

# Eco-friendly lifestyle can be bad for your health

Many people live an eco-friendly lifestyle in an effort to protect the planet and preserve it for generations to come. Simply taking small strides on an individual level can add up to measurable change collectively.

Although individuals may forge ahead with environmentally conscious plans to reduce, reuse and recycle, they may not know that some changes could potentially prove harmful to their health. Recognizing these potential health hazards and how to avoid them can benefit both the planet and the people who want to protect it.

## Reusable bags

Avoiding plastic shopping bags in favor of reusable cloth totes is a popular eco-friendly trend. Many types of plastic are not biodegradable, and tote bags help keep millions of plastic bags from ending up in landfills. Reusable totes also tend to be stronger and more durable than flimsy plastic.

But without frequent washing, reusable totes can harbor harmful bacteria. According to microbiologists at the University of Arizona in Tucson, almost all reusable bags tested in one of their studies had large numbers of fecal bacteria, which can come from toting fresh produce and meat. Bacteria can increase exponentially if the bags are allowed to sit in warm cars or trunks.

The solution is to wash reusable tote bags with hot

water and detergent regularly to remove any bacterial residue. Choose cloth bags that will stand up to repeated washings.

## Water bottles

Ditching disposable water bottles for reusable alternatives is an easy way to eliminate scores of plastic bottles from going in the trash. Such a switch also reduces energy output to recycle old plastic and turn it into new bottles.

But it's important that reusable bottles are cleaned thoroughly after each use. Bottles can hold on to germs, especially bottles with a spout or flip-up attached straw. Bacteria gets transferred from your hand every time you pull out the spout or straw, so select a water bottle that can be run through the dishwasher. The hot, steamy cycle will help sterilize the bottle after use and keep it clean and sanitary.

## Composting

Composting is a staple of green gardening. When done right, compost can add valuable nutrients to the soil and reduce waste from foods and yard clippings. When done in an irresponsible way, composting may do more harm than good.

A potential downside to composting is that the pile of decomposing food and plant matter will attract pests. Smaller pests can attract larger predators. Certain rodents can carry harmful diseases and pass

them on to people and pets through scratches or bites. Composting should be done in secured bins to keep pests away.

Putting the wrong scraps into compost also can create problems. Meat and other animal products, with the exception of eggshells, and human and pet feces are dangerous. These items tend to have more protein in them and can foster dangerous pathogens as they decompose, leading to disease and possibly even death.

## Reusable cloths

Everything from handkerchiefs to cleaning rags can be used to reduce reliance on disposable items. But while such items cut down on waste, without frequent laundering, these items can breed and transfer germs.

Routinely wash any reusable fabric cleaning or hygiene item in hot, soapy water to kill off pathogens. It's possible to get sick from eating off of dishes that were washed with a washcloth laden with bacteria. Soak washcloths in bleach and replace dishrags and towels every day or two.

Do not use hand towels or dish towels to wipe up spills around the kitchen. Designate cloths for cleaning and personal use.

Going green can help protect the planet, but men and women should ensure their attempts at going green are as beneficial to their own health as they are to that of the planet.

# Learn to tow cargo safely



The size and weight of a trailer and the cargo it's towing must be considered before embarking on a trip.

People from all over are preparing their vehicles for another season of road trips. In addition to packing the interior cargo areas full of equipment and luggage, many road-trippers also haul gear and recreational accessories with them.

There's more to towing than hitching a trailer and hitting the open road. A number of factors come into play when towing cargo or another vehicle, including the towing capacity of the vehicle doing the hauling. The following are some safety tips for road trippers hitting the road with trailer in tow.

## Tow vehicles

While many vehicles have towing capabilities, not all of those vehicles are necessarily right for the job. Review the towing capacities of various vehicles depending on the type of trailer that will be towed. A larger, more powerful vehicle may be necessary if you will be towing something large and heavy, such as a boat or a recreational vehicle. You may need more horsepower to maintain a safe driving speed when towing espe-

cially heavy cargo.

## Equipment

Different manufacturers offer towing packages equipped to work in concert with your vehicle. Towing packages may include certain types of hitches, batteries, flasher systems, extended-view side mirrors, and even special axles and tires. In many areas, a trailer with a loaded weight of more than 1,500 pounds requires a separate braking system and a breakaway switch located on the tongue of the trailer that activates the trailer brakes in the event it separates from the tow vehicle. Having the right equipment can mean the difference between safely towing cargo and getting in an accident.

## Ability

Having a lot of power and the right equipment is not enough to safely tow cargo. Recklessness on the road, which includes driving over the speed limit, is a recipe for an accident. It typically takes time and some practice for drivers to grow accustomed to driving while towing cargo. Driving while

towing cargo requires that drivers maneuver their vehicles differently than they would in more typical conditions, and that they drive at slower speeds while leaving room for a larger turning radius. In addition, drivers must accommodate for the extra weight when braking.

## Vehicle check

Verifying that the trailer hitch is secure is not the only inspection drivers must conduct before hitting the open road. The vehicle doing the towing should be serviced, and any repairs should be made. Check fluid levels, particularly the transmission fluid. In addition, make sure the water level in the battery is acceptable and have the motor oil changed if it is nearing its mileage limit. It's also a good idea to replace the air filter, examine the tires for adequate tread and test the brakes.

When the trip begins, give your vehicle and the hitch a once-over to double-check that everything is in working order. This can be done during service station stops along the trip.

# End-of-summer checklist

After a few months of blue skies and warm temperatures, summer revelers will soon bid adieu to the sultry days of this beloved season. Summer is often a season filled with vacations and recreation, but as the warm days dwindle and work and school commitments begin anew, there is additional work to be done in preparation for the months ahead.

\* Stock up on pool equipment. Homeowners who have pools can take advantage of end-of-season sales to purchase a few more gallons of pool chlorine or other pool equipment. Store them after you have winterized the pool, and you will be ahead of the game in terms of supplies for next year.

\* Plan your garden harvest. If you have a backyard garden, pick your tomatoes and other vegetables before the weather starts to get chilly. Herbs can be washed and frozen in zipper-top baggies so they can be used when cooking over the next several months. Boil toma-

atoes for sauce and freeze or jar them. Begin to clear out residual stems and plant debris from the garden.

\* Clean patios and furniture. Scrub and hose down outdoor furniture, cushions and living areas. Clean and dry items before storing them for the winter, so everything is ready to go when the warm weather returns next year.

\* Purchase spring bulbs. Buy bulbs for spring-blooming flowers and map out where they will be planted for beautiful flowers next year. Wait until temperatures start to dip before planting the bulbs, otherwise they may begin to produce shoots prematurely, zapping the bulbs of energy.

\* Check the heating system. Although turning on the heat may be the last thing you're thinking about, it's a good idea to test it and, if necessary, have the system serviced prior to the arrival of cold weather.

\* Tend to the deck and other repairs. Make repairs to outdoor structures now,

and they'll be more likely to survive the harsh weather that's just over the horizon. Apply stain or sealant to further protect wood structures in advance of snow and ice.

\* Examine the roof and chimney. Winter is a poor time to learn you have missing roof shingles or a leak. Furthermore, ensure the chimney and venting to the outdoors is not obstructed by abandoned animal nests.

\* Check your closets. Go through clothing and remove any items that are damaged or no longer fit, donating them if possible. Clean out kids' closets as well, as pants that fit perfectly in May will not necessarily fit come September.

\* Stock the shed. Once the weather has cooled down, move outdoor flower pots, hoses and lawn ornaments you no longer need into the shed or garage while ensuring items needed in fall and winter, such as rakes, snow shovels and snowblowers, are more accessible.

# Bond between grandparents and grandkids benefits both

What used to be the "golden years" of life for seniors is now turning into any opportunity to spend even more time with their youngest family members. Nowadays, a growing number of grandparents are called on to provide child care for their grandkids, many of whom are growing up in two-income households. Others are helping to raise grandkids while providing financial assistance for adult children who may not be able to live on their own.

This trend has been corroborated in a few recent studies. Information from the Pew Research Center showed 7.7 million children in the United States were living in the same household as one of their grandparents in 2011. A University of

Chicago analysis of a decade of data based on interviews with 13,614 grandparents, ages 50 and older, found that 61 percent of grandparents provided at least 50 hours of care for their grandchildren during any given year between 1998 and 2008.

\* Empathy: By sharing stories of how things were when they were younger, when opportunities may have been more scarce, grandparents can help teach grandchildren empathy. Grandchildren may learn to be grateful for the things they have and the people around them, rather than taking what they have for granted.

\* Family history: Grandparents can tell grandchildren about family members, including youngsters' own

parents, and shed light on the generations that came before them.

\* Interests: Children may be excited about learning new skills or hobbies taught to them by their grandparents. Anything from gardening to woodworking can be shared.

\* Respect: Children who grow up respecting their grandparents may have an increased tendency to respect authority figures outside their homes, which may help kids grow up to be more courteous and kind.

Grandchildren also offer benefits to their grandparents. Companionship, new experiences and conversation can help keep grandparents' minds sharp and bodies active well into their golden years.

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