

Dealing with your energy supplier

Whether you're planning to stay with your energy supplier or to switch, there are several ways of making sure that you're getting a good deal.

Do I need to take regular meter readings?

It is important that your supplier knows how much energy you are using. Taking meter readings and sending them to your supplier via an app, online account or over the phone makes sure that your supplier sends you a bill based on your actual use, and not on an estimate which can be inaccurate. If your bill is overestimated then you're paying for fuel you haven't actually used. If it's underestimated then you won't be paying enough and may face a large debt when the meter is eventually read.

If you have a smart meter, it will automatically send meter readings to your supplier on a monthly, weekly or even daily basis. This is great for people that are unable to read the meter and for those that forget to do it. Occasionally, if you have switched supplier the meter may stop sending readings or there might be a problem with the signal. Try contacting your supplier as often they are able to remotely fix the signal problem. If they can't connect to it, you will have to take meter readings manually.

Is it cheaper to buy both electricity and gas from the same supplier?

Often, but not always. Buying both fuels from the same supplier is convenient but may not be the



Thinking of switching? See next page ...

cheapest option. If you have one supplier for gas and a different one for electricity then you can check with both to see which would offer you the better deal if you became a dual fuel customer. However, to find the cheapest available tariff it's better to use an independent comparison service and check tariffs from separate suppliers as well as dual fuel options..

What is a fixed rate tariff?

Unless you request otherwise, your energy supplier will put you on a variable tariff (usually called 'standard tariff'.) This is often the most expensive tariff, and also means you will be affected by any price changes your supplier implements.

Fixed-rate tariffs tend to be cheaper than variable tariffs. A fixed-rate tariff means the price you pay for each unit of energy (kilowatt hour (kWh) you use And for your daily standing charge, will stay the same for the duration of your contract (usually one or two years). How much you pay each month will still depend on how much energy you use.

Your supplier may drop its prices after you've started your fixed rate contract or they may introduce a better tariff than the one you are on, so, you might end up paying more than the variable tariff. If you want to you can leave a fixed rate contract any time you like but you may have to pay an exit fee. This can be up to £50 per type of fuel so check it's worth it before switching.



When your contract ends, the supplier will put you on the more expensive variable tariff. It's worth keeping a note of when the contract comes to an end so that you can contact your supplier and move to another fixed tariff or switch to a supplier that has a cheaper deal.

Your energy bill or statement must now show whether there is a cheaper tariff your supplier can offer you. However this doesn't show all the available options so it is usually better to contact your supplier directly or use a comparison service to check.

Is it cheaper to pay by direct debit?

Usually, yes. Energy suppliers aren't allowed to offer discounts to people who pay by direct debit, but they can restrict access to their cheapest tariffs to direct debit customers. Therefore, in some circumstances direct debit can work out cheaper. The other advantage to paying by direct debit is that it spreads the cost of fuel evenly over the course of the year, avoiding high winter bills.

Can I switch if I'm renting?

If you live in a rental property and your name is on the bill, you have the right to switch – even if your tenancy agreement says otherwise. You also have the right to change your meter from a prepayment to credit (or vice versa). But you may be obliged to change it back at the end of your tenancy.

If your landlord's name is on the bill and your landlord or lettings agency is unreasonably preventing you from switching you can contact Citizens Advice for guidance.



- Energy suppliers use the information from meter readings to predict your annual usage and what your direct debit payment should be, so, it's important that they have regular meter readings so they don't over or under estimated it.. Your direct debit should be reviewed at least once a year to make sure you're not paying too much and building up credit, or too little and building up debt.

What if I prefer pre-payment?

Prepayment meters work on a pay-as-you-go basis. You top up the meter with a key, a card or via an app which tops up your available credit. [Click here](#) for our page on prepayment meters.

They can help with budgeting and they don't allow you to build up a big debt. However, credit can run out at inconvenient times or you may find it difficult to top up the meter. If you use electricity for a medical need, make sure you are added to the Priority Service Register so that the supplier can help you if you run out of credit.

You won't be sent a traditional bill but you will receive a statement that shows how much energy you have used and the payments you have made. If you have a smart prepayment meter you will also be able to use the digital screen to see details of your account.

If you want to start paying by direct debit, speak to your supplier about switching to a credit meter. This is easier if you have a smart meter. If you don't, you may have to pass a credit check, or may be charged to change the meter.

Is an online tariff cheaper?

On average, an online tariff can save you a further 10% on your bills. Some suppliers offer competitive tariffs but only if you manage your account online. Others may offer paperless billing discounts, where you receive your bills and correspondence by email rather than post. If you are on the Priority Service Register you may be able to request paper bills even if you are signed up to an online tariff.

* See our factsheets on Prepayment meters and Smart Pay-As-You-Go meters at www.cse.org.uk/advice.)



Thinking about switching?

If you are unhappy with your supplier or want a cheaper tariff switching gas or electricity supplier is very easy

Use one of the Ofgem-accredited independent comparison services listed below. You can do this online or over the phone. All of them offer accurate and impartial information about tariffs.

Ofgem-accredited comparison services

www.myutilitygenius.co.uk | 0203 468 0461

www.unravelit.com | 0161 464 6088

www.simplyswitch.com | 0800 011 1395

www.switchgasandelectric.com | 03333 700 600

www.uswitch.com | online only

www.moneysupermarket.com | online only

www.theenergyshop.com | online only

www.energylinx.co.uk | online only

www.quotezone.co.uk | online only

compare savings against your spend from the previous year.

If you need to pay an exit fee factor this into any savings listed. Also bear in mind that if you owe your supplier money you will need to pay this when you switch.

If you receive the Warm Home Discount be aware that not all suppliers offer the this. Also, its best if you switch after you receive the discount so you don't lose it that year.

What's the process of switching?

Once you've agreed a deal with your new supplier They will then let your old supplier know you are leaving. The process of moving can take up to 21 days, but your new supplier should manage the process so contact them if you experience problems. You should be told the date of the switch, and on this day take a meter read and submit it to your new supplier. Your old supplier will then send you a final bill to pay, and any direct debits should be cancelled.

Once you've switched, your old supplier is not obliged to reimburse you any credit left behind on your old account unless you specifically ask for it. You can claim credit back from an old account no matter how long ago it was.

What if I change my mind?

By law you have a 14-day cooling-off period to change your mind without incurring a penalty, starting from the day you take on a contract with a new supplier.

The switching process in a nutshell ...

- 1) Compare tariffs.
- 2) Select tariff and notify new supplier.
- 3) The 14-day cooling-off period.
- 4) New supplier takes up to 3 weeks to complete the switch.
- 5) Take meter reading on date of switch.

What information will I need?

All the information you need to accurately compare energy suppliers will be on your bill. This includes:

- The name of the tariff you're on.
- Method used to pay for your energy.
- If you have to pay any fees to exit your tariff.
- How much energy you use a year in kilowatt hours (kWh).

If you're on Economy 7 your comparison will be more accurate if you separate out day and night usage. Ask your supplier if this is not shown on your bill.

How much will I save?

If your fixed tariff ends within the next year, comparison sites assume you will then move onto the more expensive variable tariff. Savings figures are based on this future prediction, although some sites allow you to



Meter reference numbers

When dealing with your energy supplier, you sometimes need to know your **meter reference number**. Every gas and electricity supply has one. This is unique to your home and won't change if you change supplier. If you do switch it is your responsibility to check this reference number remains correct, to prevent any problems occurring.

For gas it's called the Meter Point Reference Number (MPRN) and for electricity it's the Meter Point Administration Number (MPAN).

These are not the same as your customer account number or your meter serial number (printed on your meter). If you need to find them they should be located somewhere on your bill or statement. Electricity MPANs look like this, and gas MPRNs are similar:

| | | | |
|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| S | 01 | 234 | 567 |
| | | | |
| 89 | 1234 | 56789 | 123 |
| | | | |

Warm Home Discount

Most energy suppliers offer a rebate on the household electricity bill called the Warm Home Discount. This is automatically available to customers who receive the guarantee credit element of Pension Credit. In 2023-24 it was £150.

You may also be entitled to the Warm Home Discount if you receive others types of benefit or are on a low income. So it's worth calling your supplier to check and apply.

Find out more at
www.gov.uk/the-warm-home-discount-scheme.

Priority Services Register



If you have a disability or a long-term health condition that means you rely on a constant electricity supply – say for an oxygen machine or a stairlift – you should contact your District Network Operator (the company that owns and runs the wires in your area).

They can put you on their Priority Services Register so that you'll receive emergency help in the event of a powercut.

Your energy supplier will also have a Priority Services Register. Being on this will entitle you to help like:

- Quarterly meter readings to keep on top of bills.
- Free gas safety checks.
- Moving your meters to a more accessible place.
- Special controls for appliances and meters.
- Password protection scheme to deter bogus callers.
- Getting your bills sent to friends, relatives or carers.
- Services for deaf or visually-impaired customers.
- Advance notice of planned disruption to supply



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We're a charity (298740) supporting people and organisations across the UK to tackle the climate emergency and end the suffering caused by cold homes.

Our Home Energy Team offers free advice on domestic energy use to people in central southern and southwest England.

Contact us:

PHONE 0800 082 2234

EMAIL home.energy@cse.org.uk

See all our energy advice pages at
www.cse.org.uk/advice