

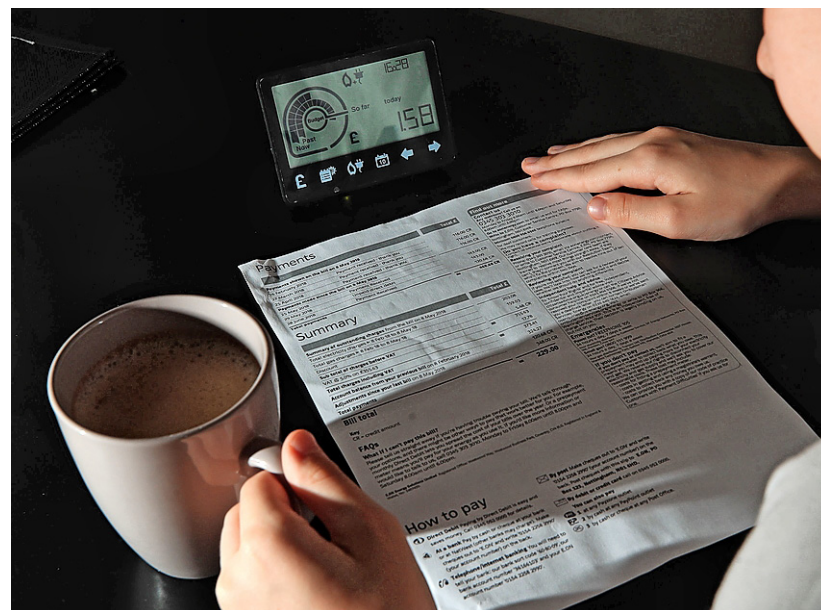
What you can do to cut those soaring energy bills

We are living through a cost-of-living crisis. Energy prices have soared 54 per cent and Citizens Advice has estimated 4.5 million people will not be able to afford their bills as a result. **Angela Terry**, environmental scientist and founder of climate action website One Home, explores some immediate actions people can take to save energy in their home and reduce bills.



IT'S hard to overstate the impact that rising energy bills is having on everyone across the country.

And the problem isn't going away. There will be another price rise in October, and the war in Ukraine is pushing up prices further as many countries across the globe scramble to reduce their



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dependency on Russian energy sources.

The Energy Saving Trust released new figures last week outlining the impacts. A family living in a three-bed semi-detached house is likely to see energy bills rise by an average of £740 per year. Two people in a two-bed flat will see an increase of around £470 per year.

While we don't have much control over gas price increases, we can take control of how much energy we use. There are many small and swift changes that really do make a difference.

Free to do, save money now

» **Put standby on standby:** Parasitic energy is the energy wasted when you forget to turn off your TV or computers. It's literally throwing money away. Turn off every machine when you're not using it.

» **Regulate your radiator:** Consider rooms that you don't use so much. Every radiator has a thermostatic radiator valve. Check they're on a lower setting.

» **Draw curtains:** It may sound obvious but don't forget to close curtains or blinds as soon as the sun goes down. It will reduce the amount of warm air escaping from the windows.

» **Cool that wash:** Wash on a 30 degree cycle or lower. Most machines are designed to wash just as well at that temperature. Cut one or two loads from your weekly wash. Save money, time and effort!

Measures for less than £500

» **Loft insulation:** This is probably the most important step you can take to reduce energy bills. A quarter of heat in an uninsulated home is lost through the roof. Add loft insulation to a depth of 30cm to save hundreds of pounds per year. For a mid terrace house, the insulation cost is around £500 with a payback period of two years.

» **Block that chimney:** A chimney balloon, an inflated plastic pillow, is an easy and affordable way to keep hot air in and cold air out. They cost about £20 and can be installed in a few minutes.

» **Seal leaky windows and doors:** If you can feel draughts around window, doors and skirting boards, you can quickly seal them with inexpensive rubber trim, available from most DIY

shops. Copper strips are also really effective and look attractive.

» **Upgrade your curtains:** Add a thermal lining to existing curtains. If buying new ones, go for the thickest material you can afford and add a lining. Choose a thermal option if possible.

» **Glaze over:** If double glazing is too expensive, you can buy secondary glazing instead. An affordable film that you stick over windows, it can significantly reduce escaping energy. If it's well installed, which may require two people to pull it tight, the appearance is similar to double glazing at a fraction of the cost.

» **Lag those pipes:** Improve your boiler's efficiency by insulating all internal pipework - including in your loft - with lagging. You can buy it from a DIY shop or a plumber's merchant.

Get support

The Chancellor has announced VAT relief for home energy saving products and solar panels. It covers items such as insulation, triple glazing and renewable energy kit.

There are a range of grants and payments that are available from the Government. Go to the Simple Energy Advice website to find out what you are eligible for and search for approved installers. The Energy Saving Trust is also a great source of information on this topic.

The Ofgem website also has a helpful summary of grant schemes including the Warm Home discount, which is for the most vulnerable customers.

You can also ask your energy supplier if you are eligible for support through the Energy Company Obligation (ECO), which obligates energy suppliers to fund the installation of energy efficiency measures. Eligibility depends on whether you receive certain benefits which are listed on the Ofgem website.

And finally...

Putting time into making your home warm is time and money well spent as the energy crisis continues. Get ahead of the game so that you've done all you can to make your home warm and cosy before next winter when energy prices rise again. Burning gas produces carbon dioxide so the less you use the better for your pocket and the planet.