

# Going swishing

Swishes, or clothes swap events, are a great way to update your wardrobe and do your bit for the environment

**'S**ave money, save the planet, have a party.' Those are the words of Lucy Shea of Futerra Sustainability Communications, who started the swishing craze more than a decade ago.

At its heart it is a very simple idea. You organise an event with friends and others. You each bring clean, good-condition clothes or accessories that you no longer wear. And you swap them for things others have brought.

Two women who love to swish are Sarah Rockley and Lisa Holland from Southwell in Nottinghamshire, who have held six swishes so far. 'We've both worked in the fashion industry and have seen its environmental impact in terms of soil depletion, water contamination and more,' explains Lisa. 'Then there's the amount of waste it generates. So it's important to encourage a more mindful approach by keeping clothes out of landfill.'

That's why, in 2020, they decided to take their swishing hobby further by setting up Conscious Closet, which not only organises swishes but runs pop-up shops of unsold stock and holds presentations about sustainable fashion.

Not that you need to be a fashion expert to run a swishing event. 'It can be as simple or as complicated as you want to make it,' says Sarah. 'All you need is passion, energy and organisational skills.'

**Buying nothing on a three-month fashion detox helps you find old favourites in your wardrobe**

Maureen Brown, Trustee in charge of TG's In Our Hands climate change campaign



Above: A swisher at a Conscious Closet event  
Right: Lisa and Sarah are encouraging people to keep clothes out of landfill

A swish could just be a group of friends bringing their swaps to someone's home. Or – as with Lisa and Sarah's events – it could be something larger. 'We use a local community space and cater for around 50 women, providing a presentation on sustainable fashion as well as refreshments,' says Lisa.

'Attendees drop off the clothes they want to swap in advance and we arrange them on rails,' adds Sarah. 'We pour them a welcome drink, do our short presentation and then open up the rails for swishing!'

Lisa and Sarah join in too. 'I picked up a beautiful & Other Stories black dress that is perfect for work,' says Lisa.

Feedback has been hugely positive. 'At the last swish, a group of women came from a neighbouring village,' says Lisa. 'When they left they told us they'd had an amazing evening, found some wonderful clothes and



really enjoyed themselves. They texted us later with pictures of them in their new outfits!'

'There's such a community spirit too,' says Sarah. 'You hear people saying to someone trying on an item they brought: "It's so lovely to see it being worn again – and it looks amazing on you!"'

For Lisa and Sarah, the swishes tick two important boxes. 'It's a fun night out with a reason behind it – to help make people aware of the environmental impact of the fashion industry. And that's the message we want to get across.'

See [www.conscious-closet.co.uk](http://www.conscious-closet.co.uk) and [www.instagram.com/consciousclosetuk](https://www.instagram.com/consciousclosetuk)

## SWISH LIST

A swish could be perfect for a Guild meeting or bigger TG occasion. Adding a raffle, refreshments and an entrance fee can turn it into a fundraising event. And inviting non-members will help promote TG. Here's how to get swishing...

**1.** Decide the time and date, and how long the swish will last (which will depend on how many people are coming), and book a venue if necessary.

**2.** Decide the rules. The simplest system is 'one for one' – so if someone brings five items, she would get a voucher allowing her to take five items. You can adapt this, giving more 'credit' for designer items or higher-value items such as coats.

**3.** If it's open to non-members, advertise via posters, social media, local press and websites. Include the date, time, address, contact details, rules and clothing drop-off times, plus a reminder that clothes must be clean, ironed and in good repair. Ask members to spread the word too – maybe they could each bring a friend? And encourage women all ages and sizes to take part.

**4.** Sort the logistics. You'll need hangers, rails, full-length mirrors, tables for accessories, and some sort of area for trying on clothes – maybe a screen or large sheets hung in a corner. Members could lend what's needed, and some local authorities' recycling departments can help too.

**5.** If possible, get people to drop off clothes (preferably on a hanger) in advance, marked with their name and number or email address.

**6.** Then make vouchers from slips of paper or card, with the person's name and



the number of items they're entitled to – you'll give these out at the swish.

**7.** On the day, give yourself time before browsing starts (see 8, below) to set up and take in any last-minute offerings. If all items are being brought on the day, allow extra time for your team of volunteers to write out the vouchers and display the items. Offering refreshments as people wait for the swish to begin will raise more money and keep everyone happy.

**8.** About 30 minutes before the swish, allow people in for browsing – they can't take anything (or hide anything!) yet. Give them their vouchers if the clothes were dropped off in advance.

**9.** At the end of the browsing period, declare the swish open!

**10.** Items left over? Donate them to a charity shop.

Find out more about swishing at [www.getswishing.com](http://www.getswishing.com)

– produced by the West London Waste Authority

but relevant to would-be swishers everywhere.



## BEYOND THE SWISH

### Buy – and sell – second-hand

As well as swapping, check out charity shops, many of which have online stores. Or try online marketplaces such as [www.ebay.co.uk](http://www.ebay.co.uk), [www.facebook.com/marketplace](http://www.facebook.com/marketplace) and [www.vinted.co.uk](http://www.vinted.co.uk), which enable you to search by size, colour, price and more.

### Hire

More retailers are offering clothing rental, mainly for one-off outfits for parties or weddings. For example, [www.hirestreetuk.com](http://www.hirestreetuk.com) has outfits from Ghost, Whistles and even M&S. Just make sure to check all Ts&Cs regarding cleaning, returns and so on.

### Repair and upcycle

Make do and mend is nothing new to many Townswomen. Now apps such as Sojo (available on the App Store or Google Play) helps those not skilled with a needle to find a local expert to repair much-loved items. Visible mending is also becoming a trend, with craftswomen like Flora Collingwood-Norris showing how to make a virtue out of darning your old holey knitwear – see [www.collingwoodnorrisdesign.com/visible-mending](http://www.collingwoodnorrisdesign.com/visible-mending). Plus there are many books and online videos with tips on transforming old socks, T-shirts and more into brand-new items.



## UK FASHION FAILS

- The average woman owns **22** items of clothing she has never worn.
- We buy **more clothes per person** than any other country in Europe.
- Around **350,000** tonnes of clothing ends up in our bins every year, with 20% going to landfill and 80% being incinerated.
- In the average household, **nearly a third of clothes** haven't been worn in the past year.
- Clothing lasts for an average of **3.3 years** before being binned or given away.