

# Carbon neutrality EXPLAINED

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Not very long ago, an eight-month-old baby boy named Ayaan Khan Ruhab made history as Bangladesh's first carbon-neutral baby. The news was celebrated everywhere, and rightfully so, as his parents had planted 580 trees in the Satkhira district to offset the carbon footprint associated with the baby's life. Previously, Aadavi from Tamil Nadu, India, was recognised as the world's first carbon-neutral child last year.

Most of us have heard about the term "carbon neutrality" more or less, although not a lot of us are familiar with the concept or its importance. Carbon neutrality essentially refers to the balance between the absorption and emission of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. In simpler terms, you, as a person, will emit a lot of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere throughout your life. All living organisms, including humans, emit the gas due to respiration, but humans contribute more to the emission of carbon in other ways too. Burning fossil fuels, creating waste, and through agriculture, we produce large amounts of carbon dioxide, and the measure of this amount of emission is known as our carbon footprint.

The concept of carbon neutrality extends beyond individuals. In fact, it's more important for corporations and large business organisations to be carbon neutral than individuals. Industrial procedures consume lots of energy, which is directly linked to the burning of fossil fuels and carbon dioxide emissions. So, corporations contribute much more heavily to carbon emissions than humans. In recent times, many companies have pledged to become carbon neutral, including giants like Google, Microsoft, and Unilever.

In order to become carbon neutral, it's essential to track the emissions first and then offset them by creating carbon sinks or other sustainable practices. A carbon sink is a natural or artificial system that absorbs more carbon dioxide from the air than it releases into

the atmosphere. Trees, plants, and algae undergo photosynthesis by absorbing carbon dioxide from the air. As such, forests, oceans, and grasslands are known as natural carbon sinks. Thus, one of the simplest ways to achieve carbon neutrality is by planting trees, which is what Ayaan's parents have done in order to offset his carbon footprint.

While discussing this topic, there are a few more terms you may hear that are relevant to this phenomenon. There's something called net zero emissions, which means that your activities remove as

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much greenhouse gas from the atmosphere as they produce. This is not the same as carbon neutrality but is similarly important if we are to be mindful of our activities and their effects on the climate.

You might be thinking, since it's possible to be carbon neutral, can we go even beyond that? Absolutely. We can ensure the absorption of more carbon dioxide than we emit, and this concept also has its own name and is generally referred to as "carbon negativity" or "climate positivity".

Aside from planting trees or creating carbon sinks to increase carbon absorption, another way to reach carbon neutrality is to lower your carbon emissions. As individuals, we can do so by engaging in sustainable practices. Limiting the use of fossil fuels in our everyday life works wonders, which means avoiding vehicles that have high fuel consumption. Shared transport or public transport, or vehicles like bicycles and *rickshaws*, are great for the environment, although not very realistic for cities like Dhaka that aren't exactly walkable.

The term "carbon neutrality" has been popular recently, but it has been a while since it was coined. "Carbon neutral" was Oxford's word of the year in 2006, and it's more relevant now than ever because of the ongoing climate change crisis. There has been a worldwide push for an increase in sustainable practices and reducing carbon footprints for individuals and corporations alike, and carbon neutrality is the end goal for such endeavours.

The concept of carbon neutrality is an important one that we shouldn't only be familiar with but also try to work towards collectively in order to mitigate climate change and preserve the environment.

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