

KEEPING WARM WITHOUT THE WORRY

WE ARE
MACMILLAN.
CANCER SUPPORT

Information on how to manage your fuel bills

While undergoing or recovering from treatment, many people with cancer find that they feel the cold more, are at home for longer periods of time and so use more heating or electricity. So what can you do if you find your gas and electricity bills have gone up?

Trouble paying your bills?

If you are having difficulty paying your bill or are worried about debt, contact your supplier. They may be able to help lower your cost or provide an easier way for you to manage your bill.

Can your energy supplier help?

If you are living with cancer, you should let your supplier know as you are entitled to be placed on the Priority Service Register. The register gives you access to free services from your supplier and means your energy supply can't be cut off during the winter months.

Some suppliers have special, low price tariffs for customers who may be in financial hardship. Depending on your circumstances, for example your age, income or any benefits you are receiving, you may qualify for such a tariff.

Below are some questions you can ask your supplier to see if they can help:

1. Am I on the lowest priced tariff?
2. Do I qualify for a specially priced social tariff due to my circumstances?
(You may need to tell the supplier about your cancer diagnosis, income and benefit entitlements.)
3. Is there any other help I am entitled to, or could apply for, due to my cancer diagnosis?
4. Is it cheaper to pay another way, for example by direct debit?

Suppliers may also offer a regular payment scheme to help you budget for the cost of your energy bills. By choosing to pay a fixed amount on

a regular basis (eg every week or month) at an authorised PayPoint or Payzone location, you can spread the cost of your bills throughout a year. Contact your supplier for more information.

Is there a cheaper alternative?

There are many different gas and electricity companies, and several companies have more than one price plan or tariff, so if you shop around you may find a better deal. Even if you switched your supplier recently, you may still find that your deal is no longer the most competitive. Changing the way you pay may also reduce your bill.

Switching is easy but you will need several pieces of information to hand, including:

- an idea of how much gas and electricity you use, or how much money you spend on it – check a recent bill to find out
- the name of your current supplier
- the name of your deal
- your postcode.

You can then compare prices for your area by doing one of the following:

- visit consumerfocus.org.uk and use the price comparison fact sheet
- use an online price comparison website – a list of approved sites is available from the website above
- phone round the gas and electricity companies.

Once you've found the best deal, contact the relevant supplier and they will organise everything for you. You will not need to do anything yourself, but it's a good idea to take a meter reading so

that you can check the final bill from your old supplier, and the first bill from your new supplier. The switching process can take some weeks but you will continue to be supplied energy by your old supplier and will not be cut off.

Please note: In Northern Ireland there are only two gas and two electricity suppliers, so changing suppliers may not always be possible. For more information, contact the Consumer Council on **0800 121 6022** or visit **consumercouncil.org.uk**

Changes to your home

The government recommends that you set your thermostat to 21°C (70°F) during the day and to 18°C (64°F) at night. They also suggest setting your heating to come on just before you get up and switch it off just after you've gone to bed.

There are simple actions you can take to reduce your bills:

- **Energy saving** Installing energy-saving light bulbs and only boiling the water you need, can help you save money. Turn off unused lights and appliances and avoid leaving them on standby. Other energy saving tips are available from the Energy Saving Trust (**0800 512 012** or **energysavingtrust.org.uk**)
- **Keep the heat in** Shut doors and windows to keep the heat in the rooms you use most. Try not to cover radiators with curtains or furniture.
- **Stop draughts** Hang curtains or seal gaps around windows and doors with draught excluders, which are available from DIY stores.
- **Insulate your home** Fit insulation into the cavity between your walls, in your loft, and around the hot water cylinder and pipes.
- **Change your boiler** If your boiler is over 15 years old, consider replacing it.
- **Contact your supplier** In England, Scotland and Wales you can contact your energy supplier for home insulation and energy efficiency advice:

British Gas **0800 072 8629**

EDF Energy **0800 096 9966**

E-ON **0500 201 000**

npower **0800 02 22 20**

Scottish Power **0800 33 22 33**

Scottish and Southern Energy **0800 0727 201**

If you prefer not to contact your energy supplier, the Home Heat Helpline offers information on energy related grants, benefits and payment schemes. Call **0800 33 66 99** or go to **homeheathelpline.org.uk**

Depending on your circumstances, for example your age, income or any benefits you are receiving, you may qualify for a government grant for heating improvements or home insulation:

England – Warm Front

0800 316 2805 **warmfront.co.uk**

Wales – The Home Energy Efficiency Scheme

0800 316 2815 **heeswales.co.uk**

Scotland – Energy Assistance Package,

The Energy Saving Trust **0800 512 012**

energysavingtrust.org.uk/scotland

Northern Ireland – Warm Home Scheme

0800 988 0559 **warm-homes.com**

You might also be eligible for help with the cost of energy efficiency improvements from your energy supplier. To find out more information, contact your supplier directly or your local Energy Efficiency Advice Centre on **0800 512 012**.

Other financial help from the government

It's also a good idea to double-check you are receiving all the financial help you're entitled to.

The government provides additional help for people who are struggling to heat their home:

- **Winter fuel payment** A payment of £125–£400 made to those aged over 60.
- **Cold weather payment** A payment of £25 per week made to recipients of certain benefits when the average daily temperature is 0°C or lower for seven consecutive days.
- **Fuel Direct** If you receive Income Support and Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance and find it difficult to manage your finances, you may be able to opt to have a sum taken from your benefit and paid direct to your supplier to cover your current supply and any arrears.

For further information on benefits and tax credits, go to **direct.gov.uk** or **macmillan.org.uk**

Further information

Please visit the Macmillan Cancer Support website

at **www.macmillan.org.uk** or call us on **0808 808 00 00**



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