

Take control of your energy bills



HOW MUCH DO YOU PAY



Energy bills can be difficult to understand because they contain a lot of information. The amount you pay is based on meter readings which may have been estimated and not accurate.

Energy bills say how much energy you've used in kilowatt hours (kWh), since your last bill. Electricity meters record the number of kWh but gas meters measure the volume of gas used and are then converted in cubic meters or cubic feet to kWh; how they do that is written on the bill.

Different energy suppliers have different rates they charge for energy. This includes a charge for the amount of energy you've used and a daily standing charge.

Paying by monthly direct debit and having gas and electricity from the same supplier is usually the cheapest. Paying on receipt of a quarterly bill or using a prepayment meter is more expensive.

If you think you are paying too much, contact your energy supplier to see if you can switch to their cheapest tariff. If they don't have one, you can switch to another supplier that does.

Energy suppliers only usually read meters every 18 months, in between they estimate how much you've used. Estimates are rarely accurate and you may be paying for energy you haven't used.

HOW CAN YOU PAY LESS

Check the meter reading quoted on your bill is accurate. Read the meter yourself and if you think they've over estimated, phone them with your own reading. They will send you a new bill.

If you're not sure how to read your meter, look on the next page for most of the types of meters.

The other way to pay less is to use less energy by making your home more efficient and by adopting energy saving habits.



10 TIPS FOR LOWER ENERGY BILLS

- 1 Dry clothes outside in dry weather or in the bathroom with the window open and door closed
- 2 Don't leave things switched on when they're not needed such as lights, appliances on standby
- 3 Full loads in dishwashers and washing machines are more efficient
- 4 Defrost fridges and freezers regularly and don't leave the door open longer than necessary
- 5 Don't put warm food into a fridge or freezer and keep it as full as possible
- 6 Use pans with lids when cooking to keep the heat in the food and steam out of the kitchen
- 7 Fit draught excluders on doors, letter boxes, key holes and close curtains at night to keep heat in
- 8 Turning heating down by 1 degree
- 9 Replace regular light bulbs with low energy ones
- 10 Be aware of what uses the most energy with an energy monitor
(free from Act on Energy - when available)

SWITCH IT OFF



How to make sure appliances are not using energy:

- LED lights only use a tenth of the energy of a filament bulb and should last many years. Over its long life, just one 6W LED bulb can save over £200 in electricity.
- When you buy a new appliance check the energy label to see how much it will cost to run.
- An 'A' rated fridge can save you about £40 a year compared to a 'G' rated one.
- If you are not using something, switch it off at the wall or pull the plug out. Do not leave things on stand-by, even digital TV set top boxes and computer modems can be switched off.

You may be surprised by the energy costs of many of the things you take for granted and how much energy they still use when you think they are off. The following table indicates the running cost of some typical appliances found in the home based on 15p/kWh for electricity.

Appliance Type Typical Use	Max Power (W)	Stand by Power (W)	Annual Cost (£)
42" Plasma TV	280	3	64.61
Video/DVD player	40	3	12.05
Music centre	75	1	17.52
Games console	45	5	59.13
Desktop PC & CRT Monitor	200	30	76.65
Broadband router	10	0	13.14
LED bulb	11	0	2.41
100W tungsten bulb	100	0	21.90
Oil filled radiator	2500	700	450.00
Electric shower	10500	7500	189.71
Electric blanket	130	35	6.01
Electric kettle	2200	0	39.75
Electric oven	2200	2	122.97
Electric hob ring	1400	0	76.65
Microwave	800	2	13.55
A rated dishwasher	1050	0	54.00
A rated washing machine	3000	5	15.75
Tumble drier	2500	0	51.75
Iron	1800	0	56.16
Vacuum cleaner	1200	0	18.72

READING YOUR ENERGY METER

Older gas and electricity meters have dials marked with the units measured by each dial, kWh for electricity and cubic ft³ for gas. Energy bills ignore units less than 1 so ignore the red numbers.

Electric dial meter in kWh.



To read this one, start with the left hand dial which records the highest units (10,000s) and each one to the right but ignore the red dial.

If the pointer is between two numbers use the lowest number. If it's between 0 and 9, use 9 but if it's exactly on a number look at the next dial to see if it's above or below 0. If it's on 8 or 9, use the lower number. This meter reads 33823.

Dual rate analogue meter (Economy 7)



This meter has 2 sets of numbers. The top row is usually marked LOW and records the cheaper night time units. The lower row is marked NORMAL and records the daytime units.

The LOW rate is connected to a timer which is normally next to the meter and is set to switch at around midnight and 7am. This one reads LOW- 77638 NORMAL- 43572

Electric digital meter



For this type, the reading is on a display which either cycles continuously between several sets of numbers in the case of a multi rate meter or just displays a single row for a regular tariff.

This is dual rate meter with a reading of 03264 for rate 2 (same as Normal). It will automatically move to rate 1 (same as Low) after a few seconds.

ELECTRIC DIGITAL PRE-PAYMENT METER

Credit is added to a card or key at a local PayPoint by paying cash. When the key is inserted, the credit is transferred to the meter.

The blue button moves the display to the next reading which can show the units consumed.



DIGITAL GAS METER

This has a permanent display showing the amount of gas that's passed through the meter in cubic metres (m³) and the reading is 11418 ignoring the numbers outlined in red.



The meter allows customers to top up from home, online, by phone or still in a shop. You won't be reliant on having a key or card, so the worry of losing your energy supply if you lose your key or card will go.

These also allow you to set notification reminders and alerts when credit is low.

Managing and transferring credit across both gas and electricity is available too.

By 2020 all energy suppliers will have replaced their existing meters with new smart meters.

ENERGY MONITORS



SMART METERS

All energy suppliers will be offering existing meters with smart meters by 2020; some are already doing it. They automatically send the meter readings to the Data Communications Company so your bills are always accurate.

Ask your energy supplier about getting a smart meter at no extra cost.

SMART PRE-PAYMENT METER



These new meters will make sure you receive accurate bills and statements, by sending your energy supplier readings direct from your meter.

An energy monitor will accurately measure and display a household's electricity usage in real time. This can help you understand how to cut your bills.

Energy monitors display your electricity consumption in units called kilowatt hours (kWh) and the cost. These are the same units that appear on your electricity bill (1 unit on your bill = 1kWh).

The monitor will show you instantly the effect on energy use by turning on/off different appliances. This can help reduce the use of energy to cut your fuel costs as well as CO₂ emissions.

If everyone in the household gets involved you can work together to bring your electricity use down.

Monitoring your usage over the long term is a great way of keeping you on track to save money on your bills.

WHAT TO EXPECT FROM YOUR ENERGY SUPPLIER

Your energy supplier not only provides your gas and electricity, they also offer a number of services.

PRIORITY SERVICES REGISTER



Some customers need extra help because of age, disability or health issues, so ask your supplier to go on their register to get help to read meters, large print bills, gas safety checks or adaptations to make it easier to operate appliances.

HELP with energy debt

If you are struggling to keep on top of your bills and payments there may be certain qualifying grants out there to help you such as:

- **Winter Fuel Payment**
- **Cold Weather Payment**
- **Warm Home Discount Scheme**



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ON DEBT

Q. What do I do if I'm in debt?

A. Your energy supplier will want to help you come to a solution. You should try to negotiate a deal that works for both of you. They can assist with an affordable debt repayment plan in instalments or advise on an alternative tariff that may be more appropriate for you. Many of the large energy providers also have a charitable trust, which can help families and individuals struggling to pay for gas and electricity bills, through grants and schemes.

Q. If I'm on benefits and have a low income how can I repay debts?

A. This can be done by repaying your debts directly from your benefits through the Fuel Direct Scheme. This means a fixed amount will automatically be taken from your benefits. You'll pay fixed amounts over a set period of time based on what you can afford to pay and how much energy you'll use in the future.

Q. What other repayment options are there?

A. Energy suppliers can fit a prepayment meter, which may work as a budgeting aid for some customers. But it can also be more costly and there can be a risk of being left without a fuel supply if the key or card cannot be charged for any reason.

Q. I'm worried I'll be disconnected during the winter months.

A. The six largest energy suppliers in the UK have agreed not to cut off vulnerable customers. Between October and March, they must not disconnect customers of pensionable age, or members of the household with long term medical conditions, and households with children.

Q. If I owe money can I still switch energy supplier?

A. Yes, but the amount you owe may affect your ability to switch.

Q. What happens to my debt and repayments if I switch supplier?

A. Any outstanding debt will be transferred to the new supplier to continue repaying at a rate based on what you can afford.

ADVICE AND HELP CONTACT DETAILS

For advice and help with managing your money to keep your home running you can contact your local Citizens Advice centre, The Money Advice service and StepChange.

Citizens Advice centre	Telephone: 03454 04 05 06 Website: www.citizensadvice.org.uk
Money Advice Service	Telephone: 0800 138 7777 Website: www.moneyadviceservice.org.uk/en
StepChange	Telephone: 0800 138 1111 Website: www.stepchange.org

SWITCH energy supplier

You could save money by switching to a different energy supplier particularly if you use gas and electricity from the same supplier. If you are switching for the first time you could save up to £300.

The best way to find out the best deal is to use comparison websites. There are many switching sites you could use that are accredited under the Ofgem Confidence Code such as:

uSwitch www.uswitch.com - 0808 1783 492

UK Power www.ukpower.co.uk - 0800 860 6844

Money Supermarket www.moneysupermarket.com

OR

Ask ACT ON ENERGY to do it for you!



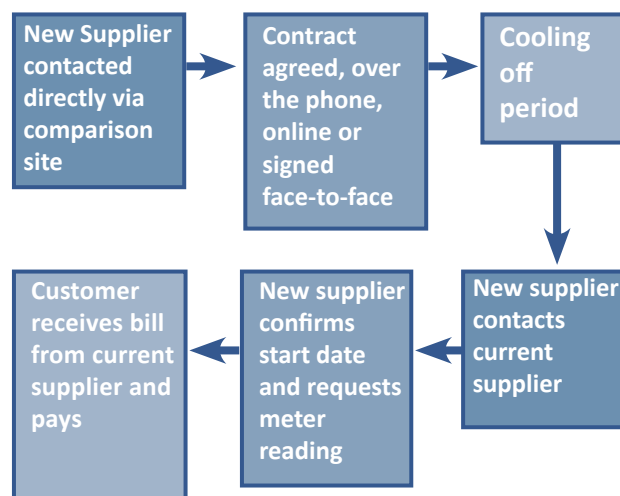
Freephone : 0800 988 2881



HOW TO SWITCH

You can switch using an internet comparison site or contact the supplier. In order to achieve accurate information you need:

- The name of the current gas and electricity supplier & tariff details.
- The payment method
- How much energy used over the last year
- Property postcode



Switching should take no more than 21 days, which includes a 14 day cooling off period if you change your mind and want to cancel the contract.



WARM HOME DISCOUNT

A £140 discount on the household electricity bill for certain households, usually paid between September and March. Subject to change.

WINTER FUEL PAYMENT

Between £100-£300 is available to help pay your heating bills if you are of pensionable age. This is normally paid between November and December, but if you have not received your payment you may need to make a claim by calling 0845 915 1515. You should get this payment automatically if you receive the State Pension and reside in the UK

COLD WEATHER PAYMENTS

Made when the local temperature is either recorded as, or forecast to be, an average of 0°C or below over seven consecutive days.

You'll get a payment of £25 for each 7 day period of very cold weather between September and March.

Data is correct at time of printing but maybe subject to change.

MAINTAINING YOUR HEALTH

A warm home is crucial to prevent cold related illnesses. A properly heated home can prevent problems associated with poor health like increases in blood pressure and common colds, to diseases such as heart attacks and pneumonia.

Those most vulnerable to the cold include people with physical conditions, such as circulatory problems, diabetes, arthritis and mental illnesses, like depression and anxiety.

Respiratory conditions, like asthma, can be exacerbated by the cold, even more so if there are damp and mould issues in living spaces.

This is often the case in under-heated, poorly ventilated homes. People with certain disabilities, children and the elderly also fall into higher risk categories.

Government health advice is that living rooms should be heated to 21C and the rest of the house to 18C to stay safe and well.



OUR AIM

Act on Energy is engaging with householders to support them through their energy journey offering a full Home Energy Support Service with the householder at the centre.

This includes everything from energy bill advice, fuel switching, referrals for physical measures, grant availability and onward referrals to other agencies if appropriate.

We ensure that we handhold the most vulnerable but empower others to make ongoing energy decisions that will provide better health and economic outcomes for residents of Warwickshire, Worcestershire, Coventry, Solihull and surrounding areas.

GET IN TOUCH



Call free: 0800 988 2881



Email: advice@actonenergy.org.uk



Website: www.actonenergy.org.uk



www.facebook.com/act.on.energy



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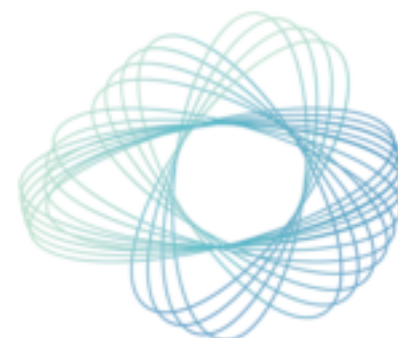
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