

Save up to £300 with these home energy saving tips ...

Like most households across the UK, you're probably starting notice the effect of recent energy price rises on your monthly budget. Since 2003 electricity prices have increased by 30% and gas prices by even more, a massive 40%.

On the plus side though, these staggering price hikes have created a highly competitive energy market with energy suppliers desperate to maintain existing customers and tempt new ones away from their competitors to maintain profits.

This buyers market together with the fact that much of our energy consumption is wasted, means that most UK homes can save up to £300 a year by simply comparing energy prices and making small changes to daily habits.

Are you paying too much for gas and electricity?

The difference between the cheapest and most expensive gas and electricity supplier can be as much as £100 per year.

If you've never changed your energy supplier or not compared prices recently, you could make huge savings with minimal effort by switching to a more competitive company.

Its simple to compare energy suppliers online and switching is easier than ever. But like any consumer purchase, you should follow a few guidelines before signing on the dotted line. Ask yourself these questions when comparing energy companies:

- 1.Are there any hidden charges?
- 2.Do the prices quoted include VAT?
- 3.Are you eligible for any special offers, incentives or discounts?
- 4.What is the supplier's complaints record?

You don't have to switch supplier to make savings. If you pay your energy bills by cheque you could save £50-£60 per year if you pay by direct debit instead. Switching to an online account can save you even more.

Small changes equal big energy savings

The biggest long-term savings come from changing your energy habits and being more energy efficient around the home.

As you start to see savings its a good idea to re-invest this money in energy saving products and appliances to reduce your energy consumption even further. The long-term savings will more than pay for the cost of purchasing and installing these measures.

Start using these no-cost energy saving ideas around your home and measure the reduction in your next few energy bills. The more you apply the more you'll save.

Heating Tips

- Time your heating to go off 30 minutes before you leave the house, and come on again 30 minutes before you are due to return.
- Turn the room thermostat down by 1°C. This can save around £30 a year.
- Make sure curtains or furniture are not in front of a radiator.
- Draw the curtains at dusk to keep heat in rooms.

Using Electrical Appliances

- Switch off appliances such as microwaves, TVs, videos, stereos, and computers, as they use energy when they are left on standby. A staggering 85% of the energy used by the DVD player is consumed when it is not actually in use.
- Unplug equipment e.g. mobile phones, shavers and electric toothbrushes—once they are fully charged, otherwise they will keep drawing electricity.

Refrigeration

- Avoid leaving the fridge door open. Avoid putting hot or warm food straight into the fridge; allow it to cool first.

- Defrost your fridge regularly to keep it running efficiently and cheaply. If it seems to frost up quickly, check the door seal. It makes sense to avoid putting your fridge next to an oven or boiler. If possible, keep the freezer in a cool room or garage.

Washing machine and dishwashers

- Only wash full loads or use a half-load or economy programme. Always use a low temperature programme as modern washing powders will be just as effective.
- Modern dishwashers use less energy and water than washing up by hand.

Cooking

- Match the size of the ring to the size of the saucepan or you will be paying to heat the air. Gas flames should only heat the bottom of the pan (not the sides)
- Use a lid on saucepans, so the contents heat more quickly and you use less energy.
- Pressure cookers, steamers and microwaves save energy.

Tumble dryers

- In summer dry your clothes outside when possible.
- If you are drying your clothes indoors, don't put them over a radiator. This stops the heat from reaching the rest of the room. Try putting up a clothes rail in an unheated room, opening the window slightly to allow damp escape and shutting the door to stop heat being drawn into that room.

Hot water

- Only boil as much water in the kettle as you need.
- In hard water areas, you need to deal with limescale to keep your kettle working efficiently for longer. At least twice a year, soak the element overnight in vinegar.
- When washing up or running a bath turn the thermostat on your hot water tank down to 60c. This is a comfortable temperature for most people.
- An ordinary shower uses just two fifths of the water for a bath. In contrast, power showers use as much water as a bath and sometimes more.

Energy Saving Tip: Invest in energy saving light bulbs for your home - they last around 12 times longer than normal bulbs and use 75% less electricity, saving you around £65 over the lifespan of the bulb.

