

Me and climate change

When you think about climate change, what comes to mind? Is it sprawling factories puffing out black smoke? Or perhaps record breaking heatwaves in arid deserts? You might even think of polar bears sitting on melting ice caps far away in the Arctic.

You're not alone- only 17% of people in Great Britain believe climate change will have a great impact on their lives, and over 40% think it will have no impact at all. [1] The unfortunate truth is that the climate crisis is already changing our lives right here and right now. The question is, what are the real effects on you and I? Here are just a few things that are being impacted today as a consequence of climate change...

Health and wellbeing

Climate change influences public health more than you might realise, but once you think about the effects of air pollution, increased temperatures and rising sea levels, it's clear what the true impacts are. Even though it's projected that the UK will experience only a half degree of warming by 2050, the knock-on health effects are daunting. Rising temperatures affect both body and mind; without intervention, heat related deaths are expected to increase by around 250% by 2020, and in addition, higher temperatures create heat stress, which often has a negative impact on mental health. As for pollution, with roughly 90% of people breathing polluted air, respiratory diseases like asthma (which currently affects 5.4 million UK citizens [2]) will be more prevalent. Unfortunately, air pollution deaths will also increase and exceed the current 7 million deaths per year as estimated by the World Health Organisation. It seems like a bleak picture, but the solution is the same as it always has been- reduce emissions, consume less and in a more eco-friendly way, but most importantly, we need to join together and demand permanent, sustainable change.

Home and environment

You may be someone who watches the news and sees the disaster caused by typhoons, tropical storms or tornadoes in distant countries and wonder: does climate change really have an impact on where you live? Happily, there is less of an effect on our climate than those in other countries, however the effects seem to be overlooked as we see less of the extremity that the weather is capable of.

The UK has nonetheless experienced an increase in rainfall and flooding. Since 1998, seven of the ten wettest years on record have occurred! Many people are likely to remember or have heard about the havoc wreaked by Storm Dennis in February this year,

which resulted in seven fatalities and over £350 million in damages due to the severe flooding [3]. As global warming continues, the UK will have warmer and wetter winters along with hotter and drier summers, causing floods in the colder months and droughts in the hotter ones. It's clear that in the future we can expect worsening weather, and parts of the countries are in real danger from rising sea levels. It seems as though we're in for a rough ride, but there's hope yet...the new climate change action plan as announced by the Prime Minister in December outlines targets for a 68% reduction in emissions by 2030, as well as a plan for net zero emissions by 2050!

Food and nutrition

Since climate change has an impact on the weather, it also has an impact on agriculture and food; the two go hand in hand. A first point to make is that as global warming increases, the occurrence of extreme weather events such as droughts or floods becomes more frequent, which in turn makes it harder to grow crops, as the conditions are increasingly unpredictable and unreliable. As the UK provides 55% of the food its citizens consume [4], this does not bode well in terms of our future food security.

A second, perhaps less obvious point, is that of food nutrition. It has been discovered that the carbon dioxide accumulating in the atmosphere is changing the composition of our fruit and veg! Studies have found that they are becoming less nutritious as quantities of vital vitamins and organic compounds like zinc, iron and protein diminish [5], with some researchers estimating that by 2050, around 175 million people will develop a zinc deficiency, and 122 million are at risk of being iron deficient.

It seems as though there is a daunting future ahead of us, but there is light in the dark. Along with the UK's new climate change action plan, there are numerous climate activist groups like Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth and the Climate Coalition, not to mention Extinction Rebellion, who (along with many individual members of the public), are joining together to fight for change. The environment is becoming an issue increasingly at the forefront of people's, politicians' and the public's mind, and with this increase in importance will come more action to protect and preserve our world, now and for the future.