

Taking an active role
in planetary health



Planetary Health in General Practice consultations

The CMG is joining the planetary health movement, which develops and evaluates solutions for a (more) equitable, sustainable, and healthier world.

Planetary health is closely aligned with the principles of general practice.



What is planetary health?

Planetary health is a transdisciplinary, evidence-based field that studies the impacts of human-driven changes to Earth's natural systems on human health and well-being and seeks solutions that protect both people and the planet.

Since 2003, the WONCA definition of general practice/family medicine has incorporated environmental, global, and sustainability considerations as a fundamental component of the discipline's integrated approach.

○ Health-environment co-benefits

- Everyday choices and behavioural changes that simultaneously benefit both personal health and the environment.

○ Environmentally responsible healthcare

- High-quality, safe, and appropriate care with a reduced environmental impact.

○ Social and environmental health inequalities

- Systematic, preventable, and significant inequalities in health between social groups.

Environmental inequalities contribute to social inequalities, while social vulnerability is inversely related to environmental quality.

Research shows that the mechanisms leading to social health inequalities (SHI) and environmental health inequalities (EHI) are interdependent, and that their cumulative effects contribute to poorer health outcomes, particularly among socioeconomically disadvantaged groups.

This observation calls for a proportionate universalism approach.

Eco-responsible approach: from the physician to the healthcare system

General practitioners: a source of inspiration?

The practice setting: a coherent environment

The practice is both a workplace and a care environment, where healthcare professionals can reduce their environmental impact on a finite planet facing climate change.

Prescriptions (for medications and diagnostic tests) represent the primary source of environmental impact.

More than half of the greenhouse gas emissions generated by healthcare are therefore directly influenced by healthcare professionals' decisions⁺. The second source of environmental impact **is patient transport**. Within general practice, however, physicians' own travel accounts for approximately **45% of practice-related greenhouse gas emissions**.

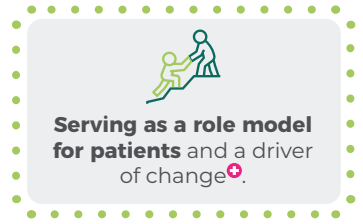
Some proposals:

- **Promote active transportation** among patients (bike racks, information on public transit, public awareness campaigns);
- **Optimise travel** through teleconsultations and shared medical transport services;
- **Organise healthcare professionals' travel** more efficiently by consolidating home visits and encouraging active mobility for short-distance journeys.



Other approaches:

- Replace paper examination table covers with washable alternatives;
- Use locally sourced, second-hand, or environmentally friendly supplies;
- Minimise digital consumption and energy use⁺



Available tools and resources:

Website



URPS Médecins
Occitanie
Sustainable Health

Website



Sustainable
Document

Website



Sustainable
Health

Book



Eco-responsible
healthcare
practice

Reflecting on the health-environment connection throughout life

Across its individual, community, and global dimensions: toward a psycho-socio-global approach.



Exposome : the cumulative effect of environmental exposures to which the body is subjected, from conception to end of life, including prenatal development, and complementing genetic influences on health. These environmental factors are both external and internal. They include various biologically active chemical agents, biological and/or physical agents (notably radiation and noise), as well as psychosocial and socio-economic factors that influence health⁺.

Exploring health determinants during the consultation:

Environmental determinants

- **Exposure to pollutants,** including chemical pollutants, endocrine disruptors (EDCs), and physical and noise pollution throughout life;
- **Access to natural and green spaces;**
- **Housing conditions,** including mould resulting from inadequate ventilation and energy choices (e.g. oil heating and wood-burning systems).

Behavioural health determinants

- **Usual modes of transport;** Identifying opportunities to promote active mobility and discussing associated health-environment co-benefits;
- **Dietary habits and their potential co-benefits** for health and the environment.

Social health determinants

- **Identifying both social and environmental health inequalities;**
- **Assessing the level of health literacy;**⁺
- **Psychosocial well-being;** Social environment, including experiences of discrimination, particularly racial and gender-based discrimination (in employment, housing, healthcare, and other settings).

These various factors are interconnected. Exploring them during the consultation provides a comprehensive understanding of a patient's circumstances and may offer opportunities for tailored interventions and support for change, such as nature prescriptions, social prescribing, and other community-based initiatives.

Some practical examples:

To reduce unnecessary medication use, empower patients, promote quaternary prevention and support shared decision-making.

In some cases, simply explaining the natural history of a condition may be sufficient, allowing a consultation to conclude without a prescription.



Seasonal allergic rhinitis:

Implement targeted measures depending on the time of year, inform patients about pollen monitoring and alert tools, and discuss the links between allergic diseases and climate change.

Advice

- **Change clothes after being outdoors** and, if possible, shower, including washing hair;
- **Keep windows closed** and limit outdoor activities during hot, dry weather or after thunderstorms;
- **Keep car windows closed** while traveling;
- **Avoid irritants** such as tobacco smoke, cleaning products, DIY products, home fragrances, incense and candles, which are common sources of indoor air pollution and may contribute to exposure to endocrine-disrupting chemicals.

Medication

If required, use antihistamines, preferably topical treatments first, followed by systemic treatment if necessary.



Upper Respiratory Tract Infection

Prefer nasal irrigation using a homemade saline solution as part of a low-waste approach.

Advice

- **Nasal decongestion** using a reusable device;
- **Ensure adequate hydration** throughout the day;
- Honey, fruit pieces, lemon, etc., may help relieve symptoms;
- Warm or sweet drinks may provide comfort.

Medication

Only if necessary for pain relief or fever: paracetamol at the lowest effective dose.



Homemade saline solution recipe:

Dissolve 2 teaspoons of coarse salt in 1 litre of lukewarm water.



Simple gastro-oesophageal reflux disease (GERD) in adults

Limit overly rich meals and use this as an opportunity to encourage a healthy, environmentally sustainable diet.

Advice

- **Avoid large meals and eat slowly;** avoid foods that may trigger symptoms such as fatty foods, spicy foods, carbonated drinks, and certain raw vegetables;
- **Reduce consumption** of alcohol, tobacco, acidic beverages (e.g. orange juice, tomato juice, and lemon juice), and vinegar;
- **In the hours following a meal,** avoid lying down, limit activities involving bending forward (e.g. gardening), and elevate your head in bed;
- **Avoid strenuous physical activity after meals,** although walking may aid digestion;
- **Maintain a healthy weight** and avoid tight clothing around the waist; Avoid constipation.

Medication

Only if necessary: sodium alginate and sodium bicarbonate.



Acute viral gastroenteritis (uncomplicated case)

Primarily dietary measures, with pharmacological treatment as a second-line option.

Advice

- **Oral hydration,** with or without oral rehydration solution (ORS);
- **Small, frequent meals;**
- **Prefer well-cooked, lightly salted** starches or cereals;
- **Limit fatty foods** and dairy products, except yoghurt.

Medication

Only if necessary: paracetamol at the lowest effective dose for pain relief and/or fever reduction.



Ear infection

Most ear infections do not require antibiotics and resolve spontaneously in both children and adults⁺.



Sore throat (pharyngitis/tonsillitis)

It is often reasonable to treat with analgesics alone, without performing a rapid diagnostic test or prescribing antibiotics⁺.



Eczema

Limit cosmetic products, irritants, and potential sources of endocrine-disrupting chemicals. Reduce shower water temperature, which also helps lower energy consumption. Use a glycerin-based emollient.

Advice

- **Avoid harsh soap-based cleansers** and prefer soap-free liquid cleansers (e.g. cleansing oils with neutral pH, fragrance-free formulations);
- **Avoid extreme water temperatures** (baths or showers);
- Pat the skin dry **without rubbing**;
- Clothing: **avoid wool and prefer cotton**;
- Laundry: **avoid perfumes and fabric softeners**;
- **Keep nails short**;
- **If you experience itching**: gently rub or tap the area with the palm of the hand.

Emollient (glycerin-based)

Apply 2–3 times daily.

If insufficient

Topical corticosteroids, adjusted according to severity and affected area, for a limited duration.



Asthma attack

Preventing asthma exacerbations involves educating patients about indoor and outdoor air pollution. Prefer dry powder inhaler devices, which reduce greenhouse gas emissions while offering equivalent efficacy.

Advice

- **Avoid active and passive smoking**;
- **Ventilate your home daily**;
- **Adapt activities according to outdoor air quality**.

If asthma symptoms worsen, investigate potential indoor pollution sources (consult an environmental health specialist if needed)⁺.

Managing the acute attack

Prefer salbutamol in dry powder form **without propellant gas** (except when an inhalation chamber is required).

Long-term asthma control

Maintenance treatment: prefer dry powder formulations without propellant gas.

Practical tools

To support (de)prescribing,⁶ whether involving medication or non-pharmacological approaches:

- **Healthy global nutrition**
Collège de la Médecine Générale
urlr.me/GbMheE
- **Prescribing less and better** (medicines, additional tests, etc.)
prescrire.org
- **Choosing Wisely**
choisiravecsoin.org
- **Eco-responsible prescribing**
Collège de la Médecine Générale
urlr.me/HACGD
- **Nature prescribing (parks, riversides, forests, sea, mountains)**
prescri-nature.ca ou urlr.me/6QCZ8k
- **"For your health, spend time in nature!"**
A down-to-earth film
vimeo.com/659594135
- **Social prescribing**
Health United
urlr.me/d6rp9Q
- **Physical activity: adapted physical activity prescription (APA)**
urlr.me/MJPRUc
- **Prescription and cycling incentives: a win-win approach!**
Support approach: follow the 5 A's rule (Ask, Assess, Advise, Agree, Assist)
Obesity Canada
obesitycanada.ca



Access to the
digital version
of the document

This document was produced by members of the CMG
Global Health Working Group.

For further information: cmg.fr/sante-planetaire-gt