

Five Sustainable Practices to Reduce Eco-Anxiety

Keywords: eco-anxiety, sustainability, mental health, entrepreneurship

In an ever-changing world, people are more concerned than ever about sustainability and their environmental impact. According to Statista, **86% of Canadians believe that global warming poses a serious threat to humanity**. As awareness grows, many individuals report heightened stress levels, often linked to **eco-anxiety**. The Oxford Dictionary defines eco-anxiety as the **“extreme worry about current and future harm to the environment caused by human activity and climate change.”**

Certain groups, including **youth, Indigenous communities, and marginalized populations**, are particularly vulnerable to eco-anxiety due to their deep connections to nature and the disproportionate impacts of climate change. When faced with these anxieties, focus on **what you can control**. Adopting manageable yet sustainable habits can reduce your environmental footprint and improve your mental health and fulfillment.

Sustainable Shopping



Shopping second-hand isn't just an eco-friendly choice; it can also be a fun and rewarding hobby! The thrill of finding a unique, high-quality item you've been searching for can trigger a dopamine boost, making second-hand shopping an enjoyable and sustainable alternative to fast fashion.

Second-hand stores often carry well-made clothing made from natural fibers such as wool, cashmere, and cotton at a fraction of the retail price. Frances, a project representative from UBELONG ([hyperlink to UBELONG website](#)), notes, “In my experience, I've found natural fiber sweaters for just \$15 to \$25, whereas those same sweaters brand new can cost \$150 or more!” In contrast, fast fashion brands often sell sweaters made from 100% acrylic or acrylic blends. This may be cheaper initially but wears out quickly, leading to frequent repurchases. This can lead to increased stress levels, feeling overwhelmed by the clothes you have, and the financial burden of repurchasing these items.

Did you know an acrylic sweater can take up to 200 years to break down in a landfill?

By choosing second-hand natural fiber clothing, you're minimizing textile waste and lowering your carbon footprint while investing in more durable and sustainable pieces.

Gardening

Gardening is a simple yet powerful way to alleviate stress and anxiety in daily life. Research has shown that gardening can significantly improve mental health, boost moods, and reduce stress, fear, anger, and sadness ([source](#)). Whether you have a backyard or a small windowsill, incorporating plants into your routine can provide mental and environmental benefits.

As a university student or those living in small apartment buildings, starting an herb garden with plants like basil, rosemary, or mint can offer a sense of achievement and relaxation. Having an herb garden eliminates the stress of last-minute grocery runs and helps reduce plastic waste from store-bought packaging.



DIY and Upcycling

Upcycling is a great way to boost your sense of accomplishment and self-esteem while reducing landfill waste. Whether repurposing an item you already own or revamping a discounted or free second-hand find, upcycling allows you to personalize and restore things that may have been discarded otherwise. Further, it can be a creative outlet for mindfulness, entrepreneurship, and self-improvement.

Here are some fun upcycling ideas to get you started:

- Create a Mindfulness Jar by filling a jar with affirmation notes or uplifting words to inspire positivity.
- An *Upcycled Vision Board* can be made using an old carport and recycled pictures or magazine clippings—great for



personal goals and entrepreneurs mapping out their business visions.

- Transform old t-shirts into Tote Bags for a stylish, eco-friendly alternative to plastic bags.
- Use scrap fabric to design unique Notebook Covers that add a personal touch to journals, planners, or business notebooks. These can even be sold as part of a small-scale entrepreneurship venture.



Fiber Arts: Crochet and Knitting

Implementing hobbies such as knitting and crocheting can offer both mental health benefits and environmental sustainability. The repetitive motions of knitting and crocheting can serve as a form of meditation, helping the mind focus, reduce stress, and increase relaxation. These benefits make them an excellent tool for managing anxiety. Further, joining a knitting or crochet club can build a sense of community and social connection.

By knitting or crocheting garments, you can expand your wardrobe without harming the planet, ensuring you choose second-hand yarn, locally sourced yarns, or natural materials like wool, cotton, and cashmere, reducing reliance on synthetics, which are harmful to the environment.



Here are some knitting and crochet Facebook groups to get you started on building community and learning new skills:

- Free Crochet Patterns (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/871443646361448/>)
- Crochet for Beginners (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/crochet4beginners/>)
- We Love Crochet! (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/crochetcrazyfans/>)
- Knitting for Beginners (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/knittingmadeeasy/>)
- Addicted to Knitting (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/2221050980/>)
- Everyday Knitter (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/EverydayKnitter/>)

Sustainable Commuting: Walking & Cycling



When possible, try to cycle or walk to work, school, or daily errands. Opting for walking or cycling instead of driving benefits your mental well-being and the environment. Spending time in nature can help clear the mind, reduce stress, and improve overall well-being. Implementing this habit in your life not only improves mental health but also helps reduce carbon emissions.

*Written by Frances Halford, Project Representative of U-Belong
02/14/2025*