



Help us End Plastic Soup!



What's the problem?

Microplastics are plastic particles smaller than 5mm. Synthetic fibres shed from our clothes when they are washed or worn are the biggest source of microplastic fibre pollution in our environment. . As they are too small to be caught by standard washing machine filters and the sewage system, they end up in the sea and the wider environment.

Due to their small size, the fibres can be ingested by aquatic life, posing a health risk to them. Microplastics are also entering our bodies and our human food chain, the long-term effects of which are unknown.

What is the Women's Institute calling for?

The WI launched the End Plastic Soup campaign following overwhelming support from delegates at the 2017 Annual Meeting. Since then our campaign has shone a spotlight on an issue that was not well-known, and now more and more people and organisations are talking about microplastic fibre pollution, and demanding action.

Since becoming the Secretariat to the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Microplastics in 2020, the WI has encouraged Government, industry, academia and campaigners to come together to find innovative solutions to microplastic fibre pollution.

To tackle the problem at source, the textile and fashion industries need to make changes to their garment manufacturing processes. Work is proceeding on this, but this global change will take some time.

In the meantime, there are things that the government can do now to stem the tide of microplastic fibres into UK seas.

The WI is calling for all new washing machines on sale in the UK to be fitted with a microplastic fibre capture filter as standard by 2025. This would capture up to 90% of fibres released from each of our domestic laundry loads.

As consumers, we can also make informed decisions when we buy and care for our clothes.

How can you help?

Consumers can make a difference by altering clothes purchasing and washing habits. The checklist on the other side of this leaflet outlines ways in which you can make a difference in your own home.

For further ways to get involved with the campaign and to download our action pack, please visit: thewi.org.uk/endplasticsoup



Change your own clothes purchasing and washing habits

Wash well

- Wash less- only wash clothes when they need it. Items that are not worn close to the skin often do not need washing after just one wear. This will prolong the life of your clothes.
- Fill up your washing machine to the max: washing a full load results in less friction between the clothes.
- Wash at a low temperature. This not only helps to reduce microplastic fibre release, but also helps to reduce CO2 emissions!
- When cleaning the dryer, do not flush the lint down the drain, throw it in the bin.
- Avoid sensitive wash cycles, like delicate washes, as high volumes of water can pluck away more fibres from the material.

Wear Well- shop smarter and buy less

'Fast fashion' can result in more harmful effects than just cluttering your wardrobe! It can have many negative impacts for people and the planet, so it's important to upcycle and repair your clothes. For tips on how to repair your clothes, visit: thewi.org.uk/s/v9

Before buying a new item of clothing, be picky and ask yourself:

- Do you really need it? Don't compromise for designs you don't really like just because they are in style.
- Could you get a similar garment second-hand? Wearing clothes for an extra nine months reduces a garment's carbon, waste and waste footprint by about 20-30% each, and cuts the cost of resources used to supply, wash and dispose of clothing by 20%.
- Does it fit well?
- Does it go with the rest of your wardrobe?
- Is it well-made? Avoid clothes that do not look like they will wear and wash well.

