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## Self-affirmation theory and pro-environmental behaviour: promoting a reduction in household food waste

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### Publication date

01-04-2019

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### Document Version

Accepted version

### Citation for this work (American Psychological Association 7th edition)

Graham-Rowe, E., Jessop, D., & Sparks, P. (2019). *Self-affirmation theory and pro-environmental behaviour: promoting a reduction in household food waste* (Version 1). University of Sussex.  
<https://hdl.handle.net/10779/uos.23466854.v1>

### Published in

Journal of Environmental Psychology

### Link to external publisher version

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvp.2019.02.003>

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Self-affirmation theory and pro-environmental behaviour: Promoting a reduction in household food waste.

**Highlights:**

- A standard self-affirmation manipulation resulted in less food waste at follow-up
- Benefits of self-affirmation were most apparent for those initially wasting more food
- A brief, integrated self-affirmation task did not affect food waste behaviour
- Standard self-affirmations may help promote pro-environmental behaviour

## **Food waste and the environment**

Climate change is one of the most serious environmental threats facing the world. Its impacts are likely to be felt globally as temperatures increase, sea levels rise and patterns of drought and flooding change. Predicted consequences of climate change include increased deaths, disease and injury due to heatwaves, floods, storms, fires, droughts and malnutrition.

The 2007 Fourth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change concluded it is very likely (more than 90% probability) that most of the observed global warming since the mid-20th century is due to the observed increase in human-caused greenhouse gas concentrations.

Food waste is a major contributor to emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases. The production, distribution and storage of food which is subsequently thrown away wastes energy, fuel and water, and contributes towards deforestation. Each of these in turn adds to climate change. If we stopped throwing food away in the UK it would save the equivalent of at least 17 million tonnes of carbon dioxide, the same as taking one in every five cars off our roads.

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## **Food waste and you**

Food waste doesn't just pose a threat to the environment, it also has immediate negative implications for you. Did you know that purchasing food that never gets eaten costs the average household £480 a year, rising to £680 for a family with children? This is equivalent of throwing £50 in the bin each month.

Throwing food away can also cause you to experience uncomfortable and negative feelings. A recent survey revealed that food waste is the number one cause of 'green guilt'. It is perhaps not surprising that people feel guilty about throwing food away, as it is bad for the environment and your pocket. Furthermore, when so many people are starving in the world it may seem particularly immoral to waste food.

Most people underestimate the amount of food that they throw away because they are simply unaware of the waste that they generate. In a recent study, people who indicated that they did not waste any food were actually found to be throwing away on average 90kg a year.

**We all contribute to the negative environmental, economic and social consequences of food waste and therefore we all need to contribute to the solution.**

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## **A win-win situation**

We waste more fruit and vegetables (including salad) than any other type of food. Indeed we throw away a quarter of the fruit and vegetables that we buy. Eating fruit and vegetables,

rather than throwing them away, will not just benefit the environment, your pocket and your conscience, it will also benefit your health.

According to the World Health Organization following a diet high in fruit and vegetables could help prevent major diseases such as cardiovascular disease and some forms of cancer.

Making sure the fruit and vegetables you buy don't go to waste is fairly easy, since much of it can be eaten without a great deal of planning or skill. Below are some suggestions of how you can increase your fruit and vegetable intake.

1. Add fruit to cereal or yogurt in the morning
2. Make fruit and vegetable smoothies or juices
3. Add vegetables such as mushrooms, peppers and onions to an omelette
4. Add salad to your homemade sandwiches
5. Snack on seasonal fruit in between meals
6. Add fruit (like grapes, mandarins or strawberries) to salads
7. Make a salad to go with every meal
8. Pre-cut vegetable sticks and take them to work to snack on
9. Make a fruit salad for dessert

## **Your values**

**Please take a few moments to read the following list of values.**

Conscientiousness

Morality

Compassion

Commitment

Determination

Resourcefulness

Intelligence

Open-mindedness

Creativity

Enthusiasm

Competence

**Please consider which of these values is MOST important to YOU. Think about why this value is important to you and how it has influenced things you have done.**

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**The good news is that if any of these values are important to you, you are likely to be successful in reducing your household food waste.**