



What Will Life Be Like in 2050? (text adapted from [Big Think Editors](#) on June 28, 2010)

By mid-century there will likely be 9 billion people on the planet, consuming ever more resources and leading ever more technologically complex lives. What will our cities be like? How will we eat? Will global warming trigger catastrophic changes, or will we be able to engineer our way out of the climate crisis?

Making predictions is, by nature, a dicey business, but Big Think asked top minds from a variety of fields to weigh in on what we might expect our world to be like 40 years from now. The result is our latest special series, [Life in 2050](#).

[Demographic changes](#) will certainly be dramatic. Biologist Joel Cohen says it's likely that by 2050 the majority of the people in the world will live in urban areas, and will have a significantly higher average age than people today.

And rapidly [advancing technology](#) will continue ever more rapidly. According to Bill Mitchell, the late director of MIT's Smart Cities research group, cities of the future won't look like "some sort of science-fiction fantasy," but it's likely that "discreet, unobtrusive" technological advances and information overlays will change how we live in significant ways. Charles Ebinger, also thinks that by 2050 we will also have a so-called "smart grid" where all of our appliances are linked directly to energy distribution systems, allowing for real-time pricing based on supply and demand.

Meanwhile, the Internet will continue to radically transform media, destroying the traditional model of what a news organization is, says Daniel Okrent, who believes the most common kinds of news organizations in the future will be "individuals and small alliances of individuals" reporting and publishing on very specific topics.

Advances in technology will make us more empowered, motivated and active, rather than mindless consumers of information and entertainment. Professor Clay Shirky worries that technological threats could endanger much of the openness that we now enjoy online.

As far as [environment](#) is concerned , Some predictions are downright terrible. Environmentalist Bill McKibben says that if we don't make major strides in combating global warming, it's likely we could see out-of-control rises in sea levels, enormous crop shortfalls, and wars over increasingly scarce freshwater resources..

We will live longer and remain healthier. Patricia Bloom, says we may not routinely live to be 120, but it's possible that we will be able to extend wellness and shorten decline and disability for people as they age. AIDS research pioneer David Ho says the HIV/AIDS epidemic will still be with us, but we will know a lot more about the virus than we do today—and therapies will be much more effective.

[In terms of how we will eat](#) , people will eat fewer processed foods, and eat foods grown closer to where they live.

And what will our [culture](#) be like? We may not get rid of racism entirely in the next 40 years, but the issue of race will become "much less significant," . Father James Martin, a Jesuit priest, says it's even likely that we'll see a black pope.