

THE PLASTIC PROBLEM!

Did you know that every year over 8 million tonnes of plastic end up in our planet's beautiful blue oceans? Read on to discover the tragic effects of this life-threatening litter, and find out how YOU can help...

PLASTIC FANTASTIC?

Plastic is an amazing man-made material. It's cheap to produce and has many uses – from pens, ping-pong balls and hard hats to prosthetic legs and car parts. But half of the plastic we produce is designed to be used just once and then chucked away – such as food packaging, balloons and straws, much of which ends up in the ocean. And because plastic takes over 400 years to break down, it stays there, causing damage, for a dangerously long time.

Not all the rubbish in the sea is dumped there on purpose. Much of it is blown from overflowing rubbish bins or landfill sites into rivers, streams or sewers.

TRY THIS!

Next time you're in the supermarket, take a look around. How many things AREN'T packaged in plastic? And how many that ARE really need to be?



SEALIFE STRUGGLES

Floating plastic is bad news for our friends under the waves. Turtles gobble up plastic bags, mistaking them for tasty jellyfish. Animals get trapped and tangled in discarded fishing nets, and birds are strangled by the plastic six-pack rings from drink cans. Bottle tops and other smaller bits of plastic are also mistaken for food and eaten by birds, leaving no room in their swollen tummies for real food.



GROSS GARBAGE

Because of the natural movements of the ocean currents, much of the world's rubbish ends up being swept into gigantic swirling 'patches' of plastic out at sea. The largest is the Great Pacific Garbage Patch in the North Pacific Ocean – it's estimated to be size of Europe. Gross! But while you're probably imagining a gigantic solid mass of floating trash, most of the plastic in the patch is barely visible. It's been broken down by the waves and sunlight into tiny particles. But this tiny microplastic is just as dangerous to animals – and can even end up harming us!



INTO THE FOOD CHAIN

Plastic doesn't break down completely – it just gets smaller and ends up being swallowed by fish and other marine animals and birds. The tiny particles of plastic absorb toxic industrial chemicals which, when eaten by fish, are absorbed into their tissues and are eventually eaten by humans.

In some parts of the Great Pacific Garbage Patch, there's more plastic than plankton!

GOOD NEWS?

Within one year after the UK's 5p plastic bag charge was introduced in 2016, plastic bag use was reduced by 85%!

Some experts predict that by 2050 there will be more plastic in the ocean than fish.

GOOD NEWS?

In 2017, the UK government announced it would ban microbeads (see right) in toothpaste and cosmetic products that 'rinse-off'. Let's hope they do!

How YOU can help!

USE LESS PLASTIC!

Fortunately, there are things you can do to help resolve the problem. Drink from reusable water bottles, use multi-use shopping bags and recycle all the plastic that you can to help keep waste to a minimum!

Ask your parents to choose loose fruit and vegetables, rather than groceries swaddled with layers of pointless plastic waste (right!)



CLEAN UP THE BEACH!

Help keep our seashores clean by going along to an organised beach cleanup. You'll be given gloves and litter pickers, and will set to work clearing clutter from our beaches, so it doesn't end up in the sea. It's fun, and we promise you'll feel really proud when you see your nice clean beach! Check out mcsuk.org/beachwatch/events to find an event near you!



NO MORE MICROBEADS!

Shockingly, loads of the products in your bathroom cabinet probably contain particles of plastic called microbeads! These minuscule plastic balls are found in toothpastes, face washes and even face creams, and, because they're so tiny, they end up getting flushed down the drain straight into the ocean!

HOW TO AVOID

Confusingly, they're not listed as microbeads on ingredients. Instead look out for polyethylene, polypropylene and polymethylmethacrylate – the chemical names for plastics, or the abbreviations PET, PTFE



Could YOUR toothpaste contain microbeads?