

Energy Confident New Tenants

Energy advice library

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Energy saving in the home

Gas central heating

If this is your first home with gas central heating, you might be wondering how it works. Even people who've used gas central heating for years can still be a little unsure about it.

This guide will help you understand:

- What gas central heating is
- How it works
- How it works with hot water

What is gas central heating?

All heating needs energy to make it work. For gas central heating, this energy comes from burning gas. Other types of heating might use oil, electricity, or even the air outside.

The 'central' part of gas central heating just means that:

- the heat is generated in one (central) place
- then sent around your home

How does gas central heating work?

Your radiators have pipes inside them. The radiators get warm when hot water flows through the pipes. This hot water comes from your boiler. To heat the water, the boiler burns gas. It's just like boiling a pan of water on a gas hob.

How does gas central heating work with my hot water?

As well as heating, you'll also need hot water in your home. Where your hot water comes from depends on what kind of boiler you have.

A combi boiler

A combi boiler gives you hot water 'on demand'. This means that if you turn on the hot tap, the boiler heats up water and sends it to the tap. Your shower works in the same way if it's linked to the boiler.

A standard or system boiler

A standard or system boiler can't give you hot water 'on demand'. Instead, water is stored in a hot water tank. With this type of boiler, you time your hot water, based on when you need it.

Hot water tank

The hot water tank is most often found in a storage cupboard. The water inside is either heated up by:

- Electricity, or
- Your gas boiler

Any hot water you use around the house will come from the hot water tank.

You can think of the hot water tank like a kettle that stays warm for a long time.

How to use your gas central heating

Now that you know how gas central heating works, using it should be much easier.

Getting the most out of your gas central heating is all about controlling:

- When your heating is on or off
- How warm your radiators are in each room

Our Energy efficiency guide will help you get the best value for money from your gas central heating.

How to use your storage heaters

If this is your first home with storage heaters, you might be wondering how to use them. Storage heaters work a little differently to other heating systems. This guide will help you get the hang of them.

How do storage heaters work?

Storage heaters charge up with heat during the night. They release this stored heat over the next day. It's a little bit like charging your phone overnight so you can use it the next day. The difference is that you can control:

- How much heat is stored overnight
- How quickly this heat is released the next day

Storage heater tariffs

Before explaining how to control your storage heaters, it's helpful to know about the tariff they use.

What is a tariff?

A tariff sets the price you pay for electricity. Electricity is measured in units called kilowatt hours (kWh). A tariff sets the price for a kilowatt of electricity.

For example:

- If your tariff is 36p per kWh
- And you use 100 kWh of electricity in a month
- Your electricity bill would £36

Most tariffs also include:

- A standing charge
- VAT

The standing charge covers your supplier's cost for providing electricity to your home. It's charged per day:

- If your standing charge is 55p
- And your bill is for 30 days
- Your total standing charge is £16.50

VAT is a tax added to most things. For electricity, VAT is usually 5%.

Tariffs for storage heaters

Storage heaters usually have a different electricity tariff to other heating systems.

On these tariffs, electricity is charged at different rates. Electricity is:

- Cheaper during the night
- More expensive during the day

For example:

- During the day (day rate), electricity might cost 41.7p per kWh
- During the night (night rate), electricity might cost 24.7 per kWh

The storage heater charges up during the night, when the cost of electricity is cheaper.

An example of this type of tariff is the Economy 7. This means that electricity is cheaper (more economical) for seven hours during the night. The exact hours vary from supplier to supplier.

How do I use the controls on my storage heaters?

There should be two dials:

- An input dial
- An output dial

The input dial

The input dial controls how much heat is stored during the night. You set it before going to bed. How high you set it depends on how much heat you think you'll need the next day.

For example:

- If it's forecast to be a cold day, try setting it on medium to high (between 3 and 5).
- If it's forecast to be a mild day, try setting it on low to medium (between 1 and 3).

Remember, although electricity is cheaper during the night, to save money you don't want to store more heat than you think you'll need.

The output dial

The output dial controls how quickly heat is released during the day.

Depending on your routine, you'll probably want most heat in the evening. This means you need to be careful you don't run out of heat by setting the output too high during the day.

- Try keeping the output on a low setting through the day, then turn the output up during the evening if you get cold

- Remember to turn the output down again before going to bed

The boost button

Your storage heater may also have a 'boost' button.

You can use this if you've run out of stored heat.

The boost function uses electricity priced at the day-time rate, not the cheaper overnight rate. To save money, try to use it rarely, if at all.

Find what works best for you

Everyone is different, so everyone will use their heating slightly differently. It's worth trying out different temperatures and timings to see what works best for you.

It's also a good idea to match your heating settings to the season. You probably won't need as much heating in summer as you did in winter. Some people turn their storage heaters off at the wall during spring and summer. Remember: any time you can lower the temperature, you're saving money on your electricity bill.

How to use your modern storage heaters

If this is your first home with storage heaters, you might be wondering how to use them. Storage heaters work a little bit differently to other heating systems. This guide will help you get the hang of them.

How do storage heaters work?

Storage heaters charge up with heat during the night. They release this stored heat over the next day. It's a little bit like charging your phone overnight so you can use it the next day.

Storage heaters let you plan how warm you want your home through the week. The storage heaters will charge up overnight with enough energy to reach tomorrow's set temperature.

You can also set what's known as a 'heating schedule'. This means you can have different temperatures at different times of day.

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The storage heater charges up during the night when the cost of electricity is cheaper.

An example of this type of tariff is the Economy 7. This means that electricity is cheaper (more economical) for seven hours during the night. The exact hours vary from supplier to supplier.

How do I use the controls on my storage heaters?

The exact way you use your storage heaters will depend on which model you have. Some makes and models have tutorial videos on YouTube. You can also check the manual.

Most modern storage heaters have a digital screen. You use the screen to get to different menu options.

Heating schedules

A heating schedule is simply the times your heater is on or off throughout the day. There will be pre-set heating schedules in the menu.

Some examples are:

- Out all day
- Home all day
- Holiday mode

You can go into these schedules and change them to best match your routine. For example:

- If you get up at 07:00 (7am), you might want your bedroom to be a bit warmer at that time. Try setting the storage heater in your bedroom to heat the room between 06:30 and 07:00 (6.30am and 7am).
- If you're not going to be in the bedroom again until 22:30 (10.30pm), you can set the heating to be off throughout the day.
- You may want to warm the bedroom up again slightly before going to bed, so you could set the heater to be on between 22:00 and 22:30 (10pm and 10.30pm).

The temperature dial and display

Most modern storage heaters have a dial (the thermostat) which controls the temperature in that room. The temperature can be seen (in °C) on the digital screen.

Try setting the temperature as low as possible by turning the dial. You don't have to go any lower than is comfortable. Most people choose an indoor temperature of 18-21°C. The lower you can set your storage heaters, the lower your electricity bills will be.

Find what works best for you

Everyone is different, so everyone will use their heating slightly differently. It's worth trying out different temperatures and timings to see what works best for you.

It's also a good idea to match your heating settings to the season. You probably won't need as much heating in summer as you did in winter. Some people turn their storage heaters off at the wall during spring and summer. Remember: any time you can lower the temperature, you're saving money on your electricity bill.

Safety

It's important not to cover a storage heater. Blocking or covering them might cause a fire. If you're drying clothes, use an airer at a safe distance from your heater.

How to use your air source heat pump

An air source heat pump does the same job as gas central heating. It keeps your home warm and covers your hot water needs.

Don't worry if this is your first home with an air source heat pump. This guide will help you get the most out of your new heating system.

How does an air source heat pump work?

An air source heat pump heats your home using the air from outside. The unit outside your home:

- Takes warmth from the air outside
- Boosts it
- Then sends this heat to your radiators and hot water tank
- If you have underfloor heating, the heat pump supplies this too

If even it drops to -15°C outside, the heat pump can still comfortably heat your home.

Air source heat pumps need some electricity to make them work. You can keep the cost of this electricity down by:

- Using your heating efficiently
- Making sure you're on the right electricity tariff

See the sections below for how to do this.

Hot water tank

Your hot water will be stored in a hot water tank. This is usually found in a cupboard. The hot water will be between 40 and 55°C . Once a week, your heat pump will heat the tank to 60°C . This makes sure there are no health risks to you from the water.

How do I use my heating?

As with most central heating, you use a programmer. Your programmer lets you:

- Tell the heating when to come on
- Tell the heating how hot (in $^{\circ}\text{C}$) you want your home to be

With most other kinds of heating, it's good to only run it for a short space of time. With an air source heat pump, the opposite is true. Your heat pump doesn't work well when it's being switched on and off a lot. It works best (and costs less to run) if you give it plenty of time to reach the temperature you want.

When timing your heating:

- Decide what your comfortable temperature is. Most people set an indoor temperature of $18-21^{\circ}\text{C}$

- Decide when you want your home to be that warm. For example, you might want it to be that warm as soon as you get up
- Whatever time you decide, take away 3 hours. This is the time you'll set the programmer for

For example:

- If your comfortable temperature is 19°C
- And you get up at 07:00
- You'd set your heating to 19°C at 04:00

In the evening, give the air source heat pump plenty of time to lower the temperature.

For example:

- If your comfortable overnight temperature is 15°C
- And you go to bed at 23:00
- You'd set your heating to 15°C at 20:00

Electricity tariffs

An electricity tariff sets the price you pay per unit of electricity you've used. With most tariffs, electricity is the same price throughout the day. This is usually the best type of tariff for an air source heat pump. It's known as a 'single rate tariff'.

Part of settling into your new home involves setting up with an energy supplier. We've made a [Signing up with an energy supplier guide](#) to help. When speaking to your energy supplier, make sure they're setting you up on a single rate tariff.

Getting even more out of your air source heat pump

When your air source heat pump was new, the installer should have set it up to work efficiently. This means you shouldn't need to worry about any of the settings.

However, if you feel confident, you can tweak the settings of your heat pump to improve its efficiency.

You can either:

- Ask your Housing Officer for the air source heat pump's manual. This goes into detail about how to change the settings
- Visit the manufacturer's website. There are often videos on how to change the heat pump's settings

It's a good idea to keep a note of the original settings. That way, you can always switch back if the new settings don't work out.

Money saving tips

With energy prices so high, it's more important than ever to save money on our gas and electricity. To cut down on our energy bills we can:

- Use less gas and electricity
- Get help to pay our bills

For help towards your energy bills:

- Check our Energy discounts and financial support guide to see what's available.

To use less gas and electricity, try out some of the tips below.

Heating

Learning how to get the most out of your heating will help save you money.

We've included heating guides for:

- Gas central heating
- How to use your storage heaters
- How to use your modern storage heaters
- How to use your air source heat pump

Bathroom

Heating up water uses energy. Electric showers can be especially costly. This is because electricity is more expensive (per unit) than gas.

Whatever type of shower you have, to save money on hot water you can:

- Take showers instead of baths, if possible
- Try shortening your shower time. Knocking one minute off can save you around £35 a year

Kitchen

You can save money in the kitchen by:

- Using a microwave instead of an oven
- Waiting until you have a full laundry load, then washing clothes at 30°C instead of 40°C
- Only filling the kettle with as much water as you need
- When cooking, making sure pans are sized to the hob ring. Cook with lids on if you have them

Around your home

- Switch the lights off when you leave a room

- Switching off any appliances you're not using
- Turn unused appliances off at the wall
- Draught-proof any gaps around the front door, windows or floor.
- Replace old lightbulbs with energy saving bulbs

Energy efficiency

Energy efficiency simply means getting the most out of the energy we pay for. You'll want to heat your new home as cheaply as possible. This means making sure not to waste any energy.

Using your central heating efficiently

Setting up your heating system will help you use energy efficiently.

A central heating system uses:

- A timer or programmer
- Thermostats

Timers and programmers

Your timer or programmer lets you choose when your heating turns on and off. You can also tell it when you need hot water.

There are lots of different timers and programmers. There might be a video on how to use yours on YouTube. You can also ask your Housing Officer for the instruction manual.

Timers can be mechanical or digital.

Mechanical timers are like clock faces. You move pins in and out on the dial to set your heating to go on or off at those times.

Digital timers have an electronic display. You press buttons to set the times on this display.

Use the timer you have to match your heating to your daily routine. For example:

- You might want your home to be warm first thing in the morning. If so, set the heating to come on about half an hour before you get up. This half hour gives the home time to warm up
- If you're going to be out for most of the day, set the heating to go off half an hour before you leave
- If you want your home to be warm when you get back, set the heating to come on half an hour before you return
- You might want the heating off during the night. Set your heating to turn off about half an hour before you go to bed

Room thermostat

The timer controls when the heating comes on. The room thermostat controls how warm your home gets.

During winter, a good indoor temperature is 18-21 degrees.

Set the temperature as low as you can, but not so low that you're uncomfortable. Every degree you can turn down by saves around 10% on your heating bill.

Thermostatic Radiator Valves (TRVs)

These are the controls on your radiators. They let you control the temperature of each room.

Turning a TRV up makes the radiator hotter. Turning it down makes it colder.

TRVs let you save energy and money by only heating the rooms you are using. In rooms you're not using, put the TRVs on a low setting.

For example:

If you're in the living room for most of the day, try turning that room's TRVs to the medium setting. If your TRVs have numbers 1-5, this would be a 3.

The TRVs in the bedroom would be on a lower setting (1 or 2).

You can experiment with how low you can set your TRVs. The lower you can set them, without feeling cold, the more money you'll save.

Flow temperature

The heat of the water that your boiler sends around your radiators is known as the flow temperature. With a lot of boilers, the flow temperature is set too high. Slightly lowering the flow temperature saves you money without losing warmth. This online guide from The Money Saving Boiler Challenge shows you how.

If you can't go online, you can use your boiler's manual instead. First, check that your boiler is a combi (combination) boiler. This means it provides both your heating and your hot water. The manual should tell you how to lower the flow temperature. You can lower it to 60 degrees to save around £112 a year.

Hot water

You may have a hot water tank in your home. When you use the shower or any hot taps, the hot water will come from this tank.

The water in the tank will either be heated up by your boiler or electricity.

You don't need to heat the water up all the time. The insulation round the hot water tank keeps the water hot for a long time. You can think of it like a kettle which you boil once, and the water inside stays hot for hours.

Hot water programmers

Like your central heating, your hot water can be timed for when you need it. There may be a video for using your hot water timer on YouTube. You can also ask your Housing Officer for the instruction manual.

Set your hot water timer to match your routine:

- If you need hot water for washing in the morning, time the water to heat up for an hour before you get up
- If you need water in the evening, time the water to heat up for a few hours around dinner time

How long your water stays hot for, and how much you need, can vary a lot. It's worth experimenting with different timings. The less hours you heat your hot water without running out, the more money you'll save.

Energy bills and your energy supplier

Signing up with an energy supplier

As you're settling into your new home, it's important to sign up with an energy supplier. This avoids you paying too much or being charged for energy you haven't used.

Following this simple guide will get you up and running in no time.

If you have a prepayment meter, there are a couple of extra steps. A prepayment meter lets you pay for your energy as you use it. They use a key or card, which is topped up at shop. Once you've gone through the steps below, check our Prepayment meters guide for the final steps.

Contact the energy supplier

Your new home will already have an energy supplier. This will be whoever the last tenant signed up with. You can find out who your current energy supplier is at: <https://www.findmysupplier.energy/>. Your Housing Officer should also be able to tell you who the current supplier is.

When you get in touch with the energy supplier, they'll offer to put you on their standard tariff. They'll let you know how much this will cost. They'll also explain the different payment options.

Normally, it's worth shopping around for the best energy deal. However, due to the Energy Price Guarantee from the government, there isn't a lot of competition between energy companies at the moment. You may wish to switch supplier for other reasons, such as customer service. If not, we'd recommend staying with your current supplier.

Give your Meter Number

All meters have a unique number. A gas meter has a Meter Point Reference Number (MPRN). An electricity meter has a Meter Point Administration Number (MPAN).

Your supplier will need to know the meter's number to make sure they're setting your account up correctly.

Where do I find my gas meter's number?

Your gas meter's number (MPRN) is usually 6-10 digits long.

If you've been sent a gas bill already, the MPRN will be on the bill.

If you haven't had a bill yet, or if you have a prepayment meter, you can find your MPRN online at <https://findmysupplier.energy/>

The Meter Point Administration Service can also find out your MPRN for you. You can call them on 0345 601 5972. Calls cost 7p per minute, plus your standard network charge.

Where do I find my electricity meter's number?

Your electricity meter's number (MPAN) is usually 13 digits long.

If you've been sent an electricity bill already, the MPAN will be on the bill.

If you haven't been sent a bill, or if you have a prepayment meter, the MPAN is something the current electricity supplier should already know.

Giving a meter reading

Your supplier will ask you for a meter reading. This is to make sure you only pay for the energy you use. It avoids getting charged for anything that the last tenant might owe.

Our How to read your meter guide can help you if you're stuck.

Priority Services Register

The Priority Services Register offers extra help to those who need it. You can find out more about it in our Priority Services Register guide. When getting set up with your energy supplier, ask whether you can go on the Priority Services Register.

What should you expect from your supplier?

All energy suppliers should be:

- fair
- honest
- transparent (open with you about how they work)
- professional

They should give you the right information to help you make decisions about your energy supply. The information should be given at the right time and in a suitable form.

Your supplier should also take our circumstances into account when dealing with you.

If you feel your new energy supplier is not treating you fairly at any time, ask to make a formal complaint against them.

Ways to pay for your energy

Energy suppliers offer different ways of paying for energy. The table below can help you work out which way of paying suits you best.

Way to Pay	It's a good way to pay if...	Can you spread your costs over the year?	Can you get a cheaper price by paying this way?	What are the good things about paying this way?	What are problems with paying this way?
Direct Debit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You have a regular income and a bank account. You like to budget your money each month. 	Yes	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Your payments are the same every month. Your gas or electricity company should review the amount you pay every 12 months. It's one of the cheapest ways to pay. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If you use more gas or electricity than you have paid for, you will pay more the next year. The money will come out of your bank account for this even if you have no money in it (so your bank may charge you a fee).
Payment Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You want to pay every two weeks or every month. You don't have a bank account. You are repaying gas or electricity debt. You find it easier to pay at post offices or pay points. 	Yes	No	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You have small set payments on a regular basis. This makes it easier to budget. This payment method can be used to pay back gas or electricity debt. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If you use more gas or electricity than you have paid for, the amount you pay will be increased the next year. If you do not pay on time, your payment plan will be cancelled. It will be difficult to set up another payment plan if this happens.
Fuel Direct	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You are in debt with your gas or electricity, and are on certain benefits (Income Support, Pension Credit, Employment and Support Allowance, or Income-based Job Seekers Allowance). You find it difficult to manage your money. 	Yes	No	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Payments come directly out of your benefit, before you receive it. The payment covers your current gas or electricity use and also pays off part of your unpaid bill. You will not pay more than around £3.75* each week towards your debt (if you have gas and electricity debt, around £7.50* will be taken towards debt each week). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If you use more than what the benefits agency and your gas or electricity company have agreed, you may end up in more debt. You do not receive a bill and so it is difficult to keep track of what you are using. You might not get the cheapest price for your gas or electricity.
Online	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You have a regular income and bank account. You like paying by direct debit. 	Yes	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Online prices are usually the cheapest prices available for gas and electricity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If you use more gas or electricity than you have paid for, you will pay more the next year. The money will come out of your bank account for this even if you have no money in it (so your bank may charge you a fee).
Quarterly Billing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You can manage to pay higher bills in winter. 	No	No	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You pay for the amount of gas or electricity you have used, after you have used it. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is difficult to budget with this payment option, as there is a big difference between what you pay in summer and what you pay in winter. Gas and electricity companies may guess what you have used if they cannot get a meter reading. Make sure you phone your gas or electricity company if this happens, and give them an up-to-date meter reading.
Prepayment Meters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You are in debt with your gas and electricity. You find it difficult to budget your money. 	No	Possibly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This is no longer the most expensive payment method. Your meter can be set to pay off your debt at a low amount (and can be as low as £3.75* a week). Some people find it easier to budget with this payment method. You can't use gas or electricity that you haven't paid for. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This can be expensive in winter. If you do not top up your meter, your supply will stop. Some gas or electricity companies may set your debt repayments too high. If you cannot afford the amount they have set, phone them and ask them to lower it.
Monthly Cash	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You are a Scottish Power customer. 	Yes	No	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This payment method is good for people who find it difficult to manage their money. Your payments are the same every month. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If you use more gas or electricity than you have paid for, your payments will go up.

Financial Support

Energy discounts and financial support

Help is out there if you're worried about your energy bills.

This list below covers:

- what help is available
- if you might be eligible
- how to apply

Warm Home Discount

The Warm Home Discount takes £150 off your electricity bill. The discount comes from your energy supplier. For the 2023 scheme, you'll get a payment between October 2022 and March 2023.

Who can get the Warm Home Discount?

You can get the Warm Home Discount if:

- You get the guaranteed element of Pension Credit. This makes you part of the Warm Home Discount Core Group.

Or

- You're part of the Warm Home Discount Broader Group. Different suppliers have different rules about who can be part of the Broader Group for Warm Home Discount. Usually, you either need to be on a low income or in receipt of certain benefits.

How do I get the Warm Home Discount?

If you're in the Core Group, you should get the Warm Home Discount automatically.

For the 2023 discount, you should have already had a letter to let you know if you are eligible. If you think you are eligible but haven't had a letter, call:

Warm Home Discount helpline: 0800 107 8002

If you're in (or think you should be in) the Broader Group, you need to apply to contact your energy supplier to apply.

The number of Warm Home Discounts your electricity supplier can offer is limited, so you should apply as soon as you can.

Child Winter Heating Assistance

Help is available for disabled children and young people under the age of 19. Those with certain benefits can receive £214.10 towards household bills this winter.

Who can get Child Winter Heating Assistance?

The child or young person needs to get one or more of:

- The highest rate of the care component of Child Disability Payment;
- The highest rate of the care component of Disability Living Allowance for children;
- The enhanced daily living component of Personal Independence Payment;
- The enhanced rate of the daily living component of Adult Disability Payment.

How do I get it Child Winter Heating Assistance?

Child Winter Heating Assistance should be paid automatically. It usually goes into your bank account at the same time as any benefits.

If you have questions about the scheme, Social Security Scotland can help.

You can call Social Security Scotland on 0800 182 2222

Winter Heating Payment

This scheme is replacing the Cold Weather Payment in Scotland. The new scheme offers £50 per year to help with fuel bills. Payments started in February 2023.

Who can get Winter Heating Payment?

If you already get Cold Weather Payment, you'll be able to get Winter Heating Payment.

You may qualify if you get:

- Pension Credit;
- Income Support;
- Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance;
- Income-related Employment and Support Allowance;
- Universal Credit;
- Support for Mortgage Interest.

Full criteria can be found at <https://www.mygov.scot/winter-heating-payment/eligibility>

You can also check whether you qualify by calling Social Security Scotland on 0800 182 2222

How do I get Winter Heating Payment?

Payments should be made automatically. Social Security Scotland will have sent you a letter in February 2023 to let you know if you qualify.

If you think you qualify but haven't had a letter, you may need to apply.

The contact details for Social Security Scotland can be found on their website.

You can call Social Security Scotland on 0800 182 2222

Winter Fuel Payment

The Winter Fuel Payment gives you between £100 and £300 towards your energy bills. The exact amount you receive depends on your circumstances.

Who can get it Winter Fuel Payment?

You need to be old enough to get the state pension. To get Winter Fuel Payment in 2023, you must have been born on or before 25th September 1957.

How do I get it Winter Fuel Payment?

The money usually goes directly into your account. This should happen in November or December.

If you've had no communication or payment by 13th January 2024, contact The Winter Fuel Payment Centre. You can call them on 0800 731 0160.

Home Heating Support Fund

This fund is for people struggling to pay their fuel bills.

Who can use the Home Heating Support Fund?

If you're worried about your energy bills, you might have started "self-rationing". This means you're cutting back on energy so you can pay for other things. You might hear this talked about as the choice between "heating and eating". If you can't afford to do both, you're forced to make a difficult decision between food and warmth.

The fund is open to self-rationers who have received energy or debt advice.

How do I use the Home Heating Support Fund?

A number of organisations can apply on your behalf. You can find the list on the Home Heating Advice website.

You can also apply yourself through the Home Heating Support Fund website. You'll be asked to gather evidence to support your application. A list of what the fund is looking for can be found on the website.

If you can't go online, Citizens Advice Scotland can help you apply for the fund. You can call them on 0800 028 1456.

The Home Heating Support Fund is open until 31st March 2023 or until funds have run out.

Debt

If you're in fuel debt, don't panic. By law, your energy supplier must work with you to come up with an affordable repayment plan. There are several different ways you can start repaying your debt. We'll look at these below.

Remember:

- It's quite common for people to get into fuel debt
- Your energy supplier will only ever cut off your gas or electricity supply as a last resort. By law, there are several steps they have to take before they can do this
- In Scotland, companies you owe money to can only take your possessions away if they have a court order

Check the debt is right

Sometimes energy suppliers get our bills wrong. We need to doublecheck our bills, or we could end up paying more than we should.

Your debt could be wrong if:

The details on your bill are wrong

There are several ways your bill might be wrong. For example, the dates you're being charged for might be wrong. It's even possible you've been sent someone else's bill.

Our Understanding your energy bills guide will help you spot any mistakes. If something's not right, contact your energy supplier to let them know.

Your debt is based on estimated meter readings

Meter readings show how much energy you've used. Your energy supplier only knows your meter reading if you tell them what it is.

If you don't tell your supplier the reading each month, they'll estimate (guess) how much energy you've used. They'll then charge you based on this estimate.

You should only be charged for what you've actually used. To avoid overcharging:

- Take a meter reading. Our How to read your meter guide will help you
- Contact your energy supplier and tell them the reading
- Your energy supplier will send you an updated bill

Ways to pay debt

The number one thing you can do to get out of energy debt is speak to your energy supplier. It might be tempting to ignore debt, but it's better to try sort things out as soon as you can. That way, you can start getting your finances back on track.

There are several different ways to pay back your energy supplier:

Payment plan

Your gas or electricity supplier can look at how much you're spending on fuel. They'll come up with an affordable regular payment for what you use.

You can then work out how much debt you can afford to pay off.

Adding these two amounts together will give you one lump sum payment. This can either be paid fortnightly or monthly.

Prepayment meter

Your gas or electricity company might want to install a prepayment meter. With this kind of meter, you pay for energy upfront. You add credit using a card for gas, and a key for electricity. Our Prepayment meters guide has more information about this type of meter.

As part of the debt repayment plan, an agreed amount will be taken off your credit.

For example:

- If you have agreed to repay £5 a week
- And you top up your gas card with £20 at the start of the week
- When you put your card in the meter, £5 will be taken as debt repayment, £15 credit will be added to the meter.

How to refuse a prepayment meter

You may wish to avoid having a prepayment meter installed. Your energy supplier can't force you onto one without a court order. They can only get a court order once all other options for repayment have been looked at.

To avoid a prepayment meter, get in touch with your energy supplier. You can:

- Ask them to work out a repayment plan for the debt
- Let them know if you have an illness or disability which would get worse if you lost power (e.g., if you keep medication in the fridge)
- Let them know if you have an illness or disability which would make topping up difficult
- Ask your supplier to take back the debt if they've passed it to a collection agency
- Raise a complaint with your supplier if they are not helping you

Fuel Direct

Fuel bills can be paid directly from some benefits. Job Centre Plus or the Pensions Department can organise this for you.

If you get Pension credit, call: 0800 731 0469

If you get other benefits, call: 0800 169 0310

Debt can also be paid off through Fuel Direct. The amount taken off your benefits will depend on:

- the type of benefit
- the type of debt

For example:

- If you receive Universal Credit and the debt is for gas
- 5% of your benefit payment would go towards paying your gas debt.

To find out which benefits qualify, and to apply for the Fuel Direct scheme, visit the Gov.uk website. You can also check if you qualify by calling one of the numbers above.

Types of fuel debt

Knowing what type of debt you have can help you deal with it more easily. There are two types of fuel debt:

- Priority debt
- Non-priority debt

The info below will help you work out

- Which type of debt you have
- How to clear it

Priority debt

Priority fuel debt is for gas or electricity in your new home.

This type of debt should be dealt with ASAP.

What to do about priority debt

Talk to your energy supplier.

Remember: your supplier must work with you to come up with an affordable repayment plan.

You should be given as much time to repay the debt as it took to build it up.

Non-priority debt

This is energy debt from a home you've moved out of.

It's still important to clear this debt as soon as you can, but it won't affect the gas or electricity supply where you live now.

What to do about non-priority debt

Speak to a debt advice charity like National Debtline or Stepchange.

National Debtline: 0808 808 4000

Stepchange: 0800 138 1111

Debt charities can help you set up payment plans. They can also deal with any debt collection agencies that may have contacted you.

Priority Services Register

The Priority Services Register is a free support service. It's there to help if you're in a vulnerable situation.

What help can I get from the Priority Services Register?

Being on the register means you can get:

- Advance notice of power cuts
- Priority support in an emergency
- Help with prepayment meter access
- Someone to take meter readings for you
- Your energy bills in braille or large print
- Your energy bills and letters sent to someone you trust. This might be a family member or carer.
- A password or ID scheme to use when anyone from your energy supplier visits you. This means you can be sure they are who they say they are.

The full list of support on offer can be found at on the Ofgem website. You can also call SP Energy Network on 0800 092 9290.

Can I be on the Priority Services Register?

You can be added to the priority services register if you:

- Are old enough to get the state pension
- Have a disability or long-term medical condition
- Have a hearing or sight condition
- Are recovering from an injury. You can also ask to be added if you've just come home from hospital and need short-term help.
- Have a mental health condition
- Are pregnant or have young children
- Have extra communication needs. For example, you might find reading or speaking English hard.
- Have little or no sense of smell
- Would find it difficult to answer the door or get help in an emergency

How to register

You can ask your gas or electricity supplier to add you to the Priority Services Register.

If you have one supplier for gas and another for electricity, make sure to speak to them both.

When you call your supplier, they'll ask for some information about your needs. It's important to let them know if you rely on your energy supply for medical reasons. For example:

- You might have a ventilator or dialysis machine that uses electricity
- Your heating going off might make your health condition worse

Other free services

You might be able to get a free gas safety check from your supplier. This check happens every 12 months.

You can get a free gas safety check if:

- You get a means-tested benefit and

Anyone in your home is:

- Under five, or
- Old enough to get a state pension, or
- Disabled or chronically ill

To get a free gas safety check each year, speak to your gas supplier.

Understanding your meters

How to read your meter

A meter keeps count of how much gas or electricity we've used. Reading a meter simply means checking how high the meter has counted. To do this, we look at the numbers on the meter's display.

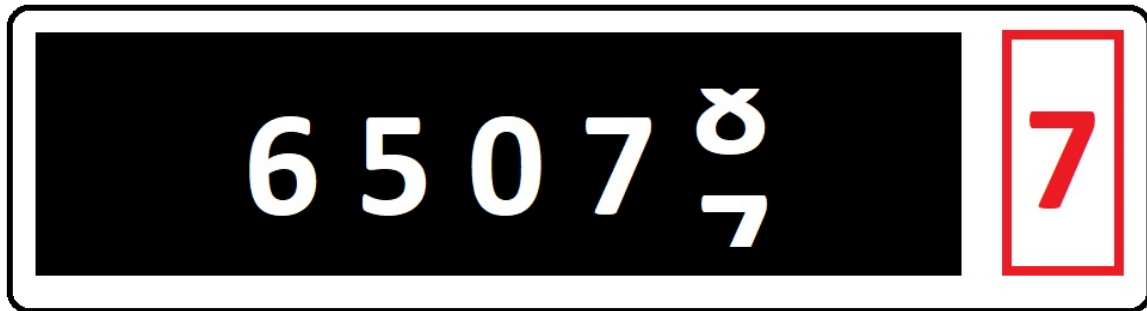
If your new home has both gas and electricity, you'll have a meter for each.

How to read your electricity meter

There are a few different kinds of electricity meter. The pictures below will help you work out which kind you have.

Single rate digital electricity meter

With this meter, the numbers literally 'go up'. You can see them turn as electricity is used. On the display below, the seven has almost turned to eight.



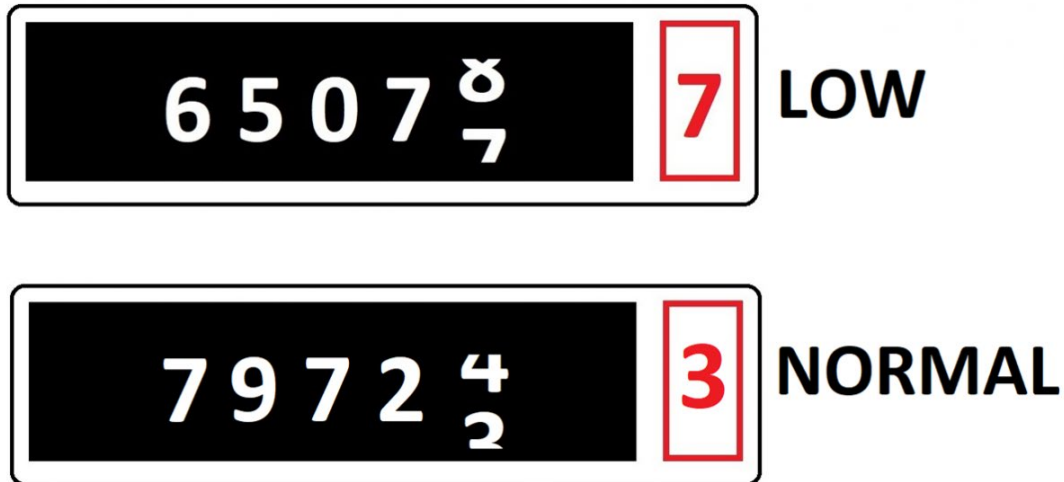
To read the meter, simply write down the white numbers, going from left to right. You don't need to write down the red one.

For the last white number, write down the number you can see most of in the display. If in doubt, choose the lower number.

The meter reading in this case is 65077

Two rate digital electricity meter

This kind of meter has two displays. You'll have this type of meter if you're on a tariff where electricity costs less during the night (e.g. the Economy 7 tariff).



The top row (labelled 'low') is the amount of electricity you've used at the cheaper rate.

The bottom row (labelled 'normal') is the amount of electricity you've used at the higher rate.

To read this meter, simply write down both numbers. Be careful not to mix them up.

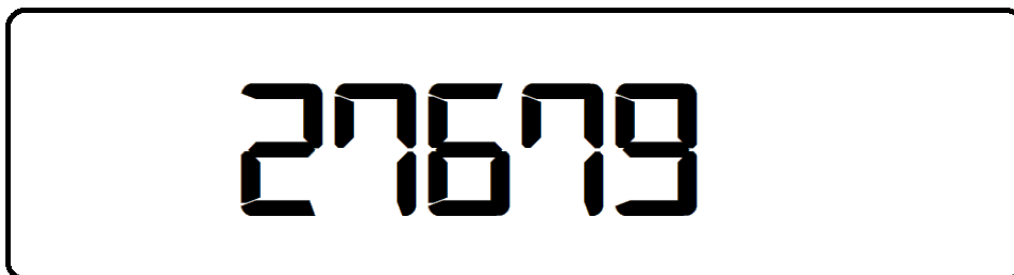
In this case, the meter reading is:

65077 at the low rate

79723 at the normal rate.

Single rate electronic electricity meter

Your meter may have a screen which shows the reading electronically. The display will look like the screen on an electronic alarm clock.

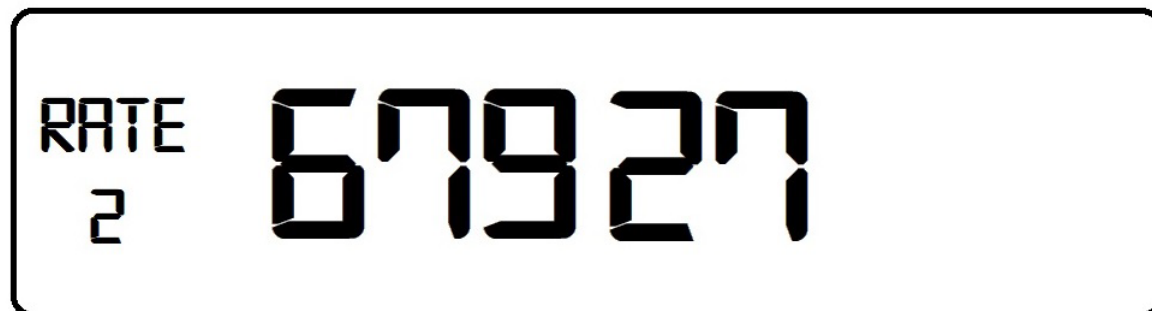


To read the meter, simply write down the number from left to right. In this case, the meter reading is 27679.

Two rate electronic electricity meter

If you are on a tariff where electricity is cheaper during the night (e.g. the Economy 7 tariff) you may have two displays on your meter.

In some cases, you might have this type of tariff but only one display. You should be able to press a button on the meter to switch between the Rate 1 and Rate 2 reading.



To read this meter, write down both numbers. Be careful not to mix them up.

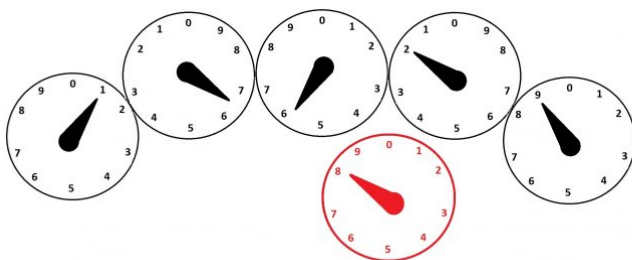
In this case, the meter reading is:

Rate 1 = 27679

Rate 2 = 67927

Electricity Dial meter

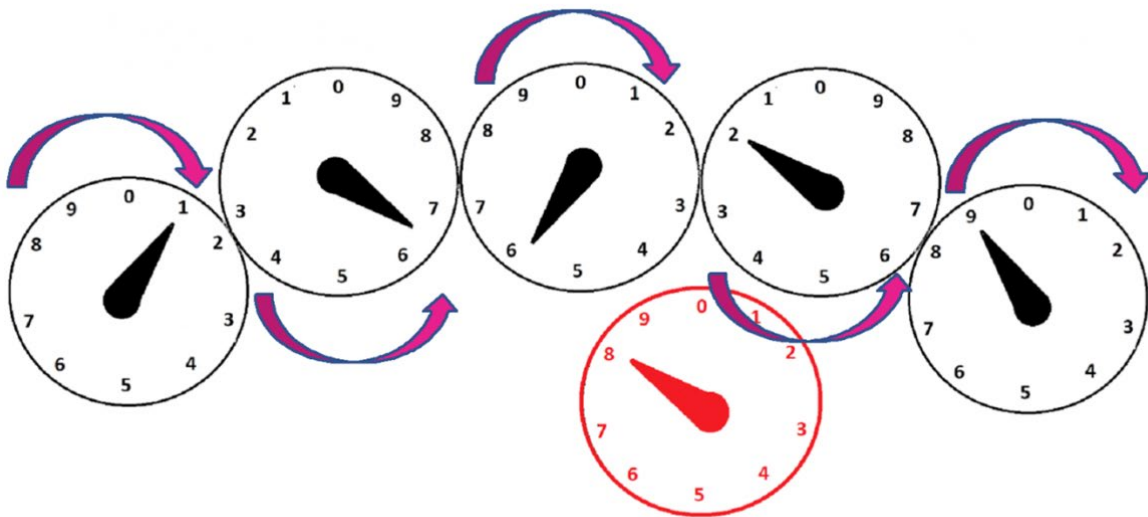
Some meters have dials which look like clocks.



Don't worry if this looks complicated.

Take your time and follow these simple steps:

- Start with the dial on the far left
- Check if the numbers go clockwise or anticlockwise. This helps you read the dial
- Look at the pointer on the dial
- If the pointer is between two numbers, write down the smaller number. If the pointer is between 0 and 9, write down 9
- If the pointer is pointing straight at a number, underline the number you write down. Ignore this rule if the number is a 9
- Move on to the next dial (to the left). Read this in the same way you read the first dial
- Continue from left to right until you've read all the dials. You can ignore the red dial



- When you've written down numbers for all five dials, look at any numbers you've underlined. If any of the underlined numbers are followed by a 9, take away one from the underlined number
- The five numbers you've written down are your meter reading.

To help you get used to it, we'll go step-by-step to read the dial meter shown above.

Starting left to right:

- The pointer is on 1. We write down 1 and underline it: 1
- The pointer is between 6 and 7. We write down 6 because it's the lower number: 1 6
- The pointer is between 5 and 6. We write down 5: 1 6 5
- The pointer is on 2. We write down 2 and underline it: 1 6 5 2
- On the last dial, the pointer is at 9. We write down 9 but don't underline it (Remember, the underlining rule doesn't apply to the number 9): 1 6 5 2 9

- We now check the numbers we've underlined
- The first underlined number we have is 1. It's followed by a 6. So we leave the reading of 1 as it is
- The only other underlined number we have is 2. It's followed by a 9. This means we take away 1 from the 2: $2-1=1$.
- This leaves us with our final reading of: 1 6 5 1 9

How to read a smart electricity meter

Smart meters send readings to your energy supplier automatically. However, there may be times when you need to read the meter yourself.

To do this, first look for the meter itself. A lot of people mix their smart meter up with the In-Home Display that usually comes with it.

The In-Home Display is about the same size and shape as a mobile phone. Like a phone, you can pick it up and move it round your home.

The meter is bigger. You'll usually find it in a cupboard. It could also be in a box outside your home.

The meter will have a screen. It usually looks like the display for an electronic meter:



The reading above is 00697.2.

You may have a two-rate meter. This means you pay less (per unit) for electricity during the night, and more through the day.

With a two-rate meter, you'll need to move through the screens to see both rates. You do this by pressing a button.

There are lots of kinds of smart meters. The Citizens Advice Bureau has a helpful guide which shows you how to read the different types. You can also call your supplier to ask how to read their type of smart meter.

How to read your gas meter

As with electricity meters, there are different kinds of gas meter. The pictures below will help you work out which kind you have.

Digital gas meter

The numbers on this type of meter go up manually as gas is used.

Your digital gas meter will either be 'imperial' or 'metric'.

Digital imperial gas meter

This type of meter has four numbers you need to read.

You can ignore the two red numbers.



To read the meter, simply write down the white numbers from left to right.

For the last white number, write down the number you can see most of in the display. If in doubt, choose the lower number.

In this case, the meter reading is 5077.

Digital metric gas meter

This type of meter will have five numbers to read.

You can ignore any numbers in the red section.



Make sure to write down the zeros at the start of the meter reading.

The meter reading in this case is 00078.

Electronic gas meter

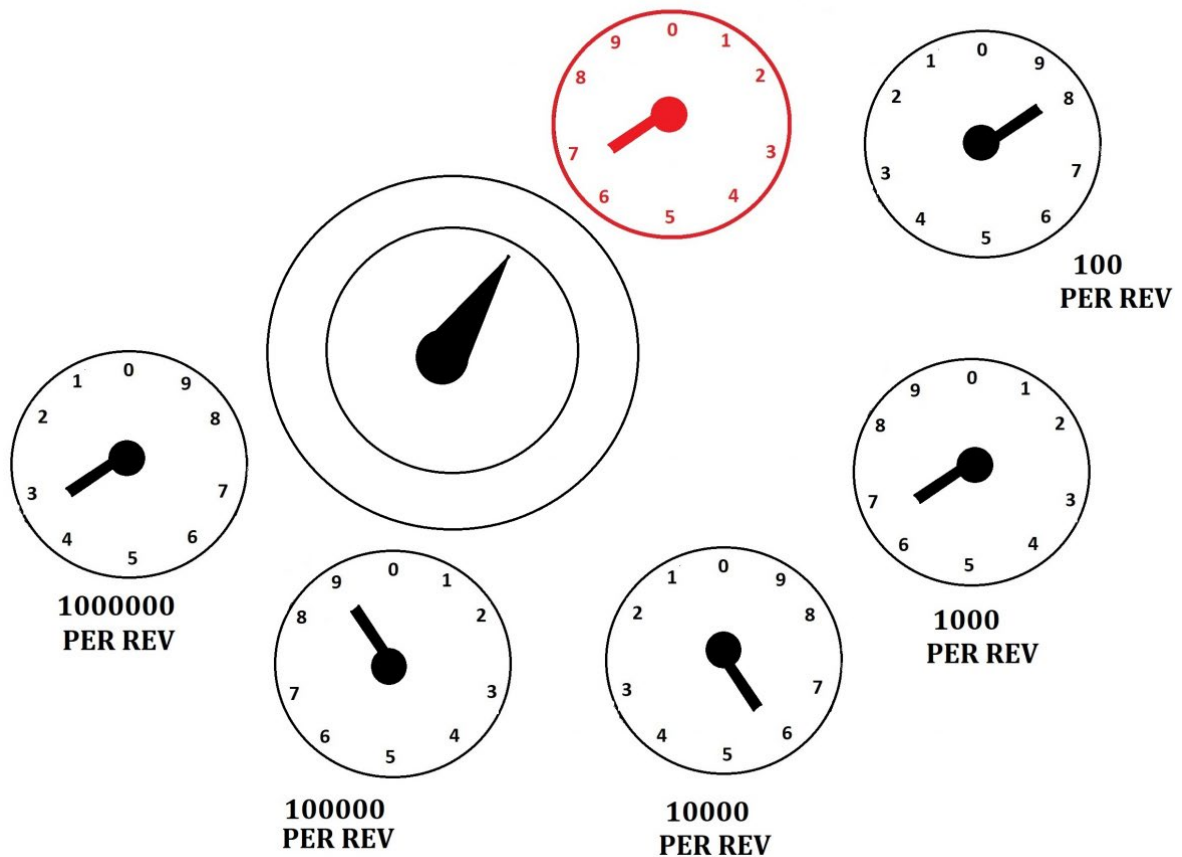
This type of meter shows the reading electronically.

Simply write down the number from left to right. You can ignore any numbers after the decimal point.



In this case, the reading is 00697.

Gas dial meter



This can be read in the same way as the electricity dial meter, above.

The dials are read from left to right.

You can ignore:

- any red dials
- the big dial
- the 100 per rev dial.

Following the steps for reading the electricity dial meter should give you a reading of 3956.

How to read a smart gas meter

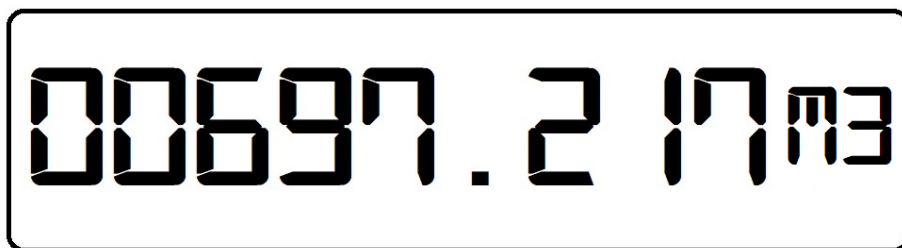
Smart meters send readings to your energy supplier automatically. However, there may be times when you need to read the meter yourself.

To do this, first look for the meter itself. A lot of people mix their smart meter up with the In-Home Display that usually comes with it.

The In-Home Display is about the same size and shape as a mobile phone. Like a phone, you can pick it up and move it round your home.

The meter is bigger. You'll usually find it in a cupboard. It could also be in box outside your home.

The meter will have a screen. It usually looks like the display for an electronic meter:



You can ignore any numbers after the decimal point.

The reading above is 00697.

There are lots of kinds of smart meters. The Citizens Advice Bureau has a helpful guide which shows you how to read the different types. You can also call your energy supplier to find out how to read their type of smart meter.

How to read your prepayment meter

You don't need to give meter readings to your supplier if you have a prepayment meter. You pay for the energy you use upfront, rather than getting a bill.

However, when you're setting up your energy account with your supplier, they may ask you for a meter reading.

Your gas and prepayment meters can both be read in the same way:

- Go into the meter's menu screen. On a gas meter, you usually press and hold the orange button. On an electric meter, you usually press the blue button
- Scroll through the screens to find your meter reading
- Write down the full number

Prepayment meters

All homes with a gas or electricity connection have a meter. This keeps track of how much energy is being used. There are several different kinds of meter.

What is a prepayment meter?

With a prepayment meter, you buy gas or electricity credit up front. With other kinds of meter, you use the energy first, then get a bill later.

Prepayment meters work like the washing machines at a laundrette. You put coins or tokens in the washing machine. The washing machine runs for a certain amount of time. When your credit runs out, you need to add more coins or tokens.

The first prepayment meters did actually use coins and tokens. Nowadays, nearly all prepayment meters have a special card or key. With a smart prepayment meter you can also add credit (top up) through an app or over the phone.

Your prepayment meter will have a slot for your top-up card or key. It will also have a screen which tells you:

- How much credit you have left
- How much the standing (daily) charge is
- How much debt is on the meter

How do you use a prepayment meter?

Gas and electricity prepayment meters both work in the same way. The big difference is that your electricity prepayment meter is topped up with a key, and your gas meter is topped up with a card.

To add credit to your prepayment meter:

- Take your key and/or card to a shop. Most cards or keys can be topped up at any shop with a PayPoint or PayZone logo, or at a Post Office. It's worth checking with your energy supplier where you can top up, just in case
- Tell the shop assistant how much credit you want. You can only add whole pounds. For example, you could add £5 or £6, but not £6.50
- Keep the receipt in case the top-up doesn't work
- Put the topped-up key or card back in your meter. This transfers the credit to your meter
- Take the key or card out again and store it somewhere safe

Your meter should have a button which lets you access different screens. These screens show:

- How much the meter will take each week for the standing (daily) charge and any debt repayment
- How much emergency credit you have left

- If you have any energy debt

How to top up a smart prepayment meter

Usually, you should be able to top up:

- Through your energy supplier's app. You will need to download the app from their website
- By calling your energy supplier
- Through your online account on your energy supplier's website
- By taking your key or card to a shop, as described above

It's worth checking with your supplier if there are extra ways you can top up.

Emergency credit and friendly credit

Emergency credit and friendly credit let you keep using gas and/or electricity when there's no credit on the meter. This works a lot like an overdraft on a bank account. You can spend more money than you have in your account, but it will need to be paid back.

Like paying off an overdraft, the next time you top up your prepayment meter, some of that credit will go towards paying off the emergency and/or friendly credit you've used.

For example:

You've used £5 emergency credit and £2 friendly credit. If you top up £10, £7 will go towards paying off the money you owe. This means that of that £10 top up, £3 will end up as credit on your meter.

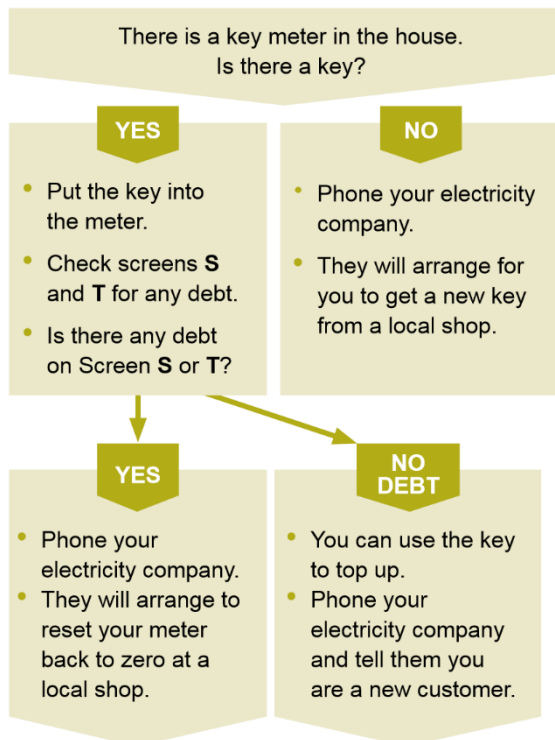
If most of your credit is going towards clearing the money you owe on your prepayment meter, contact your energy supplier. They can work out a repayment plan with you. You can set up a weekly recovery rate (e.g. £5 per week) which is affordable for you. It's also possible to pay off prepayment meter debt in other ways, by a regular card, cash, or cheque payment.

The prepayment meter in your new home

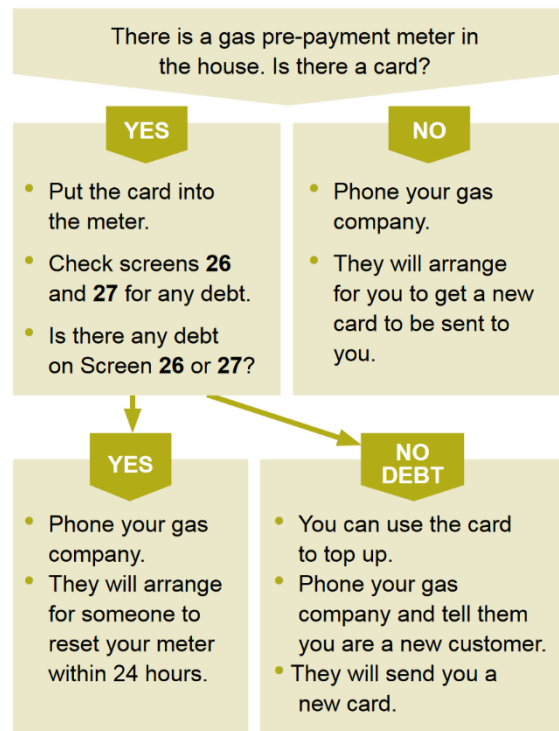
Part of settling into your new home is getting your energy supply up and running. We've put Our Signing up with an energy supplier guide can help you with this.

For prepayment meters, there's a couple of extra things to check. Following the simple steps below will make sure your meter is ready to use.

For an electricity meter



For a gas meter



Carbon monoxide safety

Carbon monoxide

Carbon monoxide (CO) is a poisonous gas. You can't see, taste, or smell it, but there are some signs to look out for.

This guide will tell you all you need to know about avoiding carbon monoxide. Knowing the warning signs will help you feel safer in your new home.

The emergency number for help with CO is 0800 111 999. Call immediately if:

- You think there might be CO in your home, or
- You think you or someone in your home might have CO poisoning

What is carbon monoxide?

Carbon monoxide is a gas that's poisonous to humans. It's produced when gas or oil appliances (like cookers or boilers) are faulty or haven't been well looked after.

Carbon monoxide is dangerous because you can't sense it. It has no colour, taste or smell. Luckily, your home comes with a special alarm which can tell whether there's carbon monoxide in the air.

How to stay safe from carbon monoxide

- Check your home has a carbon monoxide alarm. This works just like a smoke alarm. It will go off if CO is in the air. Make sure to regularly test the alarm by pressing the button. Replace the batteries when they run out
- Get all oil and gas appliances checked once a year by a professional
- Make sure there's ventilation for appliances, including portable heaters. Don't block any air vents
- If your alarm goes off or you think there's CO in the air, turn off the appliance you're using. Call the National Gas Emergency Service on 0800 111 999 immediately

What are the symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning?

If you have carbon monoxide poisoning, you might:

- Get a headache
- Feel sick or be sick
- Feel dizzy
- Feel short of breath
- Collapse
- Lose consciousness

Signs of carbon monoxide in your home

Any of the following might be signs of CO:

- Heating or cooking appliance flames burning yellow or orange. If the flame isn't the usual blue, contact your Housing Association to check this.
- Staining, soot, or discolouration on appliances
- More condensation than usual
- Your boiler's pilot light (flame) going out a lot

Gas safety

If you smell gas in your home, call 0800 111 999. The National Gas Emergency Service runs 24 hours a day. They will come to your home to make sure it's safe.

Whilst you're waiting for them:

- Open windows and doors to help let the gas out
- Turn off the gas supply at the meter
- Turn off any gas appliances

Make sure you don't:

- Smoke or use any flames
- Turn on any electrical switches. This could ignite the gas
- Go into a cellar, if you have one. If your gas meter is in the cellar, leave it alone.

Condensation

To keep your new home comfortable and healthy, it's important to avoid condensation.

This guide will help you:

- Understand what condensation is
- Learn why it's bad
- Know where it comes from
- Find out how to stop it

What is condensation?

There is water in the air around us. It moves around as a gas (vapour). When this water vapour changes to liquid form, it's called condensation.

On cold days, you might see drops of water on the inside of your windows. This is condensation.

Why is condensation bad?

Condensation can:

- Rot your window frames
- Make your wallpaper come away from the wall
- Cause mould on most kinds of surface

The mould from condensation can be bad for your health. You might have seen this black mould before. It starts as small spots but can grow to cover a whole wall. It can cause asthma, bronchitis, or lung disease.

Where does condensation come from?

It's normal for there to be water in the air. Condensation happens when:

- There's too much water in the air
- It's cold in your home
- There's not enough air flow (ventilation)

Water vapour in warm air moves to a cold surface. When it hits this surface, it becomes a liquid. You might see this happen when you're cooking. Steam from cooking has lots of water in it. If the warm steam hits a cold surface (like a window, or a wall) water will form on that surface.

How to stop condensation

There are four ways to keep your new home free from unhealthy condensation.

Stop as much water getting into the air

You can do this by:

- Not using bottled gas or paraffin heaters
- Putting lids on pans when cooking
- Drying laundry outside, if possible. If you can't, dry it in a room with the door closed and the window open. If there's an extractor fan, turning it on will help

Help the water in the air move outside

There are a few ways to do this:

- Your windows might have 'trickle vents'. These are small vents which you can open and close. They're usually at the top of the window, under the inside frame. Keep the trickle vents open when anyone is in the room
- Air out rooms that get used a lot, especially your bedroom. Leave the window open for a few hours to help the air flow
- Kitchens and bathrooms should have extractor fans. Switch these on when you're using those rooms. Opening windows helps too
- When using the kitchen or bathroom, keep the doors closed
- Leave cupboards and wardrobes open every now and again to air them out. Making sure they're not too full also helps
- Pull furniture away from the wall. A small gap helps the air flow

Keep your home warm

Turning down the heating in the rooms you're not using saves money. When turning the heating down, keep it above 15°C in all rooms. This helps the walls and furniture stay warm enough to stop condensation forming.

Other ways to help air flow

To further help the air flow in your home:

- Keep trickle vents or air bricks uncovered. Air bricks are bricks with holes in them to let air pass through
- Keep your chimney clear
- Check with your Housing Officer before draught-proofing any rooms in your home

If you're still having problems with condensation

The tips above should help stop condensation in your home. If the condensation isn't going away, talk to your Housing Officer. Taking photos of the condensation is a good idea. Giving these to your Housing Officer helps them understand the issue.

Other kinds of damp

You can also get damp in your home from:

- Leaky pipes or gutters
- Damage to the walls or roof
- Water from the ground rising through the walls. This is called rising damp.

To stop the first two, the damage would need to be fixed. For rising damp, your walls might need to be treated. Speak to your Housing Officer if you think your home has these kinds of damp.

Safety

Draughtproofing your home helps keep the warmth in. However, you also need to make sure that air can still flow properly.

Speak to a draught-proofing specialist before draughtproofing:

- Any room with a cooker
- Any room with a boiler
- Any room with a solid fuel heater, such as a wood stove

Getting professional advice will keep you safe from carbon monoxide poisoning. See our Carbon monoxide safety guide for more information.

Useful contacts

Breathing Space – 0800 83 85 87

Call if you're struggling with low mood, depression, or anxiety.

Citizens Advice Helpline – 0800 028 1456

Call if you need help with legal issues, debt, housing or consumer rights.

National Debtline – 0808 808 400

Call if you need debt advice.

The National Gas Emergency Service – 0800 111 999

Call if you are worried about a gas leak or carbon monoxide.

Ofgem – 0808 223 1133

Call if you need to complain about your energy bill or supplier.

Shelter – 0808 800 4444

Call if you need help with housing rights.

Warm Home Discount – 0800 107 8002

The Warm Home Discount takes £150 off your electricity bill if you qualify. Call if you need any advice about the scheme.