Switching Myths Debunked

Switching energy provider regularly is a sure-fire way to make sure you're getting the best deal on your household gas and electricity. However, a lot of us don't switch as regularly as we should, and some haven't ever switched! This is because people wrongly assume that switching energy providers is a lot harder than it actually is, and less than an hour's work online or on the phone can really save you a lot of money in the long run. This list of debunks should hopefully convince you that being an active, engaged customer in the energy market is almost guaranteed to save you money.

For more information on the switching process, see our guide to ensuring a smooth switch.

MYTH: I've been with my supplier ages, surely my loyalty means they put me on the best deal

While loyalty is rewarded in other markets, in the energy market almost the opposite is true! The best deals are normally exclusively for new customers which means that if you want the best deal you need to actively engage in the market at least every two years. However, if you switch once and never want to switch again, once your fixed tariff rate ends your energy supplier is required to put you on to their cheapest standard tariff, but remember that isn't likely to be the best tariff that new customers would get.

MYTH: Prices and suppliers are all the same, I'd only save a few pounds if I switch and it's not worth the hassle

This is arguably the worst myth on the list as switching energy providers can really lead to some dramatic savings. The Department of Business, Energy, and Industrial Strategy states that if you haven't switched in the last 5 years, then you are likely to save an average of £300 from switching! Even if you don't want to switch suppliers, switching from the standard tariff you're currently on to one of their available fixed-rate tariffs can still save over £100. If you're not already paying by direct debit switching to that payment method can help (so can paperless bills) but it's not mandatory if you'd rather keep paying the way you do currently.

MYTH: My gas or electricity will be cut off. See also- they'll need to dig up the road to lay new pipes

A surprisingly common myth, despite being wildly inaccurate. At no point will your energy be turned off as you switch suppliers. You will still get the same supply of gas and/or electricity that you receive at the moment, the only things that will change are the name on the bill and the amount of money you have to spend on other important things.

MYTH: I'll end up being charged twice while the energy companies do the handover

Being charged twice is a common concern among energy shoppers, although it very rarely happens. When you decide to switch, if you are in debit to your supplier, you will need to pay the remaining money you owe and it's advisable to do it promptly. Alternatively, if you are in credit with your supplier they will send you a cheque for the total amount. To ensure you're only charged for what you use you must be aware of your 'go live' date which is agreed upon by your previous and new energy supplier. Almost all suppliers only start billing you from this date, some smaller independent suppliers may charge you in advance, and some tariffs are advanced pay, however, if this applies to you, costs will be calculated to make sure you don't overpay. Further, if you pay by direct debit, make sure to cancel this with the bank after your final payment has gone out.

MYTH: You can only switch by going online and I don't have access to the internet

While admittedly it might be slightly easier to go to an online comparison website and work through the process from there, a lot of switching organisations have Freephone numbers which you can call to get a professional to help you all the way through, from comparison to switching. See the list at the bottom of this article of Ogem-approved comparison organisations.

MYTH: I know I should do it, but it's just too complicated and takes too long.

This is probably the most common concern amongst those who have never switched, and given energy suppliers' quite complex billing systems, it's not an overly surprising misunderstanding. However, all you need to do an energy comparison is a recent energy bill and your postcode. The comparison website or Helpline can then help you find the best deal for you in your local area and provide you with a free and easy-to-use switching service. They also give detailed information on each tariff, including gas and electricity unit prices and any discounts that are available.

Once you've arranged the switch, your new supplier has to give you a fourteen-day cooling-off period, during this time you can cancel the contract if you decide to stick with your supplier or change to another one without incurring any charge. Once the two weeks are up, your supplier has to change you within three working days after any raised objections have been resolved and all relevant information received. So while in 2014 it took 5 weeks to switch, it now only takes 17 days on average.

MYTH: I'm on a prepayment meter and/or in debt to my supplier which means I can't switch

If you're struggling to pay your bills and are regularly in debt to your energy supplier, that's even more reason to switch to a cheaper deal. The same goes for prepayment meters which are often the most expensive method for paying for energy. If you've owed a debt for 28 days or less, and the debt amount is less than £500 per fuel, you can still switch suppliers and the money you owe will be added to your final bill from your old supplier. If you're on a prepayment meter you'll need to ask the new supplier to agree to transfer your debt along with your supply (this is called the 'Debt Assignment Protocol'). If your current supplier tries to block your switching due to debt less than this, you can make a formal complaint to your energy supplier, Citizens Advice, and even the Energy Ombudsman if necessary. If you're in too much energy debt to switch, you should contact your energy supplier as soon as you can because, believe it or not, they can really help with debt-related matters. Your supplier must also give you information on how to avoid getting into debt, how you can pay back your debt, and a list of the money you currently owe. Further, they can set up a repayment plan so you can pay back your energy debt gradually. Although they are not required by law to offer you a way of repaying your debts that takes your financial situation into account, they are likely to. Repayment plans space your energy payments out over time so you don't have to pay large lump sums all at once. They can be weekly, fortnightly, or monthly, and will include a portion of your current use and a portion of your debt. Ofgem Accredited 'Price Comparison' Energy Switching Sites. The below companies are accredited through the Ofgem Confidence Code and therefore act independently of suppliers, so you can be sure that when you are presented with options and prices, they have been calculated and are displayed in a fair and unbiased way.

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energyhelpline.com 0800 074 0745
Energylinx 0800 849 7077
MoneySupermarket.com 0800 177 7087
myutilitygenius.co.uk 0203 468 0461
SimplySwitch 0800 011 1395
switchgasandelectric.com 03333 700 600
TheEnergyShop.com 0845 330 7247
UKPower.co.uk 0800 860 6866
Unravelit 033 3344 0031
uSwitch.com 0800 6888 557
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