

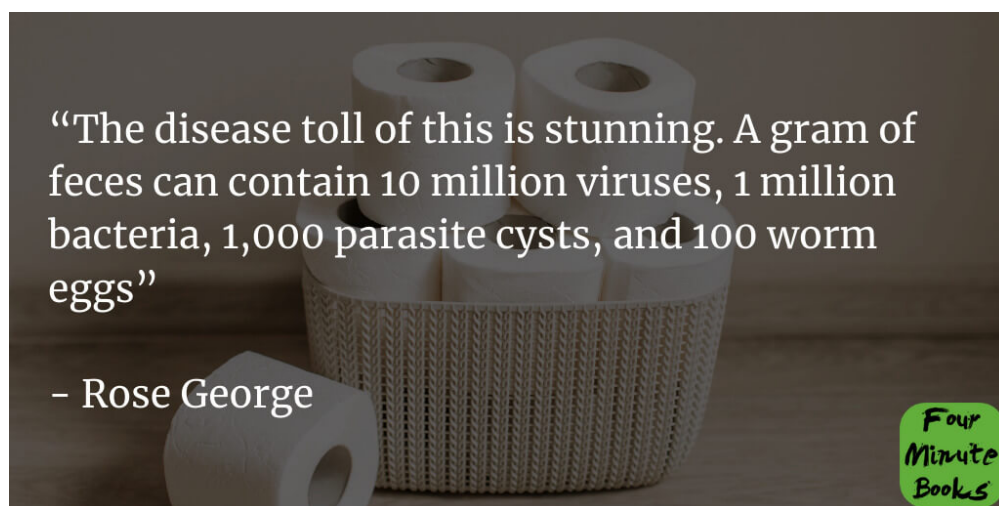
The Big Necessity Summary

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1-Sentence-Summary: *The Big Necessity* makes you smarter about feces by explaining how sanitation works, the damage it causes when it's not done properly, and what we can do to improve it around the world.

Read in: 4 minutes

Favorite quote from the author:



We all do it, just about every day. But for some reason, *nobody* wants to talk about it.

I'm talking about pooping. And unless you are the parent of a potty-training toddler, you probably don't even think about it much.

But there's no need to avoid the subject. In fact, because we like to avoid thinking about it, we ignore the problems that come with all seven billion of us sharing this world and doing our business on a daily basis.

Substandard sanitation is a huge issue in the world today. And it's one of the leading causes of disease and death worldwide. It might feel like a problem only affecting the poorest parts of the world, but *2.6 billion people worldwide don't even have access to a toilet*.

In *The Big Necessity: The Unmentionable World of Human Waste and Why it Matters*, author Rose George takes us into the world of sanitation. She explains how a lack of it can lead to huge issues and explores what can be done about it.

Here are the 3 of the most interesting lessons from this one:

1. Not only can proper sanitation save billions of dollars, it can save lives.

2. The only way to solve the problem is to change attitudes and habits toward sanitation.
3. Though there are many challenges in dealing with human waste, it can actually be a useful resource.

Are you ready to gain a new appreciation for the crapper? Let's dive right in and see what we can learn!

Lesson 1: Adequate sanitation saves tons of money as well as lives.

Did you know diarrhea takes an estimated 2.2 million lives a year? By just properly disposing of human feces, we can reduce diarrhea in developing countries by an astounding 40 percent. Harvard scientist Gary Ruvkun suggested that access to a toilet is the biggest factor in living a long, healthy life. He believed it could add an estimated 20 years to a person's lifespan.

Having good sanitation makes an immense difference both medically and economically. Bad sanitation means people get sick more often, taking them out of work and giving them costs of medical care. It's hard to estimate just how significant the economic impact would be if we could dispose of waste effectively.

But one thing is for sure: you will always spend more to fix the problem of poor sanitation than you will to put it in place in the first place. It would cost about \$95 billion to fix sanitation worldwide. It might sound like a lot until you realize it would save \$660 billion in the end.

Take Peru, for example. A 1991 cholera outbreak cost \$1 billion to contain. Cholera is the result of bad sanitation and contaminated water. The changes that needed to be made to prevent the problem would have cost just \$100 million and would've been a lasting investment in the water system.

Lesson 2: In order to fix the problem, we need to get rid of the taboo and work to change sanitation habits.

Once we flush the toilet, we just don't really want to talk about what happens after that. Even when talking about poop-related disease, we say things like "water-related diseases." And then there's "bathroom" and "water closet." This taboo even appears in world charity groups like USAID, who spend 90 percent of their budget on clean water, which reduces diarrhea by 20 percent, instead of clean sanitation, which would reduce it by 40 percent.

Each day in India, roughly 155,000 truckloads of feces are deposited in open public areas. People in the slums and poorer areas walk through and live around human waste daily. Groups have tried to help with this open-defecation problem in India by providing latrines. But it has come down to a problem of habit as millions of these have been misused or unused.

George explains that if we are going to tackle this problem, people need to be educated of the dangers of human feces, as many people may not realize the danger. In 1991, WaterAid consultant Kamal Kar actually went to villages to talk to the people in person about stopping open-defecation practices. The non-profit had been building latrines in Bangladesh for years, though the feces-related diseases continued.

Kar took the people around the village with him, calculating an estimate of how much excrement was around them. When he came to the estimate of 120,000 tons, the people were revolted at the thought of the feces all around them and making its way into their food. The people wanted something different, and quickly began a village-wide cleanup initiative. This effective tactic of getting communities to *want* sanitation is still used today, and is known as Community-Led Total Sanitation or CLTS.

Lesson 3: Though it presents many problems, there are also uses for human waste.

Calling it “waste” is a misnomer because it actually has some uses. People can reuse it and turn it into bricks for roads, for instance. It also contains valuable phosphates and nitrogen to feed plants.

Have you ever heard of the term fecal transplant? **It might sound pretty gross, but this relatively new idea of transplanting feces from a healthy person to a sick one to restore healthy gut bacteria is very effective at treating a variety of illnesses.**

China has been inventive with its waste disposal by making use of *biogas*. Biogas are biofuels made from the fermentation of any organic material, including plants and human waste. An estimated 15 million rural Chinese have what’s called a bioga digester. These devices connect to the toilet and convert waste to power.

This saves money on power, but in other ways as well. That’s because what’s left in the digester can be used as fertilizer. so they don’t have to spend money on artificial fertilizer. They estimate vegetables have around a 50 percent greater yield when fertilized by the biogas byproduct. Lastly, biogas helps save forests since it can be used to heat stoves much more effectively than wood.

The Big Necessity Review

The Big Necessity is really eye-opening. If we want to do anything about the worldwide problem of waste disposal, the first step is to start talking about it. This book has a lot of details about the problems that we face when it comes to sanitation as well as valuable solutions for different parts of the world in dealing with it.

Who would I recommend The Big Necessity summary to?

The 51-year-old activist that wants to know how we can save more lives, the 30-year-old that works as a city planner, and anyone that's ever gone "number two" on the toilet.