

Hooded blankets are cozy, but they are not great for oceans or our health

July 1 2021, by Vincent H.s. Yap and Jennifer Lavers



Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

Last year, Australian kids hounded parents for [Ooshies](#)—character-based plastic collectibles distributed by supermarket chain Woolworths. But like the attention span of a five year old, the contentious marketing campaign quickly faded. This year, the similarly named Oodies are gaining viral attention—and presenting their own plastic problem.

The [Oodie](#) is essentially a wearable blanket comprising an oversized hooded sweatshirt and an equally oversized kangaroo pocket. Lined with light, ultra-soft and heat-retentive fabrics, Oodies are billed as the ultimate comfort-wear for those wanting to snuggle down in front of the TV—especially during a winter lockdown.

But what makes Oodies ([and other hooded blanket brands](#)) soft and warm is a wool-like material called fleece. While it can sometimes be made of cotton or acrylic, fleece is most often made of [polyester](#). This synthetic fiber commonly derived from polyethylene terephthalate (PET)—the same plastic used to make [water bottles](#)—makes Oodies bad news for oceans.

We know plastics are bad

Environmental concerns about Oodies extend beyond the amount of water such bulky items require to wash them. As most PET plastics still originate from [fossil fuels](#), concern regarding the environmental impact of [polyester](#)-based garments is justified.

Not only does its production contribute to enhanced carbon emissions and [global warming](#), synthetic fibers like [polyester and acrylic](#) are the dominant form of [microplastic pollution](#) in marine (and [freshwater](#)) environments. The main pollution source is microplastic fibers released from the [washing](#) of synthetic fabrics. Fleece-type garments (including Oodies) are likely major culprits.

Happy Saturday everyone! What are you all up to this weekend?

🐾 [#OodieSquad pic.twitter.com/w6IbMVbq6J](#)

— the oodie (@TheOodie) [April 23, 2021](#)

Numerous studies have documented the detrimental effects of

microplastic ingestion on various aquatic organisms (such as fish, mussels and [crustaceans](#)), ranging from impaired physiology to lowered reproduction and survival. According to marine biologists at the Plymouth Marine Laboratory, these effects may transfer up the [food chain](#) to reach humans.

Studies have also shown potential direct impacts of prolonged exposure to polyester microfibrils on humans, including allergies, lung inflammation, disrupted hormonal function and even carcinogenic effects. This is allegedly due to harmful chemical additives (such as [phthalates](#)) that are commonly used in the manufacture of synthetic fabrics.



Credit: Lisa Fotios from Pexels

Natural vs synthetic fibers

The apparel industry [is working](#) to become more sustainable, be it the fabrics used, or the manufacturing process involved. However, information about how and where Oodies are made is limited on their website. The garments are spruiked as [vegan](#), which provides a positive spin.

Fleece can be made from cotton—some hooded blankets are of a flannel fleece exterior (made of cotton). This natural fiber—provided it's been [organically](#) and sustainably farmed—is arguably more sustainable than polyester. It is a renewable resource that can biodegrade under favorable conditions.

However, polyester-made fleece remains the preferred fabric for most hooded blanket brands available (including the Oodie with its 100% polyester interior), presumably due to its relatively light weight, durability, better heat retention, moisture resistance and recyclability—and yes, polyester can be recycled!

Is recycling (really) the answer then?

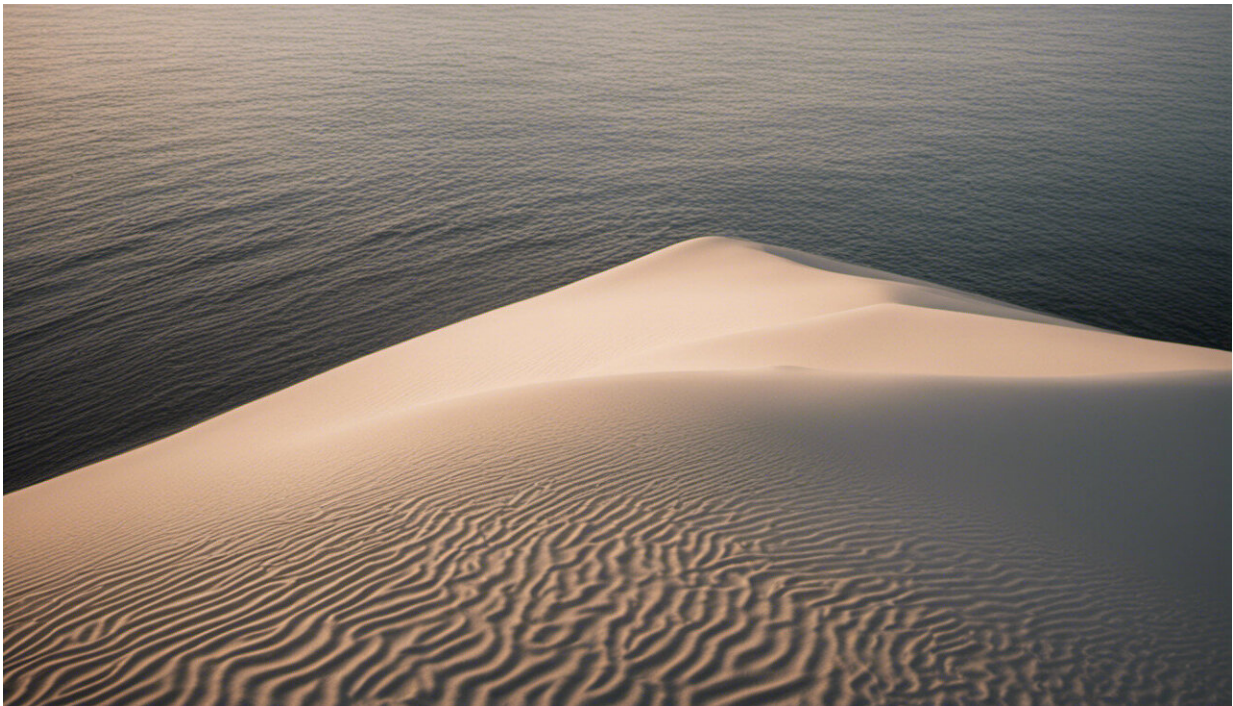
According to a [2017 study](#) by the Swiss Federal Office for the Environment, production of [recycled polyester](#) uses 59% less energy than virgin polyester. It is also ostensibly less environmentally harmful than growing [organic cotton](#), given the latter leaches nutrients from the soil and requires large open spaces to grow.

Of the hooded blankets brands we looked at (including the Oodie, [Cotton On's Snuggles](#), [Bed Bath N. Table's Hooded Sherpa](#) and others) only [BONDS' Super Softies Reversible Hoodie](#) indicates the use of

recycled polyester. But that doesn't necessarily make it a significantly "greener" choice. The relative proportion of the garment made of recycled polyester is not specified—it could be 90%, 50% or even 5%!

With any polyester-based fabric, recycled or not, the release of synthetic microfibres into wastewater systems and subsequently into natural waterways is inevitable.

Installing a decent [microfibre filter](#) in your laundry machine could help reduce the amount of microplastics entering the environment, but the efficiency of such filtering devices is still in need of urgent [improvement](#).



Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

Some heroes wear capes ... ones made of natural fibers!

Given we could not find fully cotton-based hooded blankets for sale, the current best alternative may well be to stick with standard, natural fiber-based blankets, throws or hoodies.

These are typically made from organic cotton, hemp, [Tencel](#) or recycled wool and offered by eco-friendly brands like [Bhumi](#) and [Seljak Brand](#).

As winter warmers, they are equally functional and do not generate microplastics. This makes them a much safer bet for the environment and health-wise.

Alternatively, you could [sew your own](#) hooded blanket. This would allow a choice of non-synthetic fabrics as well as personalized designs.

Sure, the Oodie is new and exciting with cute fabrics. But you get to wear conventional, non-synthetic blankets like a superhero cape and, quite literally, save the planet.

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