

MN 68: Advice column - Energy Bills.

Q: My gas and electricity bills were really high last winter and I'm worried about how I'm going to afford to pay the bills again this winter. Is there any help I can get to save both money and energy?

A: There are a number of ways you might be able to make savings on your fuel bills. First of all talk to your current energy supplier about ways to save money. If you don't already pay by Direct Debit switching to this method can save you money. You also may be eligible for what's called a 'social tariff' which offers cheaper prices to low-income or vulnerable customers, such as older people, or people with long-term ill health.

Another way to reduce costs might be to change your fuel supplier. Shop around for the best deal and compare. Ask about different tariffs and ways to pay.

You may be able to take advantage of one of the various energy efficiency schemes and grants that are available. For example you might qualify for a free grant to insulate your loft or wall cavity or be eligible for the Warm Front scheme. If you are over 60 you could be entitled to Winter Fuel payments. If you are if you are under 60 but on a low income you may be entitled to Cold Weather payments. The Home Heat Helpline: 0800 33 66 99 or www.homeheathelpline.org.uk offers free information and advice.

Finally, you may not realise that you are entitled to benefits which could improve your income. Citizens Advice can give you a benefits check and also operates a scheme called Energy Best Deal which helps people find the right energy tariff and deal for them. www.adviceguide.org.uk