

# Our carbon footprint



Did you know that when you buy flights with certain airlines you can now pay a bit more to offset your carbon footprint? Or perhaps you've read about big pop groups who plant forests of trees every time they do a tour, again, to offset their carbon footprint? But what exactly is a carbon footprint, how is it measured and where did it come from?

Originally a footprint was exactly what you might imagine – the print made by a foot. When talking about climate change, footprint is a metaphor for the total impact that something has. And carbon is a shorthand for all the different greenhouse gases that contribute to global warming.

Everybody has a carbon footprint – it's the amount of carbon dioxide we produce with any action or activity. As carbon dioxide contributes to 'greenhouse gases', our carbon footprints have a direct impact on the environment. You can estimate your carbon footprint on any number of popular websites: if it's small, then you're probably leading a relatively green lifestyle. But what happens if it's big?

Well, the answer is that you can 'offset' it. This modern answer to the problem is for people to contribute to balancing the negative effects of their actions by using green fuels, recycling, reforestation and a number of other activities which are said to contribute to a lowering of the carbon dioxide.

## Vocabulary and expressions

<i>Offset</i>	- Counteract something by doing something with the opposite effect.
<i>Greenhouse gases</i>	- Gases that cause the earth to heat up (global warming).
<i>Green</i>	- Environmentally friendly.
<i>Reforestation</i>	- Replanting forests.
<i>Fossil fuels</i>	- a natural fuel such as coal or gas

## Useful idioms

Look at the following idioms and think about how they might be used when discussing the environment.

*No quick fix*

*A race against time*

*Ripple effect*

## Discussion

1. How big is your carbon footprint? What contributes to it?
2. How do you try to reduce your carbon footprint?
3. And do you do anything to offset it?

Look at the following contributors to greenhouse gases:

<b>Transportation</b>	- Burning fossil fuels in cars, boats, planes etc.
<b>Electricity production</b>	- Burning coal and gas.
<b>Industry</b>	- Burning fossil fuels and emissions from chemicals.
<b>Agriculture</b>	- Deforestation and gases produced.
<b>Residential</b>	- Deforestation and fossil fuels used for heat.

4. How can we affect these?
5. Is your country a big contributor of greenhouse gases?
6. What does your country do to reduce its carbon footprint?
7. Do you think the state of the environment will be better in 10 years?

