

# Managing your energy bills to support your health



Older Australians shouldn't have to worry about the choice between having comfortable temperatures at home and high energy bills.

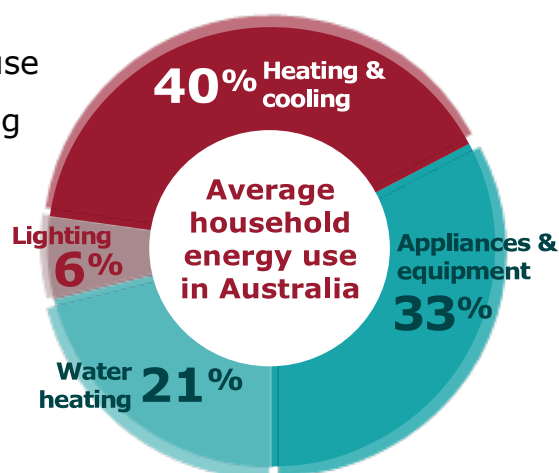
**Some older Australians are rationing their energy use, due to rising power prices, and are putting their health at risk.**

A comfortable home temperature is important to a person's health and wellbeing, particularly older Australians who spend more time at home.

Suitable temperatures in the home reduce illness from hot and cold extremes, as well as symptoms of respiratory and heart diseases, allergies, arthritis and rheumatism.

The good news is that there are many simple actions that older Australians can take to improve the energy efficiency of the home and reduce energy bills.

This diagram shows you the average energy use within an Australian home. Heating and cooling use the most energy at 40%. Of course, if you live in a hotter or colder climate than average, spend a lot of time at home, and/or have lots of people living in your home, you might use more.



The following actions can help you save money on energy. Just as important, they should make sure your health doesn't suffer.

## Simple actions to make your home energy efficient

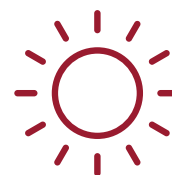
### Efficient heating and cooling

- 💡 Close the doors to rooms you are not using.
- 💡 Use draught stoppers (door snakes) or rolled up towels to stop air leaks under doors.
- 💡 Use long, thick curtains to keep the heat out or the heat in, depending on the temperature outside. Heavy sheets can work as temporary curtains.
- 💡 Stop the draughts around doors or windows by using foam weather seals around the frames. You can get these cheaply from your hardware store.
- 💡 If your air conditioner has adjustable louvres, adjust them towards the ceiling when cooling, and towards the floor when heating (as cool air falls and hot air rises).



### IN SUMMER

- 💡 Use fans instead of an air conditioner whenever you can. A fan costs around 2 cents per hour to run. You could save between \$40 and \$200 a year. Set your air conditioner or cooler between 24°C and 26°C and if there is an 'Economy Mode' you should use it. If you aren't sure, ask a family member or neighbour to help. Each degree warmer on the thermostat can save you 5-10%.
- 💡 If you don't have an air conditioner, try cool showers or use damp towels and sit in front of a fan with a damp towel around your neck to stay cool. Stay hydrated and if you are feeling uncomfortable at home, then call a friend or neighbour to share their air conditioning or spend time at a library or shopping centre that has cooling.



### IN WINTER

- 💡 In winter, set your heating between 18°C and 20°C. For every degree you increase heating you increase energy use between 5% and 10%.
- 💡 Close windows and curtains at night to keep the daytime warmth in.



## SAVING ALL YEAR ROUND

💡 Have insulation installed in your roof or ask your landlord to. Effective ceiling insulation can save you up to 20% on your cooling and heating costs.



💡 Don't leave the airconditioner or heater on all night. Use before you go to bed and when you wake up.

💡 Check your hot water system for any visible leaks.

## Manage the costs of your appliances and equipment

### In your kitchen

Almost 40% of energy use is from appliances and equipment in the kitchen.

💡 Set your fridge to 4 or 5°C and your freezer to -15°C.

Every degree cooler will use 5% more energy. Check the seals are working properly it may be leaking cold air and costing you money.



💡 If you have a second fridge get rid of it or turn it off when not in use.

💡 Only fill your kettle with the amount of water you need boiled.

💡 Cook with a microwave instead of the oven where possible. Thaw frozen food in the fridge.

### Entertainment

💡 Don't leave your TV or radio on when not in use. Some TVs can set a timer to go into stand-by mode – turn them off at the wall or ask a friend or neighbour to help if needed.



💡 Once your phone battery is full take it off the charger.

💡 Turn off your computer when you are not using it.

### In the laundry

💡 Don't overload your washing machine - it will cost more to run.

💡 Wash your clothes in cold water. It's just as effective as using heated water.



- 💡 Instead of using a clothes dryer, hang washing outside when possible or use a clothes rack. Clothes on hangers can dry on doorknobs.
- 💡 If you do use a clothes dryer, clean the lint filter regularly to make it more energy efficient, and don't overload it.

### In the bathroom

More than half of your hot water costs are likely to be in the bathroom.

- 💡 Take shorter showers and save money. Put an egg timer in the shower.
- 💡 Install a water efficient showerhead to save on energy and water. It will pay for itself in no time.



### Be bright about your lights

- 💡 Turn lights off when you are not in the room and consider sensor lights for outside.
- 💡 Use lamps instead of downlights when you can.
- 💡 Replace halogen light bulbs with LEDs - they use about 75% less energy than halogen light bulbs and last 5-10 times longer.



### **Concessions and help with paying your energy bill**

If you are a senior or pensioner, several state and territory governments offer rebates or concessions to help with paying your bills. You can save hundreds of dollars a year so call your energy company to find out more.

Some energy companies also offer special discounts to seniors' card holders. Call them to make sure you are getting the best deal. If you aren't happy then ask your friends for recommendations and shop around. It doesn't always payoff to be a loyal customer in a competitive energy market.

## Get a better energy deal

**Contact your energy company to make sure you are on the best deal. You could save hundreds of dollars a year.**

Before you call it would help to find your latest bill and check:

- Energy used in the last quarter (check the daily kWh figure for electricity usage and GJ figure for gas consumption). Also check if the cost per kWh/GJ has increased.
- See how the bill compares with the same time last year so you know if your costs are going up.



### Questions to ask your energy company:

- Can you give me a better deal?
- How do I know that my energy plan suits my household usage?
- Am I being charged different rates for using energy at different times of the day? (ask them to explain the times and where this is on the bill)
- How can I lower my energy bills?
- Can I make regular, but lower, payments more frequently?
- Am I eligible for any government concessions?
- Am I paying any extra fees for late payments or special meter readings? And what would my exit fee be?



### Shop around

If you aren't happy with your energy plan and you live in the ACT, NSW, QLD, SA and TAS you can compare electricity and gas offers at [energymadeeasy.gov.au](http://energymadeeasy.gov.au) or call **1300 585 165**. In VIC use [compare.energy.vic.gov.au](http://compare.energy.vic.gov.au) or call **136 186**. In NSW you can also use [energyswitch.service.nsw.gov.au](http://energyswitch.service.nsw.gov.au) or call **137 788**. *Note: Commercial comparison websites take commissions and may not show you all options.*

### If you are having problems paying your bill, ask for help!

Ring your energy company for help and a payment plan. Don't wait until you are paying late fees, at risk of disconnection or rationing your energy and impacting your health. **By law they must offer you a plan to pay off your bills in a way you can afford.** If you are concerned with the payment plan your retailer has offered you, ask them to change it and then ask to go on their hardship program. Hardship programs provide a much greater level of support and protection than payment plans.

## When speaking to your energy company say:

- 💡 "I'm having trouble paying my bill. What can you do to help?"
- 💡 "I can't pay what you're asking me to. Are you able to put me on your hardship program?"

*NOTE: Energy companies cannot make you see a financial counsellor before you can access their hardship program.*

If the problem is still not fixed, you can contact your state or territory Energy Ombudsman's office and ask them to help.

ACT Civil and Administrative Tribunal	02 6207 1740
Energy and Water Ombudsman NSW	1800 246 545
Office of the Ombudsman NT	08 8999 1818
Energy and Water Ombudsman QLD	1800 662 837
Energy and Water Ombudsman SA	1800 665 565
Energy Ombudsman TAS	1800 001 170
Energy and Water Ombudsman VIC	1800 500 509
Energy and Water Ombudsman WA	1800 754 004



## National Debt Helpline and Financial Counselling

If you need more help to manage energy bill stress and/or other debts, call the National Debt Hotline on **1800 007 007**, 9:30am to 4pm, Monday to Friday. This is a free and confidential service by an independent financial counsellor. Tens of thousands of Australians use this service every year.

## CentrePay

If you receive a Centrelink payment, you can pay your energy bill directly by setting up a CentrePay arrangement with your energy company. This is a great way to manage your bills and can be set up by Centrelink or your energy company. Give them a call or go to your nearest Service Centre.



**centrelink**

## Life Support Equipment

If a person relies on life support equipment, the energy company needs to be told as soon as possible. They will send a form that has to be filled out with a doctor. This form tells the company that someone at the home needs life support equipment and they must not disconnect the power for any reason.