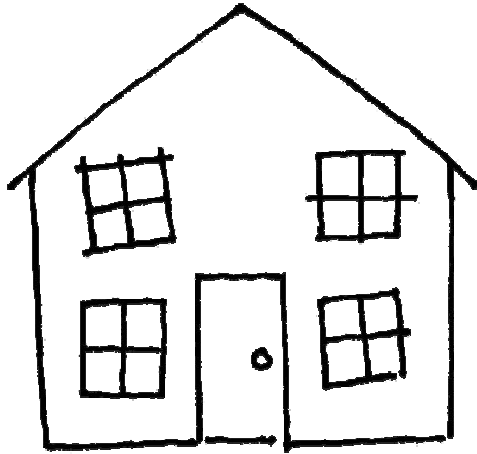


Fact sheet 15: Switch, swap and save energy



Please note, some of the information in this fact sheet is out of date, but there's still some information you might find useful. We hope to provide you with a full update later in 2012.

With current energy prices unlikely to fall by much, it makes sense for us all to do what we can to make our homes as affordable to heat as we can. Many parents tell us they'd like to spend less on energy and we think it can be done. This fact sheet looks at ways to minimise the impact of high fuel prices, manage bills more effectively and grab free money to make our homes more energy efficient.

Some of our suggestions are big ideas: they'll take time and effort to sort out and you might have to feel a bit brave to have a go. But small changes make a big difference too, so we include lots of tips and ideas to save money around the house. They cost nothing more than the effort of doing things differently.

The big ideas

Switch your energy supplier. Switching costs you nothing, and if you haven't compared tariffs (prices) between suppliers in the last year this is very likely to save you money. The difference between the cheapest and the most expensive supplier can save you £100 a year. Armed with your postcode and an idea of how much you're spending on fuel, it's easy to use www.uSwitch.co.uk, www.switchwithwhich.co.uk or www.energyhelpline.com to compare prices between suppliers and find the best deal for you.

But if tariffs are in a flux, wait! Almost as soon as one supplier changes tariffs, the others follow. Until prices have settled, comparison websites can't work out which supplier is the most competitive. If you switch too soon you are likely to find your new supplier isn't the cheapest!

Ditch your prepayment meter. It's the most expensive way to pay, and it's miserable when the TV goes off, the lights go out, it gets chilly and the shops are shut! If you can, try to switch to a billed meter: you may have to pay to get one but savings on fuel tariffs should make it worthwhile.

If you are stuck with a pre-payment meter, it's even more important that you research who can offer you the best tariff. A not for profit energy company may be the best option for you. Ebico has a good reputation for offering competitive pre-payment tariffs and with pressure from the government and consumer 'watchdogs', other suppliers are beginning to cut tariffs.

Buying gas and electricity 'dual fuel' from the same supplier is often cheaper. But while you're shopping around it's worth comparing the cheapest dual fuel supplier with the cheapest separate gas and electricity supplier.

Ask about social tariffs. Energy suppliers often offer reduced charges to households with disabled children: contact yours to see if they will give you a cheaper deal.

Don't assume an off peak tariff is right for you. Tariffs like economy 7 are only really cheap options if you use more than 60 per cent of your energy at night. So, they're great if you have storage heatersbut many of us don't!

Get a cap. If you are worried about future price rises, capped tariffs guarantee the price you pay for your energy until a fixed date in the future. But these can be more expensive than uncapped tariffs. If energy prices start to fall you may want to switch again, so watch out for deals that tie you in.

Pay by direct debit. Paying a fixed 'estimated' amount each month is a cheaper option than paying by quarterly bill.

Better still, switch to your supplier's on line tariff. These are usually the cheapest and can save you 10 per cent over a standard tariff, as long as you are happy to be billed on-line.

Check your meter regularly and keep your supplier up to date with your readings. Don't rely on estimated bills, they can be wildly inaccurate: you may unwittingly be paying in advance for fuel you haven't used. Worse still, you may suddenly find yourself with an unexpectedly large bill, the whole amount charged at the current (highest tariff) even though some of this will be for fuel you probably used when tariffs were lower.

Check your account regularly if you pay by direct debit. If it shows a large credit or debit, contact your supplier. They are more likely to alter your monthly payment if you write and explain why you think the amount you are paying is wrong and suggest a new amount.

Ask your fuel supplier what they do to promote energy efficiency. They all offer advice about how to save energy and some do more. So it's worth speaking to your fuel company to discuss tariffs, trusts and offers. Some trusts award grants for projects, others make grants to individuals.

ScottishPower Energy People Trust tackle fuel poverty by making grants to not-for-profit organisations, charities and community groups. ScottishPower funds the Amaze DLA Project and our work around energy efficiency advice.

Get help with utility debts. Some energy and water companies offer grants to help customers who are struggling to pay bills. You'll need to be a customer of one of these companies to get help.

- British Gas Energy Trust and EDF Energy Trust offer payment plans, grants to clear gas and electricity arrears, as well as help with other household bills and costs. Find out more by visiting www.britishgasenergytrust.org.uk or www.edfenergytrust.org.uk
- NPOWER's First Step Programme offers holistic long term one-to-one support for vulnerable customers who are struggling to pay fuel bills, and are likely to be in fuel poverty and arrears. This includes a stepped approach to

- managing bills, clearing debt, NPOWER's cheapest tariff as well as benefits checks, and energy efficiency advice
- The Water UK website has information on all the schemes run by water companies. Customers of South East Water struggling with water debt can apply to the Eos Foundation www.eosfoundation.org.uk for help with arrears
- Locally, Southern Water Trust Fund www.swtf.org.uk can help with sewerage debt.

If you are still struggling to cope and need help to sort out arrears, make an appointment at the CAB. Brighton and Hove Citizens Advice Bureau, in Tisbury Road, Hove has a dedicated worker who can talk to your supplier, research grants and fill in forms.

If you live in social housing and your home is cold, damp or expensive to heat contact your local housing officer for help. The City Council and housing associations working in Brighton and Hove have programmes to roll out energy efficiency measures across the properties they manage. If contacting your housing officer doesn't resolve the problem ring Amaze, we may be able to help.

If you are a home owner or private tenant a good place to look for grants to put energy saving measures in place is the Government's Energy Saving Trust www.energysavingtrust.org.uk The website lists most government, energy suppliers and local authority grants in one place and its website is easy to use. If you don't have access to the internet you can ring them on 0800 512 012.

Local council grants specific to Brighton and Hove include:

Brighton and Hove Warm-Homes is a city wide scheme aiming to make local homes more affordable to heat. Grants of up to 100% are available to households on low incomes to cover the cost of loft insulation, cavity wall insulation and heating. If you don't meet the criteria for free loft or cavity wall insulation the most you are likely to be charged is £189. To apply, or for information call free on 0800 048 0727.

An Affordable Warmth Grant may be what you need if you are a home owner or private tenant with little disposable income and no-one in your household is eligible for any of the other grants. If you have no central heating system or what you have is over 15 years old, not working properly and cannot be repaired, check out whether you can get help by calling Brighton and Hove Energy Action Partnership free on 0800 107 4100. Grants can be worth up to £5,000.

Grants for Solar Water Heating Systems of £1,500 are available to any homeowner or private landlord towards the cost of supplying and fitting a solar water heating system to a property in the city. In some cases it's possible to get an additional £400 from the Low Carbon Buildings Programme to help install solar panels. This grant is not restricted to households on low incomes.

Warm Front is a nation-wide scheme available to homeowners and private tenants on low incomes, getting income related benefits. If you qualify for help, Warm Front provides insulation and/or heating measures up to £3,500 (or £6,000 where oil, low carbon or renewable technologies are recommended). Householders who are eligible, get a home visit and an assessor works out what needs to be done to make your home more energy efficient, comfortable and affordable to run. Work covered by Warm Front includes loft, cavity wall and hot water tank insulation, draught-proofing windows and doors, installation of boilers and central heating systems, repairs to existing central heating systems and converting solid-fuel open fires to a glass-fronted fire. You can find out if you are eligible on the website www.warmfront.co.uk or by calling free on 0800 316 2805.

The Heat Project from Enact Energy provides grants towards the cost of loft and cavity wall insulation to homeowners and private tenants. Householders on an income or disability related benefit may get these insulation measures for free. Visit www.heatproject.co.uk for more information. Brighton's Warm-Homes scheme is probably more generous if you have to contribute towards the cost.

Turn2us is a new independent charity that lets you search for charities that might be able to help with things like furniture, decorating or bills and household expenses. It's easy to search by special need, age and personal circumstances. You may be lucky, it's certainly worth a try!

The little things that make a big difference

Turn your central heating thermostat down by 1 degree. Just doing this can save £30 a year. Wear an extra layer so you still feel cosy.

Set your heating to go off 30 minutes before you go to bed and come on again 30 minutes before you get up. Do the same before you go out so you aren't heating an empty house but come back to a cosy house.

Do-it-yourself and stick tin foil behind radiators (shiny side facing the radiator) to reflect heat back into rooms.

If you are not using your fireplace, block up the chimney (just use newspaper or cardboard). A lot of heat energy is lost up the chimney flue.

Seal up any drafts in doors and windows: for small drafts use stick on draft excluding tape.

Draw the curtains at night, close internal doors and move furniture away from radiators.

Replace standard bulbs with energy saving bulbs: they last up to 12 times longer than standard bulbs and use only 25% of the energy, saving you £65 over the life of each bulb. Save more by turning off lights in empty rooms.

Switch off at the plug: appliances left on standby can amount to 6% of your energy costs!

Fill up your fridge and freezer. Fill gaps with plastic bottles of tap water. A half empty fridge works harder to stay cool. An inefficient fridge can account for 20% of a households electricity use! Avoid standing your fridge next to another electrical appliance. If you can keep your freezer somewhere cool like the garage.

A big thank you to ScottishPower Energy People Trust which funds the Amaze DLA Project and our work promoting energy efficiency to families with disabled children in Brighton and Hove. ScottishPower Energy People Trust fund projects tackling fuel poverty.

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This fact sheet is one of a wide range produced by Amaze and available via our helpline or website. Others you may find particularly useful are: [Tips for Claiming DLA](#).