



# INTRODUCTION

More people today struggle to reduce their waste. It's a way by which they try to protect life and the environment by consuming less. Undoubtedly, it's a challenge- what to eliminate, what to replace it with, how to organize this mindful living?

This hands-on, no-nonsense guide will help you reduce waste in your journey to going zero waste, without beating about the bush. It lists what you might be doing currently, offers you options to make the switch along with some rationale. Yes, this handbook will push you to what you may feel are extremes. You may feel some ideas are not practical. Don't worry. Do what you can.

# HOW TO USE THE HANDBOOK

To make it easier to use, it is divided into sections. A user could pick up a section most relevant to them, or one that deals with an aspect that bothers them the most.

The best way to use this handbook is to open up any section, look at the column Check for this. And if it applies to you read the 'If yes, try this instead,' column. You'll find the alternatives here and sometimes, explanations.

Perhaps some of these won't be applicable to you given your personal context, but it will still goad you to find your own alternative. And if it does make sense for you go ahead and try to make the change.

Ideally, pick up one section at a time, so you take baby steps, but ones that are irreversible. And, let us know if you have any ideas to make it better.



# A. SHOPPING

What you buy and, how you buy it can prevent a lot of waste. After reading this list, do a recce in your neighbourhood. Figure out if there's a local bakery so you don't buy packaged biscuits. Ask which shops donot pre-pack fruits in plastics. These and so many other questions will help you map out the best spots to shop from and save your time. Don't forget to make a list for groceries shopping. It isn't green to go back several times a week when you run out of things.

CHECK FOR THIS	ARE YOU USING IT? (Y/N)	IF YES, TRY THIS INSTEAD
 Shopping bags plastic or plastic woven		Carry your own cloth bag
 Dry groceries in plastic		Avoid buying items in plastic packaging. If some items are always packed in plastics, then buy them in bulk. Find a local pansari to buy dry rations, carry them in your own bags or containers.





**Small quantities  
of  
packaged items**

In case you cannot avoid packaged goods, buy in bulk to minimize packaging.

**amazon  
Flipkart**

**Online retail**

Avoid online stores like Amazon, Flipkart etc. which use disproportionate amounts of plastics in their packaging.



**Fruits and  
vegetables**

Don't buy more fresh fruit and vegetables than you need. Refuse packaged fruit and vegetables. Look for a street hawker or vendor instead of driving if you can avoid. This way, you support local livelihoods too.



**Milk in plastic  
packaging**

Locate a Mother Dairy to buy token based milk from the tap, if possible. If not, milk pouches are still recyclable. Some more expensive milk brands sell in glass bottles. If this is within your budget, look out for these. However, avoid tetra packs as they are not fully recycled.



## Tea bags

Most tea bags don't dissolve in our cups because they are not made of bio-degradable materials. Move to tea leaves. You may need strainer and a teapot, or a tea leaf holder.



## Biscuits in plastic packaging

Easiest -look for a local bakery that sells unpacked biscuits. Start baking your own cookies. Then you don't have to buy the ones packed in plastic. Remember to buy either unpacked ingredients or in bulk.



## B. PERSONAL PRODUCTS

First, check out what you already have in the house. Before you buy anything green, finish what there is. After that, be prepared to have to adjust, because many new personal products require a slight shift in our regimes.

CHECK FOR THIS	ARE YOU USING IT? (Y/N)	IF YES, TRY THIS INSTEAD
 <b>Sanitary napkins</b>		Shift to menstrual cups, cloth pads or eco pads made from biodegradable fibers. Mainstream sanitary napkins are primarily made up of plastics.
 <b>Toothpaste</b>		Shift to tooth powder, because toothpaste tubes cannot be recycled except for their caps.
 <b>Lotions and creams</b>		Buy the biggest sizes available.
 <b>Shower gel</b>		A bar of soap- it uses less packaging. If you buy shower gel, buy a big bottle.





### Stuff in tubes

Look at jar and bottle alternatives, cut open the tube with scissors at the end to use the residue you can't squeeze out.



### Leftover soap

Cut them up into smaller bits and add water for hand soap. If you have the time, freeze the soap for a few hours and grate it to use with water as liquid soap.



### Travelling toiletries

Don't buy travel size items because of the packaging. Use old empty bottles and pour your lotions and shampoo in them or buy bottles only for travelling. Otherwise, just carry the bigger size, especially if you are travelling as a family. Sharing is caring (for the planet). Avoid sachets completely as they are non-recyclable. Don't even accept cosmetic samples in sachets and single use plastics.





### Hotel soaps

Carry your own toiletries as far as possible. However, if you have used any soap or shampoo in a hotel, don't leave it half used. It will be discarded. Get it home and finish it.



### Wet wipes

Switch to washing, use a cotton towel or cotton wool and water. Wet wipes are made of non-recyclable plastics.



### Diapers

Switch to reusable ones, including cloth diapers.



### Cosmetics

Forget what you did in the past. Create and stick to no more than 2 looks, so you buy and use much less makeup.



### Face mask sheets

These sheets are wasted after you trash them. They cannot be easily recycled. Why not use masks from a container?



# C. WASTE MANAGEMENT

It's not hard. You are already segregating some of your waste to give away. Expand it to segregate all your waste. You only have to start composting and you're almost there. One thing you'll have to do is to take out 15 minutes, check out all the medicines in your home, and take note of their expiry date. Try to give off everything before then.

CHECK FOR THIS	ARE YOU USING IT? (Y/N)	IF YES, TRY THIS INSTEAD
 <b>Unsegregated waste</b>		Make sure you, your family and your staff segregates waste. Monitor it personally. However, don't scold anyone or make it unpleasant for them to think of segregation.
 <b>Disposing off wet waste</b>		Compost wet waste. So many ways-check them out here-
 <b>Not recycling</b>		Work with Pick my Trash to recycle both dry household and e-waste in the NCR.



## Trashing batteries

Look for rechargeable options every time.



## Trashing old medicines

These are not dry waste. They end up contaminating our water. Give them off to a medicine bank before they expire.



## Electronics

Make them last. It's not cool to have the latest.



# D. KITCHEN

This seems like a short list. It is. But it requires you to spend time looking for a source (coconut husk, which you get from any store that sells South Indian groceries) or even, making these at home (the alternatives to wonder wipes). If you are over 20, chances are you'll recall how many of these better options were never alternatives, but the main materials being used in our houses.

This memory helps, because it helps you build confidence.

CHECK FOR THIS	ARE YOU USING IT? (Y/N)	IF YES, TRY THIS INSTEAD
 <b>Plastic/nylon scrubber for cleaning utensils</b>		Coconut husk. Don't let the odd fibre bother you.
 <b>Wonderwipes</b>		Use a cloth or pieces of old towels
 <b>Plastic bottles and jars</b>		When the plastic is ready to be discarded, replace it with glass. Save old jars for reuse. Remember plastic jars have toxins that can leach into your food items.





### Cling film

Shift to using sealed boxes or a steel plate. Skip the plastic. Also, some cling wraps contaminate the food with their toxic additives.



### Aluminum foil

Must you? Use sealed boxes, and the same alternatives as you would for eliminating cling wrap. All foil comes from aluminum, which is hugely energy intensive, requires bauxite mining and forests to be cut.



### Plastic liners for dustbins

Line your bin with pieces of the newspaper and wash it when required.



### Wet waste bin

Eliminate it by putting in a composter instead, where your waste goes directly. This means you don't keep wet waste for hours, allowing it to smell, before you compost it.



# E. CHILDREN

Children are often great allies in going zero waste. They'll motivate you and help you. But first, you'll have to start making shifts in their lives and explain to them why you are doing this. This short check-list is specific to a child's day, but your other actions will also impact their health and well-being. Also, check out the entertainment section for more on birthday parties.

CHECK FOR THIS	ARE YOU USING IT? (Y/N)	IF YES, TRY THIS INSTEAD
 Plastic tiffin boxes		Move to steel. It's not unfashionable.
 Plastic water bottles		Move to steel. It's not unfashionable.
 Teethers and pacifiers		Move to disinfected cloth tied in a knot. Teethers leach toxic additives.
 Footwear with glitter or decoration		Most footwear uppers cannot be recycled.
 Plastic toys, including soft toys		Many toys, especially soft toys cannot be recycled. So, don't buy them endlessly.
 Projects with thermocol		Use cardboard or thick paper sheets instead.

ZERO WASTE

# F. CLOTHES

Follow these two principles for clothes. First, shrink your wardrobe. Give away your clothes if you haven't worn them last season. Some people even go on some clothes diet-no new clothes for 3 months, 6 months or even, a year. Spend time thinking about what kind of clothes you end up wearing the most, and what you never wear. This should give you a guide to shop by. Second, be mindful of what happens when you can't wear the outfit anymore. Many stretch and other materials won't get recycled and nor do sequins and those bits of studded decorative items. How can you reduce the dumping of materials on the planet?

CHECK FOR THIS	ARE YOU USING IT? (Y/N)	IF YES, TRY THIS INSTEAD
 Sequins		Avoid. It's plastic. Can you replace it with thread based embroidery?
 Tassles		Check if they are made of cloth. Many shiny ones are polyester, which cannot even be recycled. Avoid them-they will land up in a landfill or the oceans.
 Gold and silver decorations		Few can afford real gold or silver decorations on their clothing. Most are synthetic materials which cannot be reused. They will end up in a landfill.





**Scrunchies and rubber-bands for the hair**

Ask if your hair can be tied up with a cloth instead?



**Elastic**

It's vital for many outfits, but can you use a cotton drawstring (nara) wherever possible? Elastic doesn't decompose.



**Bags**

Look for who can repair your bag before they are beyond repair. If you don't want to use a repaired bag, give it away before it is too damaged.



**Workout gear**

Get only what you will use. Most cannot be easily recycled.



**Footwear**

Give away before it is unwearable, so someone else can repair and use. Find a mochi to repair and extend the life of your footwear.



# G. GIFTS

The best mantra for giving and receiving gifts is to be honest. Just say if you are collecting money for a holiday, so people can give you even a small amount to add up. And be blasé about your budget if you have to give a gift, so the other person can tell you what they need. And if you are giving off a gift you already had and don't need-then you can gift it in a reusable cloth bag.

CHECK FOR THIS	ARE YOU USING IT? (Y/N)	IF YES, TRY THIS INSTEAD
 Giving a gift		If you are giving a gift, the best thing to do is to stop being formal. Just ask the potential recipient if she wants something within your budget. Suggest services instead, such as a spa or beauty coupon, an errand boy for a month, if you have a bigger budget, gift a fun service like a class. Not everyone uses products plus you cannot control what's in it and how it will be disposed-off.



## Wrapping paper

Give bags instead, ideally cloth bags people can reuse. Or a nice basket-it might even be better than the gift.



## Receiving a gift

Sometimes, we get gifts we don't want and can't get rid of either. Be shamelessly proactive and prevent this. Don't be ashamed to ask for books, foods or anything low budget that you want, and where appropriate, up the budget. If, like many others, you don't want more stuff, ask them for cash or ask for things like a box of organic mangoes etc. If it makes sense to you, suggest somewhere they can donate a small amount in your name.







## Stuff that is fraying

Before you donate it, consider taking it to your local mochi if it's shoes or a bag, a rafoogaar if it's fabric and ask around for people who repair. Most weekly haats and urban villages have some still.



## Flowers: Gifts, in pujas, for decoration, as gifts

Whatever happens, do not have florists pack your flowers in cellophane. It is plastic, it adds no value. Also, reconsider artificially coloured flowers (bright blue or rani pink) because of their toxicity when composted. Try not to have ribbons and baubles or glitter in a bouquet-these are typically non-recyclable. For pujas, ask yourself if you really need fresh flowers. And if yes, use only as few as needed. The power of prayer lies in you, not in the flowers. When you decorate your home, and use fresh flowers, definitely compost them at the end. Don't have a com-STE poster as yet? No panic. Put them into a flower pot. Marigolds are insect repellents anyway.

# I. ENTERTAINMENT

By changing how you entertain, you will find yourself influencing many others. This section covers children's birthday parties and several other gatherings. Be sure to speak to the guests about why you opted to make these changes, because, as you know, it builds confidence in new ideas.

CHECK FOR THIS	ARE YOU USING IT? (Y/N)	IF YES, TRY THIS INSTEAD
 <b>Mini forks (plastic)</b>		Reusable, please. Take the time to wash. Hire an extra pair of hands, if you need.
 <b>Plastic cutlery and crockery</b>		Reusable, please. Take the time to wash. Hire an extra pair of hands, if you need.
 <b>Full plate size</b>		Keep the plates small. Try using small but nice plates-the smaller they are, the less people can serve and consequently, waste.
 <b>Straws</b>		No. Aren't the glasses clean? Why do you need a straw? If you must, use paper or bamboo straws.

ZERO WASTE



**Calojing,  
coaxing and  
forcing**

Are you the kind of host who tried to feel people when they say no? Well, please listen to them. Don't put on their plate what they might waste.



**Wasting  
something you  
cannot finish?**

If you have ended up with too much food, push it aside and don't hesitate to ask if anyone wants to share. Similarly, if you see your close friend or family about to leave their bread or other un-eaten food, don't get yourself a second helping. As if you can stop them from wasting their food and grab it. Whatever you do, don't be uncomfortable.



**Toothpicks**

Think of snacks where so much wood isn't needed to eat them. Plus, it is one time use too  
Or use reusable forks.



**Paper napkins**

Cloth is easier. And use STE coasters instead of napkins for drinks





## Decorations

If you must. Do not use balloons, plastic leaves or flowers.



## Too much food

First, cook such that there is hardly any leftover. Ask your caterer too. Second, plan what you will do with the leftovers, if any. Is it 2 days meals for your family? Can you freeze something? Can you share with neighbours and household help? What about sharing at least dessert with workers who come home? Pack it carefully for the waste collector? Anything for the workers on a nearby construction site? Yes, you can - but you need to plan and learn more about your neighbourhood.



## Balloons

Skip. Options include windmills from local craftsmen.



## One time use bottles

Consider bigger bottles, and ideally glass or steel.





### Confetti

If you must. Ensure no plastic-the shining bits are usually plastic.



### Thermocol decorations

Skip. Use colourful dupattas or paper decoration if you must



### Decorating with flowers

Compost after use. Ask the contractor to do the same. And avoid artificially coloured flowers (like blue orchids)

