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How to reduce your digital carbon footprint

We hear a lot in the world about reducing carbon footprints – how can we travel less, use less energy and reduce how much carbon we release into the atmosphere. The response for the past decade or so has been to move everything online. Our paper bills have become PDFs, our notice boards have become Trello boards, and our office meetings have become zoom calls. But did you know that every email, WhatsApp message, Google search and document stored in the cloud has a carbon footprint? All these things require energy and electricity to do.

It's easier to connect with the impact of driving or not driving – your lungs feel cleaner, the air smells fresher – it's tangible. But with data and digital devices, it's harder to see the negative impact. Data is processed and stored around the world in enormous data centres, ready to send your email, GIF, or answer all your questions at the drop of a hat. These data centres use a huge amount of electricity to do this. And our devices all use electricity – the charge will deplete faster the more you ask or expect of your device.

This guide will tell you many of the things that you can do to reduce your digital carbon footprint, saving you money and lowering carbon emissions across the world! There's so much you can do from which search engines you use to changing your device settings. It's easy and we'll show you how.

Search engines

Every search request you make in a search engine uses around 1.45grams of CO₂. That means, if you make 50 searches a day, that equals 72.5kg a year – that's more than the emissions of a return flight from Newcastle to Edinburgh!

- Reducing your searches in a search engine can help to reduce your digital carbon footprint.
- You could also try to offset the carbon you emit through search engine queries by [switching to Ecosia](#). They plant a tree for every search carried out in their search engine – they even show you the total number of trees they are committing to planting on their home page.



Emails

Going paperless is a good way to lower the demand on trees needed for paper. But every email you send has its own carbon footprint. According to [research by OVO Energy](#), "If every Brit sent one less email a day, we would save 16,433 tonnes of carbon a year - the same as 81,152 flights to Madrid". Here are a few things you can do:

- Try to reduce the number of emails you send by collating information
- Cut down on those single word 'thanks' emails!
- This uses less energy.
- Delete old emails that you don't need and don't file emails you don't really need to keep. Not only will it reduce your digital carbon footprint, but it will help you to find your important emails faster! You should also delete old email accounts that are no longer in use so that they aren't holding onto unnecessary emails.
- Unsubscribe from newsletters you don't read! This way less emails are being sent by the newsletter creators. Plus, they won't clog up your inbox!

Websites

According to Wholegrain Digital, the average web page produces 1.76 grams CO₂ every time a page is viewed! Try these energy saving tips to reduce the carbon footprint of your website:

- Find out how much carbon your website is emitting by using an online tool like [Wholegrain Digital's Website Carbon Calculator](#) or [Create's Eco Checker](#). They will tell you if your web host/builder is using sustainable energy and highlight the main features on your website contributing to emission.
- Images and videos use up a lot of energy, so compressing them reduces how much they need to use. Try out [Free Converts' image compressor tool](#) or read [Video Converters' suggestions for compressing videos](#) to help. Reducing the video content on your website would also help!
- Simplify your website pathways and reduce the number of clicks required to reach a desired webpage on your site.



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Online meetings

Moving meetings online is sometimes necessary. Sometimes it is an ecological choice. Whilst long zoom meetings typically use less energy than a traditional conference, online meeting platforms do have a digital carbon footprint. Six hours of large conference Zoom meetings can generate 1,324 kg of CO₂. That's like driving over 3,200 miles.

- Think about whether your meeting will emit less carbon in-person or online. Use Going Green Together's meeting decision tool to help you figure that out.
- Turn off the HD video setting in your meeting platform. A higher quality video uses more energy to produce and transmit.
- Keep your online meetings concise. This will give you more time for a cuppa in-between meetings too!

Screens

It may sound simple, but an easy way to reduce our digital carbon footprint is to alter the settings on our laptop, phone or monitor. Why not:

- Turn off screensavers. They keep your screens on for longer and use much more energy than a simple picture or turning off screens.
- Unplug your monitors/chargers when not in use and don't leave devices on standby. Even when we are not using them, they will continue to use electricity (albeit a small amount). Switch things off to save energy! Set your devices to sleep or hibernation mode when taking a shorter break.
- Reduce the light levels of your screens to the minimum comfortable level – this can actually be better for your eyes!

Live streaming

Live streaming has become a favourite pastime for many Brits through apps like Netflix, Spotify and TikTok. But did you know that watching [30 minutes of Netflix emits a similar amount of carbon as driving 4 miles](#)? Here's what you can do:

- Download your music or video, watch/listen, then delete!
- Block auto-play on videos through your web browser or app settings.



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Use your phone less

Every time you check to see if you've had any messages or emails in the last 20 seconds you use energy! Lovefone have found that the average [smartphone uses more electricity than a fridge](#)! Here's what we suggest:

- Allow yourself to switch off from technology – it will save your battery too!
- You could try putting your phone in a different room for the evening, or not taking your personal phone to work.

Cloud storage

Cloud storage allows your files to be kept on servers that can be accessed anytime from anywhere. They've been a game changer for individuals and businesses the world over. But they are energy guzzlers!

- Delete old files regularly to limit the amount of energy used to store them.
- Shop around. Some cloud systems are 'greener' than others. Have a look at [Wired's breakdown of 'green' cloud providers](#).