

How to shop ethically: 10 tips for reducing your fashion footprint, now!

By Kelly Dougher

1. Learn how to shop at thrift stores.

One of the best ways you can shop ethically is by purchasing secondhand clothing.

2. Research ethical clothing brands online.

If you want to buy brand new clothing and your only nearby option is a mall, then it's time to head to the Internet and discover all the amazing brands that produce clothing ethically and consciously.

3. Research ethical fast fashion brands (they exist!) and stick to them.

The good news is that you don't necessarily have to eschew fast fashion for good. Some brands are making an effort to offer ethically-made clothing, so be sure to reward those efforts whenever you see them. H&M offers a conscious clothing section as part of their sustainability goals. The ASOS Green Room offers an even larger selection of sustainably-made clothing from eco-conscious brands.

4. Budget for high quality staples.

Take a good look at how many fast fashion purchases you made in the past year and ask yourself if they were worthwhile investments. Wouldn't you rather have one silk top that lasts for years instead of three polyester tops that fall apart in a year? It might be hard to adjust your shopping habits at first but it will be worth it.

5. Learn about clothing.

You can't exactly shop for quality, ethical clothing if you don't know what to look for. Do a little bit of research, either just about clothing in general or a particular brand that you're interested in. Where does the clothing come from, who made it, and what should you look for in terms of quality are just a few questions to ask. A great place to start (besides the aforementioned guide to clothing quality) is the book *Overdressed* by Elizabeth L. Cline. Cline uncovers the truth behind our fast fashion addiction, traveling to China and Bangladesh to see the impact on workers there in addition to the effects on our environment. It's a gripping and important read.

There are also online resources that can educate you and help you stay abreast of eco-conscious news, such as [Ecouterre](#), [Ecosalon](#), and [Slaveryfootprint.org](#).

6. Ask your favorite brands to do better.

Don't underestimate the power that you have as a consumer. Obviously you should vote for change with your Rands, by supporting the brands that are eco-conscious and avoiding the ones that are not. However, you should also use your voice. The advent of social media makes it easier than ever to make large brands aware of consumers' wishes, so hop on Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook to ask your favorite brands to reform. The Internet can be a powerful tool, so be creative and figure out a way to make your voice heard, whether it's with hashtags, petitions, or a viral video.

7. Support local small businesses - see [Ethical Fashion](#) handout.

8. Take a sewing or knitting class (or learn online).

For helpful tips regarding quick fashion fixes, making your clothes last longer, information about finding a tailor, and more, check out *How To Get Dressed* by Alison Freer.

9. Check out Etsy for vintage and handmade items.

If thrift stores aren't your thing (or you don't have any in your area), you can turn to Etsy for your clothing needs. It's easy to lose hours browsing for a unique handmade silk and velvet shawl or the perfect vintage coat from the '60s. Not only are you buying an item that hardly anyone else will have, you're also supporting a small business owner. You can even change your settings to shop locally.