



Switching Energy Provider: How to ensure a smooth switch

The New Year is the perfect time to reassess your financial situation and make savings. Despite its reputation as being a difficult task, looking into switching energy suppliers or tariffs is a quick and easy option. What's more, Government figures state that UK households can save on average £200 by switching energy suppliers, especially if you haven't switched in the last couple of years, so it can make a big impact on your household outgoings.

To make the process even simpler, and to make sure you consider everything that needs to be done before, during, and after your switch, we've put together this handy guide to help to make switching as smooth as possible.

Before you switch

What information you'll need:

- Your postcode
- Current gas and electricity supplier, and the name of your tariff (look at your latest bill, or contact your supplier)
- How much you use in kilowatt-hours (kWh) on gas and electricity. You can find this on recent bills or the annual energy statement sent by your supplier. If you can't find it, then how much you spend is also an option, however, this is likely to be less accurate.
- Your bank details if you decide to switch and wish to pay by direct debit

Check whether you'll incur a fee for canceling your current energy deal. Exit fees are common with fixed-rate tariffs if you switch early. The good news is that all suppliers should now allow you to leave up to 49 days ahead of your tariff's end date without incurring a penalty.

Review your overall financial situation

As well as a general financial check-up, you need to make sure you are claiming all the benefits you are entitled to. If you feel like there might be something you qualify for, contact your local Citizens Advice. It is worth claiming even if you are only entitled to a small amount of benefit, as you may find you are eligible for other forms of assistance as a result.



The switching process

Finding the best deal

Once you've decided you want to switch and have gathered the above information, you next need to shop around to find the best deal, usually, this is easiest through a Comparison Website or Helpline.

- Online

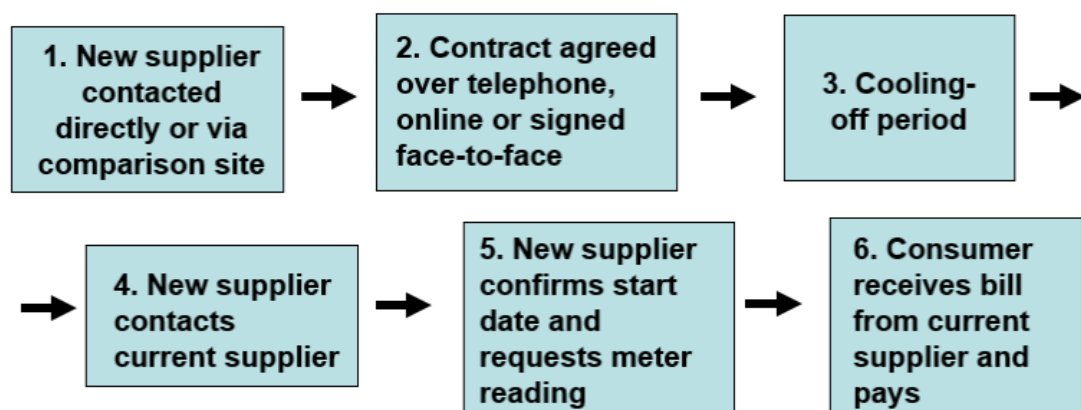
Checking two or three comparison websites is a great way to get started when you begin the switching process. Ofgem, the government regulator for gas and electricity markets in Great Britain has a list of approved energy comparison sites that are independent, and the options and prices you find on them will be calculated and displayed in a fair and accurate way – meaning you can be confident when shopping for energy. To see the list, go to <http://www.goenergys shopping.co.uk/energy-tariffs-and-deals/comparison-sites>

- Over the phone

If you don't have access to the internet, or would prefer to find your tariff over the phone. Many of the accredited switching websites also have Helpline numbers. For example MoneySupermarket (0800 177 7087) and uSwitch (0800 6888 557)

The next steps

After you've found the best deal and tariff for you, you'll need to contact the new energy supplier, either over the phone or online, and agree to the new contract. You'll then have a 14-day 'cooling-off' period, during which your contract can be amended or cancelled without incurring any fees. Your new supplier will ask you for an accurate meter reading and based on this you will be sent a final bill from your current supplier for any outstanding money you owe. Or they might send you a cheque if you are in credit!





After you switch

After the 14 days cooling-off period, your supplier should change you over within 3 days, bringing the total time to 17 days. Your new supplier should tell you when to expect your first bill and the date from which they will begin charging you. You will receive a final bill from your old supplier within six weeks of the date of the switch and it's advisable to settle this as soon as possible. If you pay by direct debit, make sure you cancel this with your bank after you've paid your final bill.

When you switch to a new supplier, keep a record of the following:

- The date you agreed to the deal/signed the contract
- Details of the deal agreed
- Meter readings on the date of the switch
- Any letters/emails sent between you and the supplier
- Contact numbers and names of people you have spoken to and the dates of your conversations
- The final bill from your old supplier

Things to consider and questions to ask

Does my current supplier offer a cheaper tariff?

If you're considering switching, you might want to first contact your current energy supplier and see if they can offer you a better deal. Naturally, we advise you to shop around, but seeing what your current supplier can offer is often a good first move.

Does my new supplier offer the Warm Home Discount?

If you are in receipt of certain means-tested benefits, you may be entitled to a one-off £140 discount on the cost of your energy during the winter months. Those who receive Guaranteed Pension Credit are known as the 'Core Group' while other qualifying benefits make up the 'Broader Group'. Suppliers can set their own Broader Group rules but they often include categories such as Income Support and a child under the age of 5. Another aspect to consider is the time of year: Broader Group funds are cash limited and suppliers may refuse to accept applications towards the end of the financial year. If you are eligible for a discount and switch to a non-participating supplier, this could effectively offset any savings you make on your bills.



What payment options are offered and what is the best for me?

There are a number of payment options including direct debit, standing order, paying on receipt of the bill, and prepayment meter. While direct debit (and paperless bills) is often the cheapest method, it's not suitable for everyone. For example, if you only want to pay for the energy you use, then you might want to provide accurate readings and pay quarterly. Or if you want to avoid bills altogether, having a prepayment meter allows easy budgeting—although you will often pay a premium rate. If you receive certain benefits, you might be eligible for third-party deduction which means your bills are deducted from your benefits before you receive them, meaning there's no need to worry about budgeting.

What is the customer service rating for my new supplier?

Citizens Advice's provides a free energy supplier performance model aims to accurately illustrate relative energy company performance on complaints. This will allow you to access to the information you need to make well-informed switching decisions.

Can I be added to the Priority Services Register?

If you're a pensioner, disabled or chronically sick, or have a hearing or visual impairment you can sign up for your supplier's Priority Services Register (PSR). This means you'll get free energy efficiency advice, free meter readings if you struggle to do so, and potentially free annual gas safety checks and be prioritised during emergencies and times of service disruption.

Switching FAQs

Can I switch if I'm renting?

Yes! If you're a tenant and are directly responsible for paying your energy bills, you can choose which supplier to use. However, it might be best to inform your landlord first as this may be required in your tenancy agreement.

If I have a pre-payment meter can I still switch?

Yes! If you use a pre-payment meter, you should be able to switch, even with a debt of up to £500.

Can I switch if I have a smart meter? Yes! Your switching rights are not affected if you have a smart meter, but your new supplier may not be able to offer you the same smart meter functionality that you currently receive.



Do I have to switch both electricity and gas to the same supplier?

No! While getting your gas and electricity from the same supplier, or being on a 'dual fuel' tariff is very common, you are in no way obligated to get both utilities from the same supplier. However, getting all your energy from the same company can make things easier, as you'll only receive one bill, and can make things cheaper as companies offer 'dual fuel' discounts.

How do I switch from Economy 7 to a standard tariff?

A few providers will allow you to move to a standard or dual fuel tariff without changing your meter – they'll simply add the day and night readings together to get your total usage, and then charge you a single rate for it. However, to avoid limiting yourself to a smaller amount of suppliers (and therefore savings) we suggest contacting your current energy supplier first and switching with them to a standard tariff and meter. Once you've changed your meter, you might find you start saving money from the off, and there's nothing stopping you from switching suppliers to another standard tariff.

I'm in debt to my supplier, can I still switch?

As the above states, if you're on a prepayment meter you can still switch with debt up to £500. You can also switch if you're on a standard meter and have owed the money for less than 28 days, your old supplier will just add the debt to your final bill. If you've owed the money for more than 28 days, you need to pay the money back in full before switching. If you're in unmanageable debt to your supplier, make sure to contact them and explain the situation, your supplier can set up a repayment plan so you can pay back your energy debt gradually. Contact your local Citizen's Advice (03454 04 05 06) for more assistance on debt management.

Switching definitions

Tariff essentially means what deal you are signing up for, there are four main types:

'Fixed' or 'capped': If you're looking for the cheapest deal one of these may be for you. With a fixed tariff, the price of energy is fixed for the duration of a contract, meaning it won't change. With a capped tariff, the price you pay for energy won't go over a set limit, but it may go down.



● 'Standard' or 'variable': Might be the best if you want a more flexible tariff– you won't be tied into a contract with an end date, and there won't be a charge to switch to a different supplier. 'Time of use' (E.g. Economy 7): Time of user tariffs have an on-peak and an off-peak rate for electricity. For Economy 7, the off-peak period normally falls between the hours of 10 pm and 8:30 am. The on-peak rate is much higher than other tariffs so you should only consider an Economy 7 tariff if you plan to use at least 55% of your electricity at night.

● 'Green': Alternatively, if you want an environmentally-friendly tariff, you might want to choose 'green'. They're not usually the cheapest tariffs, but they're a good option if you want to reduce the environmental impact of your energy use. The energy supplier matches some or all the energy you by purchasing renewable energy such as wind or hydroelectric.

Unit Rate

● This is the price you'll pay per unit (kilowatt-hour, kWh) of energy. One kWh of gas is approximately equivalent to leaving a small gas hob on for an hour. One kWh of electricity is equivalent to running a washing machine for an hour. If you're a household that uses a lot of energy, you probably want to choose a tariff with a low unit rate.

Standing Charge

● The Standing Charge is a fixed amount that you are charged each day, regardless of how much gas or electricity you use. If your household is a low energy user then a higher unit rate and lower standing charge is likely more appropriate for your household.