

THE CHALLENGE

“For months I meant to start a week without buying any plastic. But weeks came and went, and I hadn’t begun. Why was I so worried about giving it up? It was because of the effort it takes to do it. And that sums up our relationship with plastic as a nation, as a species. It is just laziness.

“If we want something, we nip to the shop and buy it. It takes no thinking about. But mostly everything we buy is wrapped or protected by plastic – bananas in plastic bags, doughnuts in a plastic box, milk in a plastic carton. I discovered it was not just about effort or planning.

So just how much extra would I pay to be environmentally friendly? A lot.



CLASS CHAT
Have you ever taken a challenge, or tried to give up anything? Did you succeed?

SARAH'S PLASTIC-FREE DIARY

DAY ONE

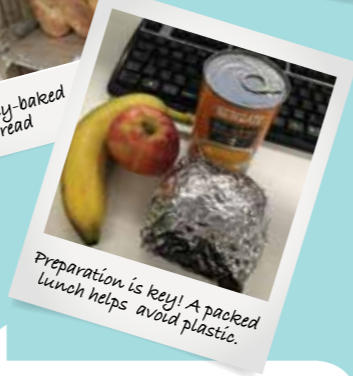
“On Sunday I popped into* Lidl¹ to buy some things for the week – my first real test! I had my trolley* ready. Fruit and veg were first – but it soon turned out these were almost the only plastic-free foods I could buy – I loaded them in cardboard boxes. I bought bananas, tomatoes, courgettes*, and whatever else I could get my hands on ... It looked like it was going to be a VERY healthy week for me.”



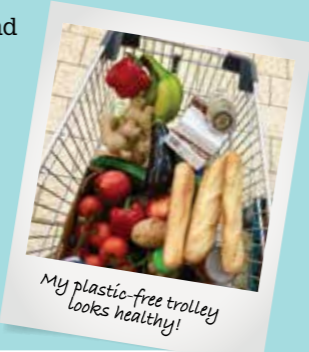
Freshly-baked bread



Who needs plastic bottles when you can have a pint glass?



Preparation is key! A packed lunch helps avoid plastic.



My plastic-free trolley looks healthy!

CLASS CHAT

Why do you think food / drink not covered in plastic is healthier? What does this tell you about the packaging of unhealthy food?

DAY TWO

“I’m up at 5.30am and I make myself a green tea for breakfast. [Sarah can’t buy supermarket milk – it comes in a plastic carton.] I’ve already made my lunch, so I won’t have to pop to* the shop later and risk buying anything plastic-coated. I’m feeling confident, but I know this week isn’t going to be easy.”

DAY THREE

“I researched where I could go for plastic-free things later in the week. A friend told me about a local organic* farm community ... I ordered a large vegetable box and it came to £15.50. “[The owner] Bill Knight told me all about their plastic-free options – but why they use plastic bags for the salad: salad leaves go limp* very quickly as water evaporates* from them, so a plastic bag means they’re still fresh by the time you get them. In the bag they can last for maybe a week, out of the bag they last a day or two.”



A fresh box of healthy veggies!

CLASS CHAT

As a Brit, how would you expect Sarah to take her regular cup of tea? Why did Sarah have a green tea?

CLASS CHAT

Would you eat anything that wasn’t fresh to avoid buying it in plastic?

DAY FOUR

“I woke up at 6am and eagerly went outside to get my glass- bottled milk ... I felt oddly nostalgic* picking off the corner of the foil lid. “I went to the market to see what I could get there. The butcher suggested some chicken breasts and I bought some mincemeat* to make a spag bol* tomorrow – all wrapped in paper. No plastic wasted!”

CLASS CHAT

What other food products come in bottles, tins or wrapped in paper?

DAY FIVE

“My plastic-free week has mainly revolved around* food. I haven’t had the need to buy anything else – like toilet paper. But today was that day ... I had no idea what to do. All the toilet roll in the supermarkets is covered in plastic. I turned to Twitter for help. And it delivered*. A website would send it wrapped in paper. But what would normally cost me about £1 each at the market came to a whopping* £13.55! ... And

there was no delivery date. Someone suggested I steal some napkins from McDonald’s!”

CLASS CHAT

How much extra would you be willing to pay for something that was environmentally friendly?

DAY SIX

“Today I went to a vegan restaurant in the city centre for a birthday party and glanced* at the refrigerator to see what plastic-free drink options I could choose from. I went for a Cola, in a glass bottle with a metal lid. “Of course, I couldn’t guarantee everything in my vegan burger didn’t come in plastic, but I couldn’t very well ask the waitress, ‘Is this meal vegan AND plastic-free?’ now, could I?”



At the local market



Glass-bottled milk

CLASS CHAT

Are you willing to change your or your parents’ ‘plastic’ buying habits? How would you do it?

PRACTISE LANGUAGE LAB
Online Learning Unit on this article
www.mg-plus.net/langlab

WORDWISE

landfill (n): a site where rubbish and waste are dumped and often buried
to nip to (v, inf): to go somewhere quickly

particle (n): a tiny portion of something
to pop to (v, inf): to go somewhere quickly, as in ‘nip’

trolley (n): a shopping cart on wheels
courgette (n): a long thin vegetable with dark green skin

organic (adj): produced without artificial chemicals
to go limp (v): to go soft
to evaporate (v): to disappear into air

nostalgic (adj): sentimental feelings about the past

mincemeat (n): finely chopped beef, often used in burgers
spag bol (n, Brit): spaghetti Bolognese, in a tomato sauce
to revolve around (v): to have something as a main subject of interest

to deliver (v): in this use, to give a result that is promised
whopping (adj): very large
to glance (v): to take a quick look at something
to strike (one) as (v): to make you think about something
fundamentally (adj): in a basic and important way
to mount (v): to increase, to grow

PLASTIC STATISTICS

300
MILLION TONNES

More than 300 million tonnes of plastic are produced worldwide every year.

ALMOST EVERY PIECE OF PLASTIC EVER MADE STILL EXISTS
– natural forces in the environment can’t break down plastic particles.

Half of all plastics are used once then thrown away – these end up in landfills* or oceans.

50%

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