

How We Can Slow Down Fast Fashion



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When you think of things which cause harm to the environment, what comes to mind?

You probably think of driving a car when you could walk or bike, failing to properly dispose of recyclable materials, or using plastic items such as straws or grocery bags. Maybe international flight even comes to mind or an image of someone throwing an empty drink bottle out their car window.

Clothing was likely not on your list.

Don't worry, you're not alone in this. Clothing wasn't ever really something I thought about either.

It wasn't until I decided to alter my daily habits in an attempt to live a more eco-friendly, sustainable life that I began to learn what a horribly negative impact fashion has on our planet. Specifically fast fashion.

Fast fashion is a term used to describe clothes which follow the latest trends, are made cheaply and quickly, and are sold at very

low prices. It's the mass production of "en vogue" styles usually only made to last a season, maybe two, and then be discarded. Fast fashion has caused clothing consumption to skyrocket while dramatically shortening the lifecycle of each garment.

In the summer of 2019, Misguided, an online clothing retailer, released a bikini selling for \$1.26 US. While this may sound appealing to the budget-minded, the bathing suit was cheaply made of mostly polyester, a microfiber known to have a harmful effect on the environment. At less than the price of a cup of coffee, it didn't matter to many consumers that Misguided's bikini wouldn't last long. They could simply throw it away and buy another one.

This perfectly illustrates the new "take-make-dispose" model the fashion industry has adopted and consumers have accepted. Misguided is not the only clothing retailer doing this. Far from it.

Settle in and I'll relay some facts to you. I'll warn you now though, you probably won't look at clothes buying the same again.

But the good thing is, I'll also tell you some things we (because we are in this together) can do to change the fast fashion lifecycle.

Fashion Facts

- The textile industry (the industry which designs, produces, and distributes yarn, cloth, and clothing) produces 10% of humanity's carbon emissions, generating [more greenhouse gases](#) than commercial shipping and international flight combined.
- The fashion industry uses about [79 trillion liters of water per year](#). This isn't surprising when you learn that it takes about 2,000 gallons of water to make just a single pair of jeans.
- Textile dyeing is the [second largest polluter of water globally](#). Most "fast fashion" clothing is produced in low-income countries that don't have many health and safety standards or regulations in place. This means untreated waste water from dyes is often released into local water supplies which has a cascading effect on all living things associated to that ecosystem.
- Many textiles which make our clothing contain plastic material such as polyester, nylon, acrylic, and polyamide. Every time these clothes are washed, plastic microfibers end up in the ocean. Half a million tons of plastic microfibers are released every year, 16 times more than those vilified plastic microbeads from cosmetics.
- When consumers tire of their clothes, they usually simply throw them out. Every [year 85% of textiles go to the dump](#).

Every second, the equivalent of one garbage truck full of these materials is landfilled or burned.

- The average consumer throws away 70lbs. (31.75 kg) of clothing per year. 95% of clothing waste can be reused or recycled yet a massive amount still winds up in landfills.
- Consumers are buying over 60% more garments since the year 2000, but they are keeping their clothes for only half as long.
- Where once clothing brands created only three to four new collections of clothing a year (in conjunction with the seasons), now the fashion industry is typically rolling out 52 “micro-seasons” per year. New trends come out every week to increase a consumer’s feelings of being out of fashion and sending them running back to brick-and-mortar or on-line stores to buy the newest styles.

What Can We Do?

It’s easy to say that textile manufacturers, corporations and governments carry the weight of responsibility in bringing change to the fast fashion industry. Certainly sustainable innovations and new trade and environmental policies and regulations will be the most effective in bringing about large-scale change.

But it’s important to remember that we, as consumers, are a part of this fast fashion supply chain and changing our buying

habits can help to break that chain and influence change. Look at the effect consumers had when they began to speak out against the use of plastic bags at grocery stores.

We can make a difference.

Buy Better and Buy Less

I know it's hard to resist the siren call of an inexpensive pair of cute boots. But you know those boots aren't going to last long. Save up a bit more money and buy a nicer pair of boots that will actually last a long time if taken care of properly. Do the same with every purchase. Or at least *think* about doing the same. I'm not saying you have to spend a lot of money on everything. But being more mindful of your shopping habits will slow you down, and that's exactly what we're going for.

Buy Sustainable Fibers

Buy sustainable fibers such as linen, hemp, organic cotton, [Tencel](#) (made from wood pulp), [Monocel](#) (made from bamboo), and rayon. [The Sustainable Jungle](#) has a fantastic blog post to educate consumers on the best types of fibers to buy and why. You can also learn about [regenerated fibers](#) and how to find clothes made from them.

At the moment, many eco-friendly brands are a bit pricey. Personally, I'm not ready to drop \$400 on an ethically fashioned

dress or even \$60 on an organic cotton t-shirt. But there are affordable brands which are offering shirts made from recycled materials, and those shirts might cost just \$10 or \$15 more. That's a price difference I'm willing to pay. When organic food first started hitting the market, it was crazy expensive because there wasn't much demand for it. As more people became mindful food consumers and the demand for organic food went up, the cost went down. Organic tomatoes might cost a bit more than their non-organic counterparts, but the cost is now negligible, especially when considering the environmental and health benefits. The same thing can happen with fashion if consumers change their buying habits and show the fashion industry they are no longer willing to contribute to fast fashion.

Take a look at the [Fashion Transparency Index](#) to find out how well-known brands you might already buy rank for things like transparency, sustainable practices, and governance.

Repair Clothes

Learn to sew a button back on a shirt or stitch up the growing hole on the seam of your pants. Teach your children to do the same. If you're feeling ambitious, you could even take a sewing class. Not only could you learn how to make larger repairs beyond reattaching a run-away button, you might even learn how to make a dress or a pair of pants. I know that once upon a time it was considered laugh-worthy to wear home-made clothes. But I personally think it'd be pretty cool to sport a pair of pants I made myself, as long as they looked good.

Have a Clothing Swap

When was the last time you did this? If you have children you could organize clothing swaps for them as well. Normalizing the swapping and sharing of used clothes at a young age will help your children to become mindful consumers as they grow older.

Buy Second Hand Clothes

There are vintage shops around that have some pretty awesome pieces of clothing. Again, you might pay a bit more for it, but this means it'll just make you think more about whether or not you really need, or *absolutely* have to have, it. And as I said before, slowing down is the key to stopping fast fashion. Even just getting a little bit more mindful about what you buy helps tremendously.

If you're just looking for a few pairs of jeans, find your nearest second-hand shop.

If you remember how much water it takes to produce one pair of jeans, then simply increasing the life span of someone else's discarded jeans means you're helping to conserve the world's water supply. Every little bit counts.

Start a Recycle Bag

You don't want to donate clothes to a second-hand store that are covered in stains or full of unrepairable holes. But you also

shouldn't just throw them away. Start a recycle bag of garments that can't be used anymore. When the bag is full, look up your nearest textile recycling factory or bank (I found two near me in less than 1 minute of on-line searching). Textile banks take old garments and turn them into new items such as industrial blankets, upholstery for furniture, and cleaning cloths.

It's easy to bury our heads in the sand, to continue buying as we always have, and just hope that other people will drive the change while we hang out in the backseat. I get frustrated sometimes with how much more challenging or more expensive living a mindful and sustainable life is. And I don't always buy 100% ethical, sustainable garments. But I try to and I believe that's what will start to make a change. No one said you have to be perfect all the time, all we need is for you to think a bit more about what you buy. I promise you, I'm here doing the exact same thing, slipping off the ethical sustainable eco-wagon but climbing back on again and again.