A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT MAKES HEALTHY HUMANS

Pure water to drink, clean air to breathe, nutrient-rich produce to eat, these by-products of a healthy environment would obviously be beneficial to our health.

But perhaps it's not that obvious if we continue to pollute and abuse our environments and don't come to realise that we are only harming ourselves in the process.

How bad is it?

The quality of your life, as well as the number of years your life will span, is hugely dependant on living in a healthy environment, according to the Office of Diseases Prevention and Health Promotion (ODPHP), a federal website managed by the US Department of Health. The site warns that "globally, 23 per cent of all deaths and 26 per cent of deaths among children under age five are due to preventable environmental factors." These factors include:

- "Exposure to hazardous substances in the air, water, soil, and food
- "Natural and technological disasters
- "Climate change

The ODPHP also suggests that people whose health is already compromised are at the most risk of being impacted by these factors.

Further consequences

"Many aspects of the environment can affect our health", according to Environmental Health Intelligence New Zealand (EHINZ), adding that "environmental hazards can increase the risk of disease, including cancer, heart disease and asthma".

A few of the environmental exposures and their related effects on our health listed by EHINZ include:

- Climate change – Infectious diseases and heat exhaustion.
- Crowded living spaces – Infectious diseases like respiratory infections, waterborne diseases.
- Air and general outdoor pollution – Lung cancer, cardiovascular disorders, infections.

How can we clean up our act?

If you'd like to take the initiative and try to help improve our environmental health, Everyday Health suggests the following tips:

1. Don't take yourself for a ride – Driving everywhere, particularly doing so when you're alone adds a lot of unnecessary carbon monoxide to the environment. Ride a bike or join a carpool for a smaller carbon footprint.

2. Don't keep your water (plastic) bottled up – Constantly buying water in plastic bottles is expensive and not good for the environment. Buy a decent glass or stainless-steel one to carry your water and keep a reusable mug or thermos for hot beverages instead of using the disposable kind.

3. Go natural – Shopping for clothes or groceries, opt for natural eco-friendly fabrics and locally grown organic food whenever possible. Why not try growing some of your own healthier groceries?

4. Plant a greener future – To enjoy cleaner air and potentially even reduce your air-conditioning bill, plant trees.