



## 2b. *How to*: Reduce plastic purchasing and waste



### Why is it important?

Plastic is having an increasingly detrimental impact on the environment, biodiversity and health. 79% of the plastic produced over the last 70 years has been thrown into landfill sites or into the environment, with only 9% of it being recycled and the rest incinerated. 8 million tonnes of plastic enters our oceans each year. Plastic does not naturally biodegrade but breaks down into smaller 'micro-plastics'. It can absorb other chemicals and can enter the food chain, poisoning wildlife, destroying ecosystems and putting human health at risk.

Dental practices produce huge amounts of waste plastic from plastic cups, disposable syringes, gloves, single use instruments, oral hygiene products, stationary and more.

Finding ways to limit the purchase of plastic and plastic-packaged items, encouraging plastic recycling and liaising with manufacturers about their plastic use and sustainability will help to reduce the plastic 'burden' and may reduce costs to your practice.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/environment/plastic-how-planet-earth-environment-oceans-wildlife-recycling-landfill-artificial-a7972226.html>



### What does a Sustainable Practice look like?

#### Modelled example:

Susan works as a practice manager for a mixed NHS/Private practice. As a team they have decided to adopt a 'Reduce, Reuse, Recycle' policy to reduce their plastic use and waste. Clearly labelled recycling bins have been placed in all patient and staff areas.

The practice uses pouches for instruments after they are autoclaved, which are part paper and part plastic which are easily separated. There are now small boxes in each surgery, one for the paper and one for plastic. The nursing staff have carried out an audit and found that this initiative has greatly reduced the number of pouches being disposed of incorrectly into the clinical waste bins.

The practice has also introduced a selection of sustainable oral hygiene products including bamboo toothbrushes from 'The Humble Brush' which are becoming increasingly popular with their patients.



## Actions

### KEY:

**Implementation:** Easy = 😊😊😊 Less Easy = 😊

**Investment Cost:** Low = 💰 High = 💰💰💰

**Financial return on Investment (ROI):** Low = 🐷 High = 🐷🐷🐷

**Environmental benefit:** Small = 🌍 Large = 🌍🌍🌍

- Consider putting out plastic cups for patients to rinse only when needed (rather than as standard) 😊😊😊💰🐷🌍
- Avoid single use devices where appropriate: use stainless steel impression trays, prophylactic cups and suction tips 😊😊💰💰🐷🐷🌍🌍
- Use glass/stainless steel pots vs. plastic 'Dappens' pots 😊😊💰💰🐷🐷🌍🌍
- Carry out an audit to see how much plastic your practice is using and whether all recyclable plastic is being recycled 😊😊😊💰🐷🌍
- Share information and communicate your plastic reduction efforts to patients 😊😊💰🐷🌍
- Advertise alternative, non-plastic oral hygiene products e.g. bamboo toothbrushes 😊😊😊💰🐷🌍
- Liaise with dental product manufacturers about the sustainability and recycling potential of their products- ask them if they have signed up to the UK Plastics Pact 😊💰🐷🌍🌍

## You can calculate both the money saved and carbon saved

•**Money saved:** compare costs of waste collection fees and purchasing of goods costs each month before and after implementation

•**Carbon saved:** Carbon calculator  
<http://c.environmentalpaper.org/home>



## Resources

**Remediating hospital paper cup wastage**

<https://networks.sustainablehealthcare.org.uk/networks/eyehealth-susnet/remediating-hospital-paper-cup-wastage-challenges-and-recommendations>

**The Guardian:** How plastic is damaging planet earth

<https://www.independent.co.uk/environment/plastic-how-planet-earth-environment-oceans-wildlife-recycling-landfill-artificial-a7972226.html>

**Ecover sustainable plastic packaging strategy**

<http://horizons.innovateuk.org/case-studies/124>

**The Guardian:** Made from bamboo, pig hair and yoghurt pots, can eco-toothbrushes take off?

<https://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/2016/oct/06/eco-toothbrushes-biodegradable-bamboo-pig-hair-yogurt-pots-plastic-waste-landfill>

**Bamboo Toothbrushes** by The Humble Brush

<https://thehumble.co>

**UK Plastics Pact**

<http://www.wrap.org.uk/content/the-uk-plastics-pact>

**Colgate Terra-Cycle Oral Care Products** Recycling Programme:

<https://www.terracycle.co.uk/en-GB/brigades/colgate#how-it-works>

Duane. B, Ramasubbu. D, Harford. S, Steinbach. I, Stancliffe. R, Croasdale. K, Pasdeki-Clewer. E. (in press). Environmental sustainability and procurement; Purchasing products for the dental setting. British Dental Journal.

**Dental Susnet**, online network for improving the sustainability of dental services:

<https://networks.sustainablehealthcare.org.uk/dental-susnet>