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Introduction

In April 2022, the price cap that exists to limit how much consumers pay for the cost of a unit of energy was increased.

Since the increase, approximately 22 million people across Great Britain who are on a standard variable tariff (SVT) have seen their average household energy bill rise by up to 54%, equivalent to approximately £700 for bill payers. With another price cap increase due in October 2022, Ofgem has warned that households across the UK could see bills of up to £2,800 or more. This would reflect a 119% increase for households who had an average energy spend of £1,277 at the start of the year.

Despite measures such as the Energy Bill Support Scheme, the Warm Homes Discount and VAT relief on energy saving materials, the continued rise in energy prices, food and fuel costs mean Britain is still navigating a cost of living crisis. As the UK experiences record breaking summer temperatures - coupled with the summer holidays - new pressures such as keeping homes cool and families entertained also emerge.

But spurred on by the challenges of the rising cost of living, some British households have started to shift the way they manage their energy use, leading to positive changes to their energy bills and household budgets.
Research was conducted among 5,000 British adults by Smart Energy GB, the not-for-profit organisation that informs Britain about the benefits of smart meters.

It shows that despite entering the warmer months, people across Britain have been taking action to reduce their energy use since the price cap came into effect; in an effort to instil positive habits that will help them when bills start to rise again later this year. In fact, for over a quarter (28%) of Brits, this is the first summer that they’ve taken proactive steps to better manage their energy use.

It’s no surprise then, that bill payers admit they think about their energy use at least twice a day, whereas previously, as many as 12.3 million Brits said it wasn’t considered at all during the sunny season.

Despite these steps, many are calling for more guidance when it comes to managing energy use. 28% of Brits say they want energy saving tips they haven’t heard before, with one in five specifically looking for advice relating to energy use over the summer.

Smart Energy GB, together with Dom Littlewood, Helen Skelton and MoneyMagpie have co-authored the Super Smart Energy Savers Report. Dom Littlewood also stars in Smart Energy GB’s new online mini-series, What’s Watt, which tracks three families across Great Britain as they take steps to better manage energy use and take control of their household budgets.

The experiences of each family, alongside actionable advice from the panel can be found in the following pages of this report.
Meet the Super Smart Energy Savers panel

Helen Skelton
Helen is best known for her presenting roles on shows including Blue Peter, Countryfile and Watchdog, where she has become a trusted voice on consumer issues.

Dom Littlewood
Dom is a TV presenter and consumer advocate best known for his roles presenting programmes such as Cowboy Builders, Fake Britain and Don’t Get Done, Get Dom.

Victoria Bacon, Smart Energy GB
Victoria is a director at Smart Energy GB, the not-for-profit campaign helping everyone in Britain to understand the importance of smart meters and their benefits.

Vicky Parry, MoneyMagpie
Vicky is an award-winning writer for the UK’s leading self-help money site, MoneyMagpie. As a solutions journalist focusing on the response to social issues, she is an experienced campaigner for social change.
Research findings

Positive steps

Many households see a natural reduction in energy use over the summer months. However, although we rely less on heating and lighting, the school holidays mean children spend more time at home. This increases our reliance on electricity to power entertainment devices and the fans we use to keep cool, while the amount of gas or electricity we use to cook also rises.

The research in this report explores how our habits change over the summer months and reveals some of the most common ways we try to save energy.

Hot habits

As the weather gets warmer, the average Brit spends more time at home (17%) than any other time of year, with one in 10 (13%) increasing the time they spend working from home. Despite 38% spending more of this time outside than usual, when indoors over a quarter (28%) use fans more often to keep cool, with as many as 4.7 million households leaving fans on all night. A further 12% use portable air conditioning units only during the summer months.

But despite enjoying the great outdoors, 45% notice an impact on their energy bills from increased use of children’s entertainment devices such as games consoles, mobile phones and tablets.

One in five (19%) feel less in control of their overall spending during the summer with energy costs and expenditure on social occasions (29%) playing a part.
Reducing usage

Over a quarter (28%) of Brits have taken action to reduce their energy use for the first time this summer, after typically paying less attention to their bills during the warmer months.

The most common energy saving practices employed by Brits include:

- Turning the lights off more regularly: 49%
- Boiling the kettle with only the water I need: 43%
- Turning devices off at the socket: 39%
- Leaving the heating off completely: 39%
- Hanging washing out to dry outside instead of using a dryer: 38%
- Unplugging phone chargers and turning them off at the mains when not in use: 37%
- Minimising use of electrical appliances: 35%
- Washing clothes on a cooler temperature: 34%
- Reducing use of heating: 31%
- Letting hair dry naturally instead of using a hairdryer: 26%

Smarter bills

Those who have adjusted their energy habits say they’ve reduced their bills by an average of £22.09 per month, which could save almost £270 over the course of a year10.

Smart meters playing a role

Almost half (48%) of households now have a smart meter installed, allowing them to receive accurate, rather than estimated, bills and monitor what energy is being used in near-real time. A further 10% of households plan to have a smart meter installed by December 2022.
32% of smart meter users say that having one installed has helped them to feel much more in control of their energy use and household budgets.

Using a smart meter’s in-home display to monitor energy use in near-real time and in pounds and pence has shown to be a motivating factor when making small changes to household energy habits. And when looking at who was most likely to see a reduction in bills – the number of those with smart meters was 23% higher than those without.

They were likely to see a larger reduction in their bills too. Those with smart meters reported seeing their energy bills decrease by £23.50, compared to just £15 for those without smart meters.

Households with a smart meter saw their bills reduce by a further £8.50 on average, as a result of small changes to their energy habits.
Whilst Brits are taking many positive steps to reduce energy use and regain control of their household budgets, a fifth (21%) still feel their summer energy bills are never as low as they expect and there’s still a clear need for more actionable advice specifically tailored to the summer months.

Although the summer can provide some respite, with the cost of living crisis set to continue, it’s vital that households understand which energy habits are having the biggest impact on their bills.

Whilst there may be many elements of the cost of living situation that we can’t control, there are some simple, actionable steps that can be taken to help Brits manage energy use and feel a bit more in control of their households budgets.

If you’re worried about paying your energy bills, additional help and support is available via energy suppliers, or contacting organisations such as Citizens Advice Bureau, National Energy Action, and Energy Saving Trust which have lots of useful information on getting financial help and support and advice on energy efficiency.
Install an energy-efficient shower head - around one fifth of the average household’s heating bills are spent on heating water\(^1\), so an energy-efficient shower head can help to reduce the amount of water each shower uses and the amount of energy it requires.

Close your blinds - closing your blinds or curtains on hot summer days blocks the sunlight to keep your home cooler and reduce your energy use. Southern and western-facing walls take the most of the sun’s heat, so invest in good curtains or blinds on these parts of the house, and keep them closed to insulate the heat.

Get the most out of your fans - choosing the right fan is key to staying cool and in control of your energy bills. Making sure any fans or cooling equipment you have around the house are as energy efficient as possible will reduce your consumption of electricity. The way you use your fan is important too: for example, some have timers that enable you to save energy when you’re asleep; or placing a bowl of ice in front of your fan will lower the temperature of the air circulating in the room and cool you down quicker.

Switch to a summer routine - many people use their tumble-dryers regularly over the winter, but using a tumble-dryer three times a week could cost approximately £223 a year\(^2\), so think about drying washing outside if you’re able to in the summer. It will dry much quicker and cost less than using a tumble-dryer.

“Summer is traditionally a time that energy use and bills are pushed to the back of our minds, but the increase in energy prices this year has changed that.”

- Victoria Bacon, Smart Energy GB
A recipe for reducing bills

**Keep an eye on refrigerator seals** - the seals around a refrigerator are the barrier between warm air outside and cool air inside. Any break in this seal will mean warm air gets into the refrigerator, so it’ll have to work harder to maintain the set temperature. Check your seals and replace them if you notice any cracks or splits. If you’re looking to buy a new fridge, look for one with a higher energy efficiency rating.

**Batch cook** - microwaves generally use less energy than ovens or hobs. Instead of cooking from scratch every night, cook in one go and then reheat meals throughout the week. Cold meals that don’t require cooking and using a barbeque more often on warm summer days can also help to reduce energy use.

**Cover your pots and pans** - by using lids on pots and pans, the water will boil faster and less energy will be used to heat the food.

**Defrost your freezer** - the more that ice builds up, the more energy a freezer needs to use to maintain its temperature. This can be significant as fridges and freezers account for 13% of the average family’s energy bills[1].

**Fridges and freezers account for 12% of the average family’s energy bills.**
Taking control with a smart meter

Get a smart meter - nearly half of all energy meters across Great Britain are smart meters, with 28.8 million installed in homes and microbusinesses so far. Amid rising energy prices, smart meters give people increased visibility over their energy spend and can help them regain control over their finances. They also enable those who use prepay mode to clearly see when they are close to using their emergency credit, helping them to avoid a potentially difficult situation with no energy in their home.

A smart meter’s in-home display also enables people to track the impact of implementing energy saving methods in near-real time, in pounds and pence.

There’s a whole range of benefits including:

Greater accuracy - rather than providing estimated energy bills, smart meters provide accurate costs based on your actual energy usage. Knowing how much an energy bill is before it arrives can be a helpful tool as people look to manage household budgets.

Available at no extra cost - gas and electricity suppliers are responsible for providing and fitting smart meters for everyone in Britain at no extra cost. All people need to do is contact their energy supplier directly to find out more about getting one and arrange an installation.

Increased control - smart meters come with an in-home display that shows exactly how much energy is being used in near-real time in pounds and pence. By knowing how much energy is being used and money spent, this enables customers to have more control and encourages small, positive changes to reduce energy use and keep bills down.
Handy summer money saving tips from MoneyMagpie

Living frugally doesn’t mean missing out. It’s about making sensible, informed spending choices to minimise unnecessary costs and save money where possible.

**Free days out** - the summer months can feel long and expensive, especially for families. Whatever your budget, a free day out can keep all ages entertained, as well as creating precious memories, without the added worry of paying for it all. For families this could include woodlands and forests, paddling pools or skate parks. For adults - why not explore your local area by foot or jump on a bike if you have one.

**Pack a picnic** - even a trip to the beach or a park can find you scrabbling around for change to cover food and drinks. Think ahead and pack a picnic. You can still pick your favourite foods from the shops but it will be significantly cheaper than finding shops or cafes nearby attractions.

**Free outdoor spaces** - it can be very tempting to head to a pub garden when the weather is nice, but any public outdoor space, such as parks can be sociable in the summer. Take a friend and enjoy a drink, without paying pub prices.

**Stay active for less** - many local authorities across Britain have installed gym equipment in parks that can be used free of charge. Exercise is good for physical and mental health, and this way it comes at no cost at all.

**Have a savings goal** - if you have anything you want to do or buy, whether it’s short or long term, consider how you finance it. Make sure goals are specific, realistic and that you have a time frame to achieve them.

**Grab yourself freebies** - if there are any items you want to buy, then sites such as Gumtree or Freecycle have adverts for free things in your area. It could well be that someone nearby wants to get rid of a garden table that just happens to be perfect for your needs.

**Grow some veg** - even with just a small balcony or windowsill you can grow herbs or small fruit and vegetables. It feels like an achievement, and you can save money by not buying them from a shop on a regular basis.

**House swapping holidays** - if you want to get away but are looking to reduce costs, try a house swapping holiday. It’s a much cheaper option, particularly for families, as you only have to pay for your travel and food while you’re away.

“Our summer money saving tips aim to show Brits that being frugal doesn’t mean missing out and there are a number of ways to help reduce overall household costs alongside making positive changes to energy habits to reduce energy bills.”

- Vicky Parry, MoneyMagpie
What’s Watt with Dom Littlewood

To help Brits better manage energy use and take control of their household budgets, Dom Littlewood and Smart Energy GB launched a new online mini-series tracking three families across Great Britain as they take steps to reduce their energy use. What’s Watt saw the Matheson family in Edinburgh, the Yabantu family in Burnley and the Litjerwood family in Cardiff follow advice to reduce their bills and gain more control over their finances.

In just one month since Dom’s visit, by following the tips, each family saw a reduction in their energy use and household bills. The Mathesons managed to cut expenditure by £75 per month, the Lijertwoods by £18.90 and Yabantus by £45 a month.
Jane (50) and John (40) have two children (12 & 18). They’ve recently started living together as a family and have seen their energy bills increase by more than three times the price they were paying when they lived separately.

On his visit to the household, Dom identified a number of practical fixes to help them reduce their energy bills this summer, and to help set good habits before the price cap increases again in October 2022.

Dom recommended using heavy-lined curtains and blinds to help keep out any draughts on windows and doors, also advising that heat could be escaping through open doors and windows, which could considerably increase energy bills.
Whilst the Mathesons have a smart meter installed, they weren’t taking advantage of their in-home display, rarely using it to monitor their energy use in near-real time in pounds and pence. Following Dom’s visit, Jane and John have managed to reduce their bills from around £7-8 per day to under £5.

£8—£5

Jane said, “Since Dom’s visits we’ve been shutting doors more often, turning lights off, turning our washing machine down to 30 and only washing full loads. The tumble dryer thinks it has been made redundant, we have turned our thermostat down, ordered new insulating curtains and made enquiries about loft insulation.”

By making these small changes, Jane and John are hoping to instil positive habits in their children, so they can continue to reduce their energy usage and spending into the winter months.
Danielle Yabantu (35) and Mwande Mabaso (45) have four young children. Like many families, they’ve seen their bills rise since the energy price cap increased in April 2022. With Danielle’s father now set to move in with them, they expect their bills to rise even further.

Danielle identified that their biggest energy use in the household was their washing machine and tumble dryer, with Dom recommending shorter and colder washes to combat this. Due to the size of the family, constantly cooking during the week was also a concern for the couple. Dom recommended a number of tips including batch cooking, only boiling the water needed in the kettle each time and checking the efficiency of fridge seals to avoid warm air entering and causing the fridge to have to work harder to stay cool – all saving both money and time.
Dom also highlighted the importance of having a smart meter installed which sends meter readings directly to your energy supplier at least once a month and means you receive accurate bills.

Following his visit, the family has taken the tips on board and are already seeing results. They have implemented shorter, colder washes and have taken to drying clothes on the line outside (weather permitting). They’ve also purchased draught excluders for their doors and have pulled their sofas away from their radiators to improve circulation when they decide to put the heating on.

**reduced by**

£40-£50

They have estimated that this could reduce their bills by £40-50 each month and are looking to make even more changes to reduce their energy usage over the summer months, including getting a smart meter installed, closing their living room fireplace off so no heat is lost and switching to an energy-efficient shower head.
Charlene and Dominic have two young children (6 & 8) and have also seen their energy bills rise since the price cap increased in April 2022. The couple have both been forced to take on second jobs to cover the increasing costs.

Since moving into their house last year, Charlene and Dominic have made a conscious effort to better understand where their money is being spent. To help with this, they had a smart meter installed with the aim of using its IHD to monitor their household’s energy consumption.
Through the inspection of the property, Dom saw that there were some appliances that were switched on at the wall and on standby, including hair straighteners. Simply unplugging devices and appliances at the wall can considerably reduce the energy bills of a household and over a few months this change can add up.

Dom also identified that both of their children slept with a lamp on and whilst they used energy efficient light bulbs, Dom recommended putting these on a timer, so they turn off when the children are asleep.

During his visit, Dom also recommended moving the family’s smart meter’s IHD to somewhere more visible, so it’s easier to monitor their energy use.

Charlene said, “We’ve been making a lot of changes around the home to try and reduce our energy bills. We considered ourselves to be on top of it but speaking to Dom has shown us ways to save energy we wouldn’t have considered otherwise. We’d already got our smart meter and it’s been useful to have bills automatically sent to our energy supplier, while having an idea of how much energy we’re using each day by monitoring our IHD.”

“We estimate that the tips Dom has given us will definitely have an impact on our energy bills and have already seen a decrease on our smart meter’s IHD of 20%.”
Check eligibility for grants or schemes to help afford energy bills - If you are struggling to pay your bills, you might be able to get help from certain schemes or grants offered by the government or energy suppliers. Some example schemes include:

**Energy Bills Rebate** - all domestic energy customers in Great Britain will receive a £400 grant to help with the cost of their energy bills through the Energy Bill Support Scheme. This will appear as a credit from energy suppliers from October 2022 onwards and will not need to be repaid.

**Council Tax Rebate** - households liable for Council Tax in Bands A-D in England will also receive a £150 Council Tax Rebate to help with the rising cost of bills.

**Warm Homes Discount Scheme** - if you’re on a low income or are getting the Guarantee Credit element of the Pension Credit, you may be able to get £140 off your electricity bill or a £140 voucher for your prepayment meter. Head to GOV.UK to find out more.

**Winter Fuel Payments** - providing payments of £200 for households with someone of State Pension Age, or £300 for Households with someone aged 80 or over, a significant £2bn per year contribution to winter fuel bills.

**VAT relief on energy saving materials** - ensuring that households installing energy saving materials such as thermal insulation or solar panels pay 0% VAT for the next five years, helping to improve energy efficiency and keep heating bills down.

**Energy debt grants** - if you’re in debt to your energy supplier, you may be eligible for a grant to help pay it off. Various suppliers offer grants - just visit your supplier’s website to apply. If you can’t get a grant from your supplier, you may be eligible for a grant from the British Gas Energy Trust, which is available to anyone, even if they aren’t your energy supplier.

**Priority Services Register** - those who are of state pension age, disabled, sick or considered ‘vulnerable’ by their energy network can sign up to the Priority Services Register to receive extra support from their energy supplier.

**Local energy grants** - grants or schemes run by your local council may be available to you, just head to GOV.UK to check to check if you’re eligible.
References

Unless stated otherwise, stats quoted are from research of 5,000 nationally representative UK adults and was carried out by OnePoll between 29th June and 5th July 2022.

1. According to Ofgem, approximately 22 million people across Great Britain on a standard variable tariff have seen their average household energy bill rise by 54%.

2. According to a House of Commons Research Briefing the April 2022 price cap increase is equivalent to £700 for ‘typical’ levels of dual fuel consumption paid by direct debit.

3. According to Ofgem the second energy price cap increase planned for October 2022 could see bills rise to up to £2,800 for households across the UK.

4. The Government is providing a £15 billion energy bill rebate package as part of the Energy Bill Support Scheme, worth up to £550 each for around 28 million households. All domestic energy customers in Great Britain will receive a £400 grant to help with the cost of their energy bills through the Energy Bill Support Scheme.

5. 2.2 million low-income households can receive a £140 rebate on their energy bills through the Warm Homes Discount. From 2022, proposed changes will see the scheme be worth £475 million a year with nearly 3 million households receiving a £150 rebate.

6. The Government has provided 0% VAT on households installing energy saving materials including thermal insulation or solar panels for the next five years, the scheme is focused on helping to improve energy efficiency and keep heating bills down.

7. According to the Met Office, the UK could expect record breaking summer temperatures during July and August 2022.

8. Chapter One of the Super Smart Energy Savers Report commissioned by Smart Energy GB explored the feelings, attitudes, and behaviours of 5,000 British adults ahead of the energy price cap increase in April 2022.

9. There are 28.1 million households in the UK (Office for National Statistics). 17% of people surveyed claimed to leave cooling fans on overnight. 17% of 28,100,000 = 4,100,000.

10. Saving is £22.09 per month. £22.09 x 12 = £265.08 annually.

11. According to Scottish Water Around 1/5 of the average household’s heating bill is spent on heating water in the household.

12. Uswitch.com suggested that tumble dryers are one of the most energy-intensive devices in the home, with energy expert Justina Miltienyte quoting the cost from its research.

13. Energy Saving Trust outlines that fridges and freezers account for around 13% of the average household’s energy bill due to the fact that these appliances need to stay on all the time, as such they are continually drawing power to maintain a constant temperature.

14. According to Gov.uk, at the end of March 2022, there were 28.8 million smart and advanced meters in Great Britain in homes and small businesses.