

# Ways to Reduce the Use of Plastic

*Megan O'Neill is the senior beauty editor at goop. Which is another way of saying she has a passion for clean products, loves anything that reduces stress, and will happily guinea pig herself in the name of wellness.*

It's 6:30 a.m., the most magical time to run on the beach. I'm on Sumba island, a paradise of lanky palms, perfume-oozing blossoms, and sand so inviting, I almost prefer it to the plush hotel bed. It took three flights and twenty-four hours to get to Indonesia from New York, but this particular beach alone makes the trip worth it. Sunlight striates the still-dark sky, illuminating scuttling crabs and other stirring marine creatures. I run past huge boulders jutting from the crystalline ocean like sculptures and smile to myself, amazed that a place like this, so excessively gorgeous and remote that it hardly looks real, actually is. And I'm lucky enough to be here, basking in this embarrassment of riches.

I curve around a bend in the shoreline and have to stop dead in my tracks: The beach is piled with trash in heartbreaking heaps. Bottles, jars, caps, tubes, forks, straws, spoons, knives, bags, grizzled toothbrushes, takeout containers, toilet brush handles, unrecognizable shards, lipstick flasks, dispenser pumps.

Five trillion pieces of plastic pollute our oceans right now—enough to circle the earth more than 400 times, according to Greenpeace, which also estimates that Europe and Central Asia alone dump the equivalent of 54 plastic bags full of micro plastics per person, per week into the oceans. (The US, Canada, and the UK export much of their plastic waste to Asia, so they're partially included in that number.) Plastic debris outweighs plankton by thirty-six to one, says the Plastic Pollution Coalition. Not only does plastic kill 100,000 marine mammals and up to 1 million sea birds annually—a stat from the 2017 United Nations Ocean Conference—its effect on humans is also significant. Exposure to BPA, a chemical found in many plastics that acts as a synthetic estrogen, is linked to cancer, infertility, endocrine disruption, lower IQ, girls getting their periods early, smaller penis size, boys developing breasts, and obesity. A small 2009 EWG study detected BPA, among other health-disrupting chemicals, in the umbilical cord blood of nine of the ten American newborns it tested.

The large-scale equivalent of my Indonesian beach covered with trash mounds is the Great Pacific Garbage Patch, a vortex of mostly plastic swirling between Hawaii and California: It's three times the size of France—France—and ever-expanding.

I recycle; I avoid extra packaging whenever I can, I bring reusable bags to the grocery store, and so does practically everyone I know. Obviously, we all need to do more, starting with donating to and volunteering for organizations that are making a difference. But conservationist and founder of the Plastic Pollution Coalition Dianna Cohen says that cumulatively, the tweaks and minor daily adjustments we make can also make real change.