

# Getting the best from your gas or electricity supplier

Whoever you buy your gas and electricity from, you need to make sure you are getting a good deal. This leaflet gives you a few starters ...

## 1) Are you on the best tariff?

If your existing fuel supplier hasn't put you on the cheapest option (or 'tariff') you may be paying more than you need to for your gas or electricity. You can phone them to check; the number will be shown on your fuel bill.

**NB** Some energy companies offer a special, discounted tariff to those who are in financial hardship. Oddly enough, these aren't necessarily the cheapest tariffs (people paying by direct debit and on-line often pay less). If you think you may qualify, ask your supplier.

Your energy supplier may also offer something called the Warm Home Discount Scheme which is a discount for vulnerable customers. All the 'big six' energy companies (plus some of the smaller suppliers) are participating in this scheme which, last winter (2011-12), gave a £120 rebate on electricity bills to people named on a gas or electricity

Everyone wants a good deal from their energy supplier. And there are savings to be made by switching supplier or by changing the way you pay for your gas or electricity.



Photo: Kamo/www.istockphoto.com

bill who received the Guarantee Credit element of Pension Credit. The qualification benefit and amount of the rebate may change for next year. See [www.direct.gov.uk](http://www.direct.gov.uk).

You may also qualify for the 'Priority Service Register' because you're disabled or have another particular need. See overleaf for details.

## 2) Dual fuel?

If you buy both your gas **and** electricity from the same supplier it is usually, but not always, cheaper. Again, check with your supplier.

## 3) Paying by monthly direct debit

Energy companies prefer customers to pay a fixed amount each month and will offer discounts of 5-10% to customers who do this. If you're not currently paying by direct debit, it may be worth doing so. If the amount you chose to pay by direct debit is not enough to cover the bill, or if you are being charged too much, you can call your supplier and request that the amount you pay is changed.

## 4) Switch to an internet tariff

This can save you another 10%. The only thing that will change is that you will get your bill by email.

## 5) Do a meter reading every time

Every time you receive a bill, check your meter. Most bills are based on estimates, and these are often inaccurate. If your supplier has under-estimated, you'll have to pay the difference at the end of the year. If they have over-estimated, you'll get refunded, but not for several months.

## 6) Avoid pre-payment meters if you can

Some people like pre-payment meters because they do make budgeting easy. But pre-payment customers don't



Most of us buy our gas and electricity from one of the 'big six' (above), but there are other players in the energy market (below) including renewable ('green') energy specialists

benefit from direct-debit discounts, online discounts or prompt-payment discounts. So it usually pays to switch to a billed meter, though there may be a charge to do this. Go to [www.energyhelpline.com](http://www.energyhelpline.com) to compare different companies' pre-payment tariffs.



## What about switching to a new supplier?

According to the energy industry regulator, Ofgem, you could save £130 per year by switching supplier. The process is very easy: usually just a phone call and/or letter. And you will often make savings because the new energy company wants your custom and will offer you a good deal. Customers on prepayment meters may also switch energy suppliers, providing they don't owe money to their existing supplier. Use one of the price comparison and switching services listed below.

[www.uswitch.co.uk](http://www.uswitch.co.uk) | 0800 404 7908

[www.moneysupermarket.com](http://www.moneysupermarket.com) | 0845 345 1296

[www.theenergyshop.com](http://www.theenergyshop.com) | 0845 330 7247

[www.simplyswitch.com](http://www.simplyswitch.com) | 0800 011 1395

[www.switchwithwhich.co.uk](http://www.switchwithwhich.co.uk) | 01992 822 867\*

(\* September to March only)

It's very important to bear in mind that an offer from your new supplier may be only temporary, and that in due course you'll be put on a more expensive tariff. You should check this before making any commitment to switch.

## The Priority Services Register

If you are of pensionable age, disabled or have long-term health issues you can ask to be put on the Priority Services Register and receive extra help from your energy supplier. This might include:

- Quarterly meter readings to keep on top of bills
- Free gas-safety check
- Relocation of meters to a more accessible place
- Advance notice of disruption to supply
- Special controls for appliances and meters
- Password protection scheme to deter bogus callers
- Bills sent to friends, relatives or carers
- Services for hearing-impaired and/or vision-impaired customers

# Tips for lower energy bills

Happy paying more for your electricity and gas than you need to? Course not. So here's how you can cut your bills:

**Give your clothes a day in the sun** and give your tumble drier a break. Clothes dried in the fresh air feel great, and there are drying days in winter, too.



**Catch 'em young.** Encourage your children to switch off electric toys and lights that they're not using. They'll soon get the hang of saving energy.



**Be a friend to your freezer.** Defrost it regularly to help it run more efficiently.

**Buying a new washing machine, TV or dishwasher?** Look out for the Energy Saving Trust logo.



**Don't over-fill the kettle** (but do make sure you cover the metal element at the base).



**Dodge the draught!** Fit draught-excluders to your front door, letter box and key hole, and draw your curtains at dusk to keep the heat in.

**Turn your heating down by 1 degree.** You'll hardly notice the change in temperature, but it'll make a big difference to your heating bill.

**Sleep tight.** Make sure all the lights are turned off when you go to bed. If you want to light a child's room or a landing, use a low-wattage night light.



The Centre for Sustainable Energy's Home Energy Team offers free advice on domestic energy use to householders in Bristol and Somerset (including the unitary authorities of North Somerset and Bath & North East Somerset).

Call us free on 0800 082 2234, email [home.energy@cse.org.uk](mailto:home.energy@cse.org.uk) or follow us on twitter @cse\_homeenergy

More energy advice leaflets at [www.cse.org.uk/advice-leaflets](http://www.cse.org.uk/advice-leaflets)



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Charity 298740  
Founded 1979

We are a national charity that helps people change the way they think and act on energy