 bottles, or 48 bottles per week. Even with my best efforts, not all 48 would make it into my recycling bin. So, this year, vow to purchase a stainless steel liter-sized water bottle for each member of the family, choose their favorite colors for easy identification. Wash and air them out every night, refill them every morning. Most employers have water coolers where the bottle can be refilled later on in the day. Make water your primary beverage. The eight 8 -oz glasses per day is still a good base line for hydration.

2. Re-evaluate your shopping habits to eliminate excess packaging. Buy in bulk to avoid excess shrink-wrap, Styrofoam and small bottles. The individual serving packaged foods sure are convenient, for example pre-portioned 1.5 oz trail mix or 100 calorie packs. Small packages are easier to grab and go, but think about how much additional packaging is going into the landfill. Consider buying in bulk and portioning out an individual serving into reusable containers. The bulk foods will contain a nutrition label that will identify a serving size. This will reduce the amount of packaging and also re-acquaint oneself with what a serving size of that food product is.

3. Eliminate lunch bags (paper and plastic). Purchase a reusable lunch bag and reusable containers with lids for each family member. Again, consider this, a family of 4 (2 full time employed parents and 2 school age children) will use 20 paper sacks and approximately 80 plastic bags per week if they pack 4 food items in plastic bags per paper bagged meal (sandwich, sliced fruit, chips, cookies). There are many reusable lunch bag or box style totes that may even include a set of reusable food containers.

4. Recycle your food scraps. Much of your kitchen waste may be composted in backyard compost piles and used to enrich your garden soil. Food items that I presently compost are; coffee grinds and unbleached coffee filters, egg shells, fruit and vegetable peelings, trimmings, and cores, leaves, grass trimmings and shredded newspaper. Search online or visit your public library for resources that outline the steps to composting.

5. Run your dishwasher more efficiently. Using the light setting instead of the heavy wash or air drying dishes instead of using heat will reduce the amount of energy used to run the dishwasher. Also, skipping the pre-rinse cycle will save on average 20 gallons of water per load.

6. Use glass to store and reheat foods. Plastic containers may contain petroleum, which is a non-renewable resource. Plus, there has been some research possibly indicating that reheating in plastic may release toxins into the food. Glass may be used safely for storage as well reheating.

7. Heat only what you need. Use a microwave or toaster oven to heat individual servings of food items. Heating the stove or oven will take much more energy than needed. Use an electric kettle rather than a cook top kettle to heat water.

8. Set up a recycling station. Encourage all family members to recycle by preparing a special location for all recycling items. Familiarize yourself with the items accepted by your recycling program. Plastic items for recycling are usually identified by the number inside the recycling triangle imprinted on the bottom of each item. Generally # 1 (high density polyethylene, HDPE) and #2 (polyethylene terephthalate, PETE) are accepted for recycling in most communities. A # 3 represents a plastic item that contains PVC (polyvinyl chloride, and this is generally not accepted because it is made of vinyl, which is a cancer-causing chemical and it forms as a byproduct a potent carcinogen dioxin, during production and incineration.

This list is not inclusive of all the changes that you can make to decrease the damage made to Mother Earth, it is just a small compilation of what I have tried to practice this past year, and I would like to share my ideas with you.

Here's to wishing you a Healthy & Happy 2010

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