

Smart meters

For smarter living ...

Smart meters are modern gas and electricity meters designed to give you more information about your energy use and easier control over your costs

Smart meters are being installed for free by energy suppliers across the UK. They come in two parts: firstly, there's the meter itself (pictured below) which replaces your existing meter and records how much gas or electricity you use – and when you use it – and sends this information to your energy supplier. The second part is the 'in-home display' (pictured right) that gives you near-real-time information about your energy use.

Photo caption: Left, the smart meter itself; right, the in-home display unit.



Smart meters offer several financial benefits, both for people who pay regular bills and those who pay by topping-up.

Accessible in-home displays are being developed for partially-sighted and blind customers. Features include tactile buttons, a high-contrast screen, and speech output options.

Credit meters: Smart meters send readings to your energy supplier automatically, so they no longer need to visit your home to take meter readings. Nor will they ask you to take meter readings yourself, or send you bills and statements based on estimated readings. This should mean that you are always charged the right amount for the gas or electricity you've used.

Prepayment meters: Smart prepayment meters give you the option to top-up remotely by phone, text, app or online, so you won't need to visit a local paypoint as before (although topping up this way is still possible). This means that you won't run out of gas or electricity if you have no credit left and the local paypoint is closed, or if you misplace your prepayment key/card. Some suppliers might also give you the option of automatically topping-up if your credit drops below a certain amount, or include an emergency credit button on your in-home display.

In-home displays allow you to keep track of how much energy you are using in real-time, and can help you make adjustments with what you use around the home to keep the costs down. For prepayment meters, in-home displays should show how much credit you have left, if there is any debt and allows you to set goals and budgets.

Smart meters can operate in both a prepay and credit mode. This makes it much easier to swap from pay-as-you-go to monthly or

quarterly bills, or back. Your meter won't need to be changed to do this, although your supplier may still need to visit to make the adjustment.

Finally, smart prepay meters are helping to create a smart grid that allows the energy system to better predict how much electricity the country needs, when and where it needs it. This helps conserve energy and make usage more efficient across the UK network.

The in-home display

All smart meters should come with an in-home display. This is a separate small device with a screen that lets you see your energy usage and costs in real-time. It shows you how much energy you are using (in kilowatts) or how much you are spending (in pounds and pence) at any moment, or you can view your usage or spending for the whole day, week, month or year.

This allows you to keep an eye on your gas or electricity use and identify where you're using a lot of energy and have the opportunity to reduce this. This can also help you find out how much energy different appliances are using.

Different energy suppliers may use different in-home displays, but they all provide similar information. Some suppliers also allow you to monitor usage through their an account on their website or a smart phone app.

Having a smart meter installed

If you really don't want a smart meter, you don't have to accept one. However, some energy tariffs include a compulsory smart meter installation, so by choosing to not accept one you may be limiting your choice.

Smart meter installation is straightforward and should take less than an hour, depending on the building you live in and where your meter is in the house. Your gas or electricity will have to be switched off while the smart meter is being installed.

Your energy supplier will arrange with you a date and approximate time for an engineer to visit. They will confirm with you what to expect and what support is available for customers with hearing or vision impairment.

You can also request that the engineer calls you 30 minutes before they expect to arrive. For added security, you can ask your energy supplier for a password which the engineer must repeat when they arrive at your home. If you have any concerns, check the engineer's ID card and, if you're still in doubt, ask them to wait outside while you call your energy supplier.

The engineer will advise you on how the smart meter and in-home display work. They will also carry out safety checks on gas appliances if a gas smart meter is being installed.



Who we are

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

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