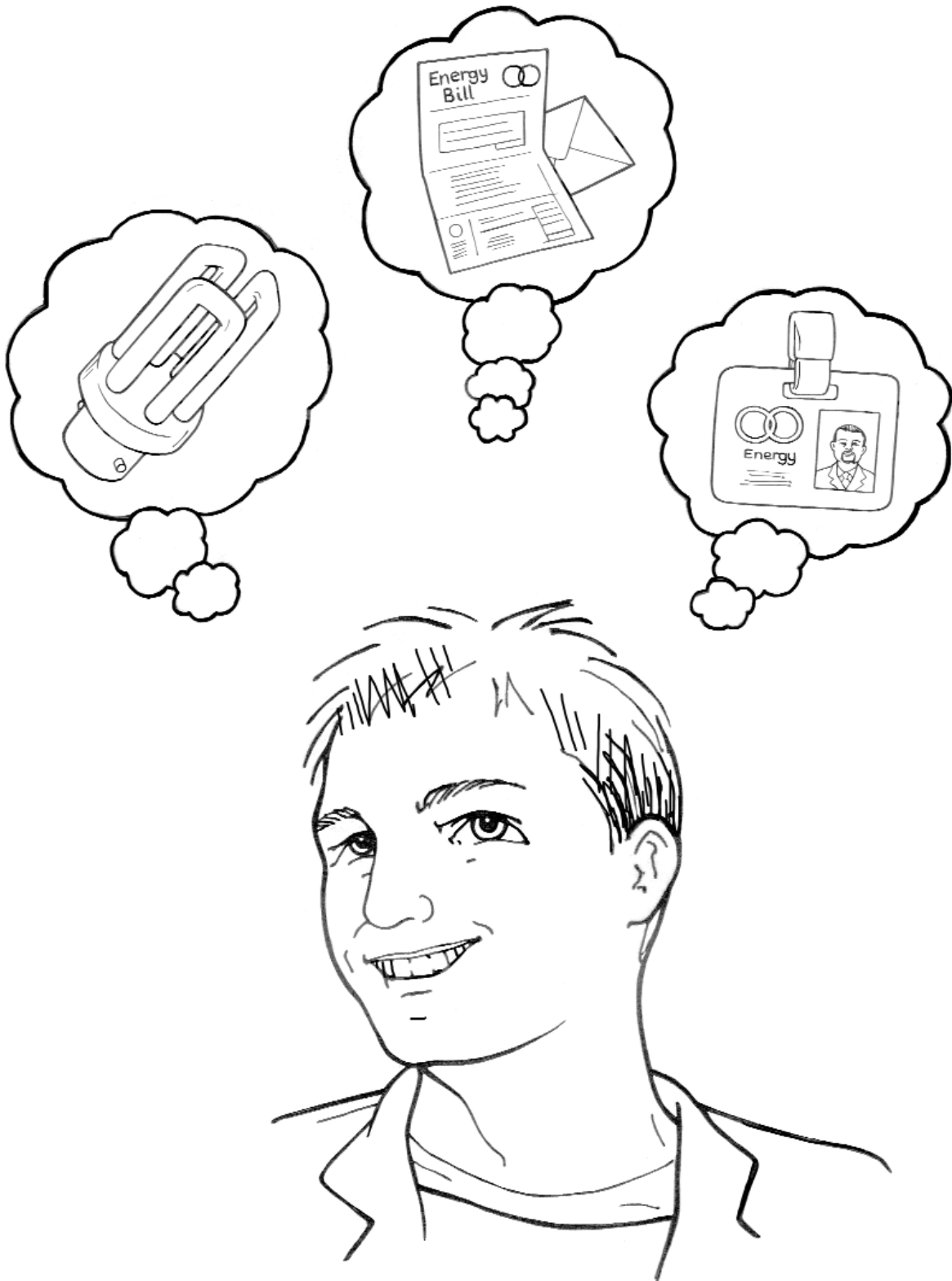


All you need to know about energy and your home



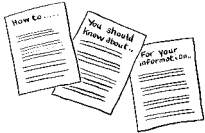


We all use energy in our homes. Most of this energy comes from gas and electricity. We use gas and electricity every day to keep us warm and light our homes. We also use it to do things like cook our food, watch TV and have a hot shower. So energy is really important.



We all have to pay for the energy we use in our homes. This pack tells you how to make sure you are not paying too much money for your energy. It also tells you lots of other important things about energy that will help to save you money and keep you safe.

There are 5 factsheets in this pack. They are:



- 1 Choosing your energy company
- 2 Paying for your energy
- 3 Free services from your energy company
- 4 Energy sales people
- 5 Saving energy and money at home



You might want to get a friend, family member or carer to help you read the factsheets or do some of the ideas in this pack.



This pack has been produced by energywatch. Their job is to tell people about gas and electricity and help them to get the best deal from their energy company.

If you would like any help or advice from energywatch:

telephone: **0845 906 0708**

typetalk: **18001 0845 9060708**

email: **enquiry@energywatch.org.uk**

website: **www.energywatch.org.uk**

write to: **4th floor, Artillery House
Artillery Row
London
SW1P 1RT**





This factsheet tells you:

- how to choose your energy company
- how to compare prices
- how to change your energy company
- what to do about your gas and electricity if you move home.

How to choose your energy company

There are lots of different energy companies. You might have heard of some. They are:

- Atlantic Electric and Gas
- Basic Power
- British Gas
- npower
- Powergen
- Scottish and Southern incorporating Swalec/Scottish Hydro/Southern Electric
- EDF incorporating SWEB Energy/London Energy/Seaboard Energy
- Scottish Power



You can choose which energy company you want to get your gas and electricity from. You can change your energy company any time you want to.

When you are choosing which energy company you want to get your gas and electricity from, it is a good idea to compare prices.

This means finding out how much each energy company charges for gas and electricity and seeing which will be the cheapest.

You can then decide which energy company will be the best for you. This can save you money.



How to compare prices



1. Work out how much you are paying for your energy now

To compare prices, you need to know how much you are paying for your gas or electricity **each year**.

- **If you pay your bills once every 3 months:**

look at your last 4 gas or electricity bills. Add the amount of each bill together – this will be how much you pay for your gas or electricity each year.

- **If you pay by direct debit:**

amount you pay each month x 12 months = how much you pay for your gas or electricity each year

2. Find out how much you would pay for your energy with a new energy company

Contact energy companies and ask them to send you information saying how much they charge for gas or electricity. Look at how much other companies' charge for gas and electricity and the amount you pay now. Would you pay less if you changed to a new company?



To find out how to contact energy companies:

telephone: energywatch **0845 906 0708**

website: **www.energywatch.org.uk**

Things to remember!

- Check if there are any hidden or extra charges.
- Try to compare prices for the amount of gas and electricity you actually use.
- It can be cheaper to buy your gas and electricity from the same energy company. Ask about any special offers or discounts.
- Tell your energy company if you have Economy Seven (if you have Economy Seven you pay more for your electricity during the day but less at night. This means you can save money if you use things like your washing machine at night time).

Remember



Want help to compare prices?

energywatch can give you information that compares gas and electricity prices in your area.

telephone: energywatch **0845 906 0708**

website: **www.energywatch.org.uk**



How to change your energy company

If you decide you want to start getting gas or electricity from a new company, you need to:

1. Get in touch with the new company



Tell them you want to start getting your gas, electricity or both from them. They will agree a contract with you. A contract is an agreement between you and the energy company – it says what you both must do.

It should then take about 6 weeks for you to start getting your gas or electricity from the new energy company.

2. Get in touch with your old company



You should tell your old energy company that you are going to start getting your gas or electricity from a new energy company 28 days before you switch. It is a good idea to telephone and write to them too.

3. Pay your bills



Make sure you pay all the bills from your old energy company. If you do not pay your bills, you might not be able to change to a new energy company.

4. Read your meter



Read your meter on the day you switch to your new energy company. Check that your old company and your new company use it to work out your bills. You can find information on reading your meter in factsheet 3.

You could ask a friend, family member or carer to help you change your energy company.



What to do about your gas and electricity if you move home

If you are moving home, you need to make arrangements for your gas and electricity. Here is what you need to do:



Before you move home:

- Tell your energy company that you are moving home. You need to tell the company that supplies your gas and the company that supplies your electricity. You need to do this at least 2 days before you move out. Your energy company will read your meter or ask you to read your meter. They will send a final bill to your new address.
- Write down your gas and electricity meter readings at your old home on the day you move out. Keep them somewhere safe. This will be very useful if you think the final bill you are sent is wrong.



When you move into your new home:

- Write down your gas and electricity meter readings at your new home on the day you move in.
- Telephone the energy company at your new home. You need to telephone the company that supplies gas and the company that supplies electricity. Tell them you have moved in and give them your meter readings. This will help to make sure your first bill is for the right amount.
- You can change to a new energy company if you want to. You will need to tell the energy company at your new home 28 days before you want to change.



For more help and advice, contact [energywatch](#). Look on your folder to find out how to get in touch.



This factsheet tells you about:

- ways to pay for your energy
- estimated bills
- what to do if your bill is an estimate or you think it is wrong
- getting help with paying your bills.



Ways to pay for your energy

You can choose which way you want to pay for your energy. It is a good idea to think carefully about which way to pay so you choose the way that will be best for you. For example:

- **do you want to save money?** Some ways to pay can save you money
- **do you find it hard to budget (make sure you put enough money aside to pay your bills)?** Some ways to pay can help you to budget.



Choosing the best way to pay can really help you to pay your bills and manage your money.

Some of the ways you can pay for your energy are:



- **By sending a cheque in the post**

Your energy company will send you a bill telling you how much you need to pay. You can send them a cheque for this amount in the post. You normally pay once every 3 months.

- **By cash or cheque at the post office or bank**



You can take your bill to the post office or bank and give them cash or a cheque for this amount. Or you can arrange to pay a bit of money for your energy each week or month. You might have to pay some extra money to pay at the post office or bank.

- **By direct debit**

You can arrange for money to be taken straight from your bank account to pay for your energy. This is called direct debit. The same amount of money is taken from your bank account on the same day every month.

It is often cheapest to pay by direct debit. It can also help you to budget because you pay the same amount of money each month.

- **Through a prepayment meter**

You pay for your energy by putting a card, token or key in your prepayment meter. You can buy tokens or keys at the Post Office or in some local shops. Your prepayment meter lets you pay for your energy before you use it.

It is normally more expensive to use a prepayment meter. But it can help you to budget.

Your energy company might have other ways you can pay for your gas and electricity. Ask your energy company if you would like to find out about them.



Think carefully about choosing the way to pay that is right for you. You might want to ask a family member, friend or carer to help you.

Estimated bills



Your gas and electricity meters measure how much gas and electricity you have used. You can see how much gas and electricity you have used by looking at the numbers on your meter. This is your **meter reading**.



Your energy company uses meter readings to work out how much money you need to pay. Someone from your energy company will come and read your meter. They then send you a bill for the right amount.

But sometimes you will get a bill when no one has read your meter. Instead, your energy company will 'guess' how much gas and electricity they think you have used. If this happens, the bill you get is called an **estimate**.

How will you know if your bill is an estimate?

If your bill is an estimate you will see a letter 'E' on your bill. Look carefully for a letter 'E' on your bill.

It is very important to check if your bill is an estimate. This is because if your bill is an estimate:

- it could be for **too much money**. You might find it hard to pay.
- it could be for **not enough money**. This can cause problems too. This is because you will have to pay for the energy you have used eventually. So you might end up having to pay a bill for a lot of money all at once. This can be really difficult.

Gas and electricity companies only have to read your meter once every 2 years. So you could be paying the wrong amount of money for a long time.



What you should do if your bill is an estimate or you think it is wrong

If your bill is an estimate it is really important to make sure you are paying the right amount for your energy. This will stop you getting a really big bill for a lot of money all at once.

It is also really important to check with your energy company if you think your bill is wrong.



If your bill is an estimate or you think your bill is wrong:

- read your gas or electricity meter
- telephone your gas or electricity company and give them your meter reading.



You will then get a new bill for the right amount.

Get help with reading your meter

If you find it hard to read your meter, you could ask a friend, family member or carer to help you. If you have a disability or are over 60 years old, you can get help to read your meter – see factsheet 3 for more information.

Getting help with paying your bills



If anything on your bill is not clear or you are going to find it difficult to pay your bills, talk to your energy company straight away. There are lots of things they can do to help you.

For more help and advice, contact **energywatch**.
Look on your folder to find out how to get in touch.



This factsheet tells you about free services from your energy company. It tells you:

- who can get free services
- what free services you can get
- how to get free services.
- getting help with paying your bills.

Who can get free services?



You can get free services from your energy company if you:

- have a disability, chronic sickness, or a visual or hearing impairment

or

- are over 60 years old.



You can get these services by joining the **priority service register**. The priority services register:

- is free to join
- can save you money
- can help you to feel safer at home.



How to join the priority service register

Contact your gas and electricity company.

You can find their phone number on your bill.

For more information about this, see page 4.

What free services can you get?

Here are some of the services you might be able to get if you join the priority service register:



- **Password scheme**

You can choose a password and agree it with your energy company. When they send someone to your house to read your meter, they will say your password. This means you will know the person is from your energy company, and is not a 'bogus caller' (someone who is not who they say they are).



- **Information in a different format**

You can get information in a format that you can understand. For example, you can ask for your bills in large print, on audio tape or in braille.



- **Bill nominee scheme**

If you find it difficult to read or understand your bill, you can ask for them to be sent to a friend, family member or carer. Or you can ask for a friend, family member or carer to be sent a copy of your bill.



- **Meter readings**

If you find it hard to read your meter and no one else who lives in your home can read your meter, your gas and electricity company can come and read your meter for you once every 3 months. This means that your bill will be for the actual amount of gas and electricity you have used, and not an estimate.

- **Moving your meter**



If you find it hard to read your gas or electricity meter because of where it is, your energy company may be able to move it to a better place for you. For example, they could move your meter if it is too high up or too low down for you to see.

- **Easy to use controls and adapters**



If you find it hard to use your meter, or things like your cooker or kettle, you can get easy to use controls or adapters from your energy company.

- **Gas safety checks**



You can get a check of all your gas appliances (things like gas heaters) to make sure they are safe.

You will only get this service if you own your own home and everyone who lives there joins the priority service register. (If you are a tenant your landlord must do this for you instead).

- **Help in an emergency**



If your gas supply is switched off and you are not told this is going to happen, your gas company will provide you with other ways to cook your food and heat your home.

You will only get this if you and everyone you live with join the priority service register.

How to get free services

To get these free services, you need to join your energy company's priority service register.

All gas and electricity companies have a priority service register scheme. But sometimes the scheme has a different name.

If you want to join, contact your energy company and ask to join the priority service register. You can find their phone number on your bill.

Remember! If you get gas and electricity from 2 different energy companies, you will need to contact them both.



Remember



For more information and advice on free services and the priority services register, you can contact **energywatch**.

Look on your folder to find out how to get in touch.



This factsheet tells you:

- about energy sales people
- what to do when a stranger calls at your front door
- what to do if you speak to an energy sales person at home, on the phone or in a shopping centre or supermarket
- what to do if you have switched companies and change your mind
- what to do about your gas and electricity if you move home.

About energy sales people



Energy sales people work for energy companies (you can find a list of energy companies in factsheet 1). Energy sales people might knock on your front door, telephone you, or speak to you in the shopping centre or supermarket. Their job is to tell you about their energy company and ask if you would like to buy your gas or electricity from them.

This can be a useful way to find out how much energy companies charge for their gas and electricity.

But there can be dangers:



- some people have switched to a new energy company without realising
- some people have been tricked or pressured into switching their energy company
- some people have been hurt or had things stolen by people who were only pretending to be from an energy company (called bogus callers).



There are things you can do so these things do not happen to you.

When a stranger calls at your front door

If a stranger calls at your door, there are some things you can do to stay safe:



1. Open the door carefully

If a stranger calls at your front door, leave the chain on when you open the door. If you live in a flat, you should use the intercom.



2. Check who they are

Anyone who really is from an energy company will carry an **identification card (ID card)**. Ask to see this. If you want to check the ID card is real, telephone the company on the ID card. Look the company's number up in the phone book, or telephone directory enquiries. **Do not** use a telephone number the person at the door gives you.



Remember to leave the door chain on while you do this!

3. If in doubt, keep them out!

If you do not want to let a stranger into your home, or you are not sure the caller is really who they say they are **do not let them in**.



If you want to, you could ask them to arrange another time to call back. This could be a time when a friend, family member or carer is with you.

4. Tell your warden or carer

If you have a warden or a carer where you live, let them know when a stranger calls at the door.



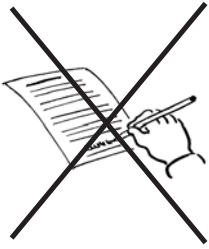
Password scheme

You can choose a password and agree it with your energy company. When they send someone to your house to read your meter, they will say your password. This means you will know the person is from your energy company, and is not a 'bogus caller'.

See factsheet 3 for more information.

If you speak to an energy sales person at home, on the phone or in the shopping centre or supermarket

If an energy sales person speaks to you at home, on the phone or in the shopping centre, there are some things you should try to remember:



1. Do not sign anything if you are unsure

Unless you want to change to a new energy company and are completely sure what you are signing, do not sign anything.

Some people have been tricked into switching to a new energy company by an energy sales person who told them they were signing for another reason.

Remember! You do **not** need to sign anything:

- to say someone has read your meter
- to be sent further information
- to say a salesperson has visited you
- ...or any other reason.



2. Ask for some written information

If you are thinking about changing your energy company, ask if you can have some written information showing how much you would pay for your gas or electricity if you switched to the new company.

Make sure this is for the amount of gas and electricity you actually use, not for an 'average household'.

If you do ask for more information, make it clear that you only want more information, and are not agreeing to switch your energy company.

Remember! Only sign something if you are sure you want to switch to a new company.

There is more information about comparing prices and choosing your energy company in factsheet 1.



If you have switched companies

If you have switched companies and change your mind or have been tricked into changing companies, do not panic! There are some things you can do:

1. If you switch companies and change your mind

If you switch companies when someone speaks to you at home, on the telephone, or in the shopping centre or supermarket you can change your mind.



You have **7 days** after you have signed the contract to change your mind and switch back to your old company. This is called a 'cooling off' period.

If you do change your mind, tell the new company straight away. You should tell the company by telephone and you should write to them too.



If the company does not sort the problem out, contact energywatch for help.

2. If you are tricked into switching companies

Some people have been tricked into switching to a new company by an energy sales person who told them they were signing for another reason.



If this happens to you, contact the new company to tell them there has been a mistake. You should tell energywatch too.



If your signature has been forged (an energy sales person signed your name on a contract and pretended you signed it) this is against the law. You should tell energywatch about this. You could also tell the police.

For more information and advice, contact energywatch.

Look on your folder to find out how to get in touch.



This factsheet tells you about:

- why it is a good idea to save energy
- 10 ways to save energy in your home
- how to find out more about saving energy and getting help to do this

Why should you save energy?

Saving energy in your home can save you money. If you use less energy in your home, your gas and electricity bills will be cheaper.

Saving energy is also important for the environment. When the power stations that supply us with our energy burn fossil fuels, they pump out gases which make the earth heat up like a 'greenhouse'. This is often called global warming. This is causing a lot of problems for the environment.

There are lots of things you can do to save energy in your home.

You do not need to spend any money to do most of these things. A few of the things will cost a little bit of money now, but will save you lots more money in the future.

Here are 10 easy things you can do to save energy and your money. Why not try them!

10 ways to save energy in your home

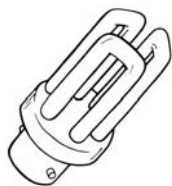
1. Use low energy lightbulbs

Low energy lightbulbs use a lot less electricity than normal lightbulbs. This means they may last up to 12 times longer!

One low energy lightbulb can save you up to £10 a year on your electricity bill. And because they last longer you will not have to change them very often.



Low energy lightbulbs cost around £5 each. You can sometimes get some low energy lightbulbs for free. See page 4 to find out more about this.



Tip! Use low energy lightbulbs where you switch lights on most often or for the longest amount of time.

Low energy light bulbs do not work with sensors, dimmers or timers.

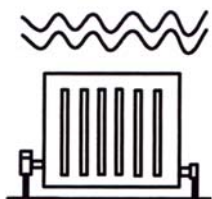
2. Have a shower not a bath



Having one bath uses the same amount of water as five showers! So having a shower instead of a bath will save lots of hot water.

If you do not have a shower you can buy special attachments to fit on your bath taps. You can buy these in DIY shops for about £5.

3. Turn down your central heating



It is really important to keep warm, especially in the winter. But if it is too warm in your home, turn the thermostat down and save money.

Turning your heating down by just 1° C (centigrade) could cut 10% off your heating bill. This means that if your gas bill is normally £100 this could save you £10.

Remember! If you have the heating on and it is too warm in your home, turn your heating down. Do not just open a window – this wastes lots of energy ...and your money too!

4. Turn off lights and things that use electricity



Always turn off the light when you leave the room. Turn off things like your TV, video, stereo and computer when you have finished using them too. Do not leave them on 'standby' – this wastes energy.



5. Close the curtains

Close your curtains when it starts to get dark. This will stop heat getting out through your windows.



6. Save energy when you wash your clothes

Try to only use your washing machine when you have a full load.

Only use the tumble dryer when you really have to. You can use an airer, or dry your clothes outside on a washing line. This will not cost you anything!



7. Turn off taps

Try not to leave taps dripping – this can waste lots of water.



8. Only boil the water you need in your kettle

When you make a cup of tea or coffee, only boil the amount of water you need. Do not fill the kettle up to the top every time – this wastes energy.



9. Close the fridge door

Try not to leave the fridge door open for longer than you need to. This will stop the cold air getting out.



10. Use lids on your saucepans

Use lids on your saucepans when you are cooking – food and liquids heat up more quickly if you use a lid.

Choose a saucepan that is the right size for what you are cooking. And use a cooker ring that is just the right size for the saucepan too.

Find out more about saving energy and getting help to do this



You can find out more ways to save money by contacting your energy company or your local Energy Advice Centre. You even might be able to get a grant (money) to help you make changes around your home that will save energy.



Sometimes you can also get free low energy lightbulbs.



To find out about:

- saving energy at home
- getting a grant
- getting free low energy lightbulbs

Speak to your local **Energy Advice Centre**
telephone **0800 512 012**