

## Simple ways to reduce your energy bills

Most of your money, about a third to half of your energy bill, goes to **heating your home and your water**:

1. Turn your thermostat down by 1 degree. On average your living room is recommended to be heated to about 21° Celsius (70° Fahrenheit) and bedroom to 18°C (64°F). If this feels too cold for you, try putting on a jumper, socks and slippers first before putting the heating up.
2. Draw your curtains at dusk. Closed curtains prevent warm air escaping from the windows at night, and that helps keep your house warmer for longer. Do make sure the curtains, or any other items such as furniture, do not block your radiators.
3. Check the thermostat on your boiler, see what the temperature settings are for hot water and think about turning it down just a couple of degrees (60°C minimum). That will make a difference to the amount of energy you're using.
4. Your house should be adequately insulated. Although loft and cavity wall insulation may require an investment on your behalf, it can easily save you up to £130 a year in heating costs. You can contact the Energy Saving Trust to find out what energy efficiency measures you could get for free whether you own or rent your home: 0300 123 1234 (available Mon-Fri 9am - 8pm and Saturday 10am - 2pm at national rate call) or visit <http://www.energysavingtrust.org.uk>. Alternatively, you can visit the Government's website: <https://www.gov.uk/energy-grants-calculator>

Your **washing machine, refrigerator, freezer and cooker** also take up a large portion of your energy. Here are some tips to reduce these costs:

1. Do your washing less frequently by making sure the washing machine is **full** every time.
2. Where possible, use the 'economy' setting on your washing machine or wash at **30°C**.
3. Dry your clothes **outside** or on a clothes horse (make sure to ventilate properly if you dry your clothes indoors, as damp air takes more energy to warm up than dry air).
4. If possible, replace your current refrigerator/freezer with an energy efficient model.
5. **Defrost** frozen food in the fridge overnight, as this will typically halve the cooking time
6. Always use the **right size of pan** for the amount of food you are cooking. Put just enough water in the pan to cover the vegetables rather than fill the whole pan, and always put the **lid** on to keep the heat in (and by doing this you also avoid the steam increasing the moisture level in your home).

Consumer electronics, including **TVs, microwave ovens, DVD players, and computers** also consume a lot of energy. You can reduce this cost with the following tips:

1. Never leave any electronic appliances on standby, but switch them off completely.
2. Do not let your laptop and/or mobile phone charge overnight as you waste energy doing this. And if you're not using your computer for a little while, set it to hibernate.

A significant portion of your energy bill goes to **lighting your home**. The quickest, easiest way to save on your lighting cost is to:

1. Buy energy efficient light bulbs. They last up to 10 times longer than normal light bulbs and could save you up to £40.
2. Always remember to switch off the light when you leave a room.

Make sure you are on **the right electricity and gas tariffs** – compare various tariffs on switching websites such as [www.uswitch.com](http://www.uswitch.com), [www.moneysupermarket.com](http://www.moneysupermarket.com), [www.moneysavingexpert.com](http://www.moneysavingexpert.com), [www.confused.com](http://www.confused.com), [www.gocompare.com](http://www.gocompare.com), etc.

Alternatively, you can call your own energy supplier and ask if they have a better tariff for you.

Be aware that energy companies offer discounts if you pay via direct debit, and if you take gas and electricity from the same supplier (so-called dual fuel). If you are on a pre-payment meter, know that this is the most expensive way to pay for your energy. If you can, see if you can have your energy company switch you to a 'normal' meter (there may be a charge for this, usually around £50).

And finally: make sure you get billed for what you use, not what the energy company thinks you have used (estimated bills). So take regular **meter readings** and submit them to your energy company either online or over the phone.

If you are struggling to access your gas or electricity meter call the **Home Heat Helpline** on **0800 33 66 99** (free phone) or <http://www.homeheathelpline.org.uk/> to find out what support your energy company could give with reading your meter.

This is called the **Priority Services Register**, a scheme which offers extra free services to people who are of pensionable age, are registered disabled, have a hearing or visual impairment, or have long term ill-health. It is run by energy suppliers.

Every supplier offers a different set of services, but these can include:

- a service more tailored to your needs. For example, you can ask to have your bills and meter readings in Braille, large type or audio tape;
- free quarterly meter readings if you tell your supplier you can't read it yourself;
- priority reconnection if your supply is interrupted and advance notice if they have to stop your supply;
- arranging for your bills to be sent or copied to someone else, such as a carer, who can help you read and check them.

If you are a pensioner or on a low income, you may qualify for the **Warm Home Discount Scheme**. This gives a rebate to pensioners on low incomes and some other customers on low incomes. The rebate is **£140** on your electricity bill for winter 2014 -2015.

If you're not a pensioner on a low income, you may still be eligible for the Warm Home Discount Scheme. Each energy supplier has different criteria, so contact your supplier to check whether you're eligible. Alternatively you can call the Home Heat Helpline (0800 33 66 99)

## **Damp and ventilation**

Poor ventilation is the most common cause of damp. Buildings need to "breathe" and rely on constant air circulation. Anything that stops the flow of air through your home prevents moisture from escaping or evaporating and leads to damp.

Anxious not to lose expensively produced heat, many people turn their homes into hermetically sealed boxes with little or no ventilation. As well as being bad for your health, this can create huge damp problems, so make sure there is always some provision for air circulation.

Some damp is caused by condensation. Here it will be explained how condensation forms and how you can keep it to a minimum, so reducing the risk of dampness and mould growth.

### ***What is condensation?***

There is always some moisture in the air, even if you cannot see it. If the air gets colder it cannot hold all the moisture and tiny drops of water appear. This is condensation. You may notice it when you see your breath on a cold day, or when the mirror mists over when you have a bath or shower.

Condensation occurs mainly during cold weather, whether it is raining or dry. It does not leave a 'tidemark'. It appears in places where there is little movement of air. Look for it in corners, on or near windows, in or behind wardrobes and cupboards. It often forms on north-facing walls.

### ***How to avoid condensation in 3 steps***

#### 1. Produce less moisture

Some ordinary daily activities produce a lot of moisture very quickly.

*Cooking:* To reduce the amount of moisture, cover pans and do not leave kettles boiling. Use an extraction fan if available.

*Washing clothes:* Put washing outdoors to dry if you can. Or put it in the bathroom with the door closed and the window open or fan on. It is best to fit a fan that can be switched to run continuously for clothes drying. If you have a tumble dryer make sure you vent it to the outside (unless it is the self-condensing type).

*Paraffin and portable flueless bottled-gas heaters:* These heaters put a lot of moisture into the air: one litre of gas or paraffin produces about a litre of water. If you have a problem with condensation, try to find alternative means of heating.

#### 2. Ventilate to remove the moisture

You can ventilate your home without making draughts. Some ventilation is needed to get rid of moisture being produced all the time, including that from people's breath. The simplest and cheapest way to ventilate your home is to open doors and windows regularly to allow fresh air from outside into your home.

In summer, open windows and doors in different parts of your home to create a cross-draught, which will circulate air and help keep your house cool. In winter, air your house at least once a day for a few minutes with wide open doors and windows to create a cross-draught. This will quickly replace stale indoor air with fresh outdoor air.

You need much more ventilation in the kitchen and bathroom when cooking, washing up, bathing and drying clothes. This means opening the windows wider. Better still, use a humidistat-controlled electric fan (these come on automatically when the air becomes humid and are cheap to run).

Close the kitchen and bathroom doors when these rooms are in use even if your kitchen or bathroom has an extractor fan. It will help to draughtproof these doors. Doing this will help stop the moisture reaching other rooms, especially bedrooms, which are often colder and more likely to get condensation.

Allow space for the air to circulate in and around your furniture. Open doors to ventilate cupboards and wardrobes. Leave space between the backs of wardrobes and the wall. When you have a curtain or blind drawn, it makes the surface of the window cooler and increases condensation, especially with single glazed windows. Trickle ventilators can help reduce the problem. If you replace your windows at any time, make sure they are double glazed and fitted with trickle ventilators.

### 3. Insulate and draughtproof

Insulation in the loft, cavity wall insulation and draughtproofing of windows and outside doors will help keep your home warm and you will have lower fuel bills as well. When the whole home is warmer, condensation is less likely.

When draughtproofing:

- Do not block permanent ventilators.
- Do not completely block chimneys (leave a hole about two bricks in size and fit a louvered grille over it).
- Do not draughtproof rooms where there is a fuel burning heater (e.g. gas fire) or cooker.
- Do not draughtproof windows in the bathroom or kitchen.

If you live in a house, insulating your loft is a cost-effective way of cutting heating costs. Remember to draughtproof the loft hatch but do not block any eaves ventilation. Cavity wall insulation is also an effective way of cutting heating costs. Many properties, however, are built without suitable cavities. If you are in doubt, you should seek the advice of a building professional who will advise you on the need for a building warrant. Call the Energy Savings Trust on 0300 123 1234, visit the Government's website: <https://www.gov.uk/energy-grants-calculator>, or call the Home Heat Helpline on 0800 33 66 99.

#### **Points to remember**

##### **Produce less moisture:**

- Cover pans
- Dry clothes outdoors
- Vent your tumble dryer to the outside
- Avoid using paraffin or flueless bottled gas heaters

##### **Ventilate to remove moisture:**

- Ventilate every day
- Increase ventilation of the kitchen and bathroom when in use and shut the door

##### **Insulate and draughtproof:**

- Insulate the loft
- Draughtproof windows and external doors
- Consider cavity insulation
- Consider secondary glazing
- Find out if you are eligible for a grant or other help