

Taking on the Plastic Free July challenge

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This month, I took on the Plastic Free July challenge to see just how much plastic I could reduce from my daily routine.

Plastic Free July is a global movement launched by the Plastic Free Foundation in 2011. It encourages people to refuse single-use plastics in their everyday lives, shifting the conversation from

simply cleaning up plastic waste to preventing it at the source.

For one week, I challenged myself to reduce my plastic consumption, focusing mainly on food and beverages, where single-use plastics are most common.

Armed with my reusable water bottle, coffee cup, food container and shopping

bag, I set out to see just how much plastic I could avoid.

To make the comparison meaningful, I first tracked my habits during a typical week before spending another week consciously making plastic-free choices whenever possible.



My Weekly Plastic Tracker

	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
Plastic Week	- Got my daily coffee fix. - Got a takeaway for lunch. - Bought a bottle of water.	- Ordered a takeaway coffee. - Had to get takeout for lunch. Too busy at work. - Got food delivered for dinner.	- Watched barista pour coffee into a plastic cup. - After work, went on a grocery run. Cashier bagged my fruits in plastic.	- Surviving meetings with coffee again. - Ordered food delivery today. - Got a bottled sweet tea for a pick-me-up.	- Picked up coffee on the way to work. - Produce clerk bagged my fruit and veggies in separate plastic bags. - Had to buy bottled water while out of on assignment.	- Post-run crash: grabbed a bottled energy drink to boost me up. - Went out with friends and got a matcha.	After spending a day out, needed to beat the afternoon heat with a cold refreshing drink. Stopped by a convenience store to quench my thirst.
	Total : 3	Total : 3	Total : 2	Total : 3	Total : 4	Total : 2	Total : 1
No Plastic week	- Brought my reusable cup for my usual coffee this time. - Had time during lunch to dine out.	- Handed my reusable cup to the cafe staff. - Take my lunch to go using my own container.	- Home-brewed coffee in my own mug. - Hit the grocery store armed with my mesh bag.	- Ice latte stayed cold in my reusable mug. - Back-to-back meetings all day, had to get my food delivered. It came in a plastic container.	Got to use my own reusable bag for today's grocery run.	- Post-run fix: icy water straight from my own bottle. - Got takeaway at the neighborhood cafe with my own glass container.	Slowed down Sunday: enjoyed a cold refresher in a glass mug instead of to-go.
	Total : 0	Total : 0	Total : 0	Total : 1	Total : 0	Total : 0	Total : 0

What I learned

The biggest surprise was seeing just how much plastic I normally use in a single week when it was all laid out in front of me.

Even more encouraging was discovering that many plastic-free swaps were surprisingly easy to adopt. Many shops and vendors were accommodating of reusable options, making it easier than expected to cut down on single-use plastics.

That said, some challenges remain.

Food delivery services were by far the hardest obstacle. Unless you already know a restaurant's packaging practices or can request minimal packaging, it is incredibly difficult to avoid single-use plastics.

Packaged snacks and sweets were another sticking point. Many of my favourite treats simply did not have

plastic-free alternatives, making plastic consumption almost unavoidable.

I may not have eliminated plastic completely, but I came away with a better understanding of where I could make lasting changes.

The changes I made

Carry reusable food containers

Whenever I bought takeaway meals, I asked vendors to use my own food container instead of disposable plastic packaging whenever possible.

Shop smarter

Going plastic-free at the supermarket proved to be one of the biggest challenges, as many everyday items – especially raw meat, seafood and packaged snacks – are wrapped in plastic.

One easy switch, however, was choosing loose fruits and vegetables instead of pre-packaged produce. I also brought along reusable mesh bags instead of using the thin single-use plastic bags provided at the produce section.

And of course, carrying a reusable shopping bag meant I avoided both single-use carrier bags and the need to purchase reusable bags at checkout.

Bring my own coffee cup

My daily coffee habit usually comes with a disposable plastic cup and lid.

By bringing my reusable cup throughout the week, I avoided multiple pieces of single-use plastic that would otherwise have been thrown away after just one use.

Dine in instead of takeaway

Another simple lifestyle change I made was choosing to have my meals at cafes

and restaurants instead of ordering them to go.

Not only did this eliminate disposable plastic cups and lids, it also gave me a welcome excuse to step away from the office and enjoy a short break.

Final thoughts

The challenge showed me that meaningful change doesn't necessarily require dramatic lifestyle shifts. A few simple habits, repeated consistently, can significantly reduce the amount of single-use plastic we consume.

The biggest takeaway was that while I cannot avoid plastic entirely, I can be more mindful about when and how I use it.

Reduced the use of
17 plastic items
in a week