

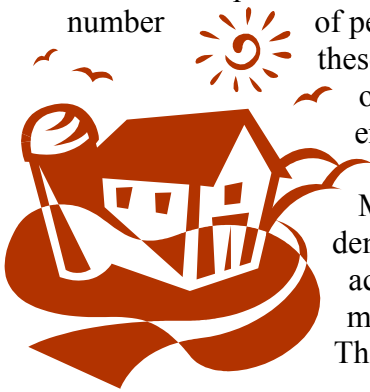
Overpopulation

Why You Should Care



Will we ever reach a point where there are too many people on Earth? Yes. Every environment has a carrying capacity — the point at which there are not enough natural resources (food and fuel) to support any more members of a given species.

Only a small amount, 11 percent, of all the land in the world is arable (able to be farmed). The rest is built up into cities and towns or is too cold, wet, rocky or dry to grow crops. While the number of people continues to grow, the small portion of land which must support these people remains the same, or becomes smaller as cities expand. Already one billion people suffer from malnutrition because they do not have enough to eat.



Many countries have tried to grow more food to meet the increasing demand and to save their people from starvation. Each year, 33-34 million acres of forests (an area equal to the size of Florida) are cut down to create more farm and grazing land and to obtain wood for fuel and other uses. The loss of these forests affects the entire Earth.

We all depend on forests, especially the tropical rainforests of Asia, Africa and Latin America, to control the world's weather patterns. And we rely on forests to absorb the excess carbon dioxide (CO₂) released from burning fuels in our cars, homes and businesses to prevent global warming. The rainforests are also home to half of the world's animal and plant species, some of which may contain the ingredients for medical breakthroughs.



The forest is not the only natural resource affected by overpopulation. Soil, too, is destroyed. In search of food, growing numbers of people have expanded their livestock herds. These billions of animals are now grazing the world's grasslands to dust. Croplands have been destroyed as the rich topsoil blows away after being overworked and misused.

This devastation of the land has created millions of environmental refugees worldwide, people forced to migrate from their homes in search of more fertile land, cleaner water and a better quality of life.

What Can Be Done?

There are better alternatives than competing with one another for the last best space or the only remaining clean water. Certainly, we can encourage our government to help us and other nations deal with population and environmental problems. But there are also things we can do as individuals, choices we can make in our lifestyle and in how we raise our families that will significantly reduce the stress on our resources and environment.

Lifestyle

We can protect our environment by making thoughtful choices about where we live, how we use energy in our homes, what we eat, how we travel and whether and how we use “throw-aways.” By making such choices, we can have a collective, healing impact on the biological systems that sustain us.

Family Size

Many American parents already limit their families to one or two children (a number that would lead to population stabilization). Young couples recognize the benefits of waiting until they’re older to have children and then spacing their births by several years — two factors that slow the growth rate. Your parents and teachers are the best sources of information on how to plan a family. This may even be covered in your school’s family life or sex education classes.



Do such choices really make a difference? Compare two families: After four generations, a family with a three-child tradition will consume 160 percent more resources (including fish, meat, wood and vegetable products) than a two-child-per-generation family.

A child’s best chance for a happy life flows from a combination of things: parental love, adequate food, water and space; and the security that comes from finding as he or she grows older, that the next generation will have these resources. Two commitments can protect such a legacy for the world’s children: responsible parenting and caring for the environment.