



High bills

There are a number of possible causes of high bills – you might have used more energy, or there might be some problems with your bill.

Have you used more energy?

Check these **six** possible causes of higher than usual energy consumption:

1. Unusual or extreme weather

When the weather is much colder or hotter than usual, you may use more energy for heating or cooling. For example, running a heater or air conditioner throughout the day and overnight can contribute to a high bill.

2. More people at home

Extra people in the house can mean you use more electricity or gas. A new baby in the house can add to your energy bills, as often this means more people are at home during the day, they are awake for longer and there is more washing.

3. Appliances with timers or standby options

You may have installed some appliances which run on timers or thermostat controls, eg heater, air-conditioner, swimming pool filter, pump, bar fridge. These items continue to use energy if you leave them on when you are not using them.

Some household appliances also have a standby option which allows you to turn them on and off by remote control, eg TV, DVD, stereo. Appliances on standby are not off and will continue to use energy.

4. Faulty appliances or hot water supply

Damaged or old appliances and hot water supplies can cause a significant increase in energy use. When appliances, eg refrigerators, get older they may use more electricity. If you are renting, contact your landlord or property manager immediately to report faulty appliances or leaking hot water.

If you have gas, there may be a gas leak on your side of the meter. If so, you have to pay for the gas that is leaking. Call your retailer for advice as soon as possible – emergency numbers for gas issues are on your bill and in the front of the phone book. Get the problem fixed by a gasfitter, or if you are renting, contact your landlord or property manager as soon as possible.

5. Adding or upgrading appliances

If you have upgraded or installed new appliances (especially large items such as a fridge or hot water supply) you may notice an increase in your bills.

Oil-filled heaters left on all the time use a lot of electricity.

6. Moving into a new home

When you move into a new home, the energy bills may be different, even if all your appliances are the same.

Read the meter when you move in and write the reading down in a diary. Check the start date on your bill to make sure it is the same as the day you moved in. If you think there is a problem, contact your energy retailer (the company that sends you the bill) as soon as possible.

Are there problems with the bill itself?

Your bill might be higher than expected because of charges, debt or extra fees. Check these three things:

1. Debts and other charges

Bills can include charges other than use of electricity, such as unpaid amounts from previous bills, fees, bonds and miscellaneous charges, including disconnection and reconnection fees. You can also receive a bill for an outstanding amount from your previous address, if you did not pay this when you moved out.

2. Back billing or delayed billing

There can be delays in billing and you might get a bill for a longer period than usual. Your previous bills may have been low because the retailer under estimated or incorrectly read your meter, or made a mistake when calculating your bills.

Retailers may estimate your energy use if they are not able to access your meter (because of a locked door or gate, dogs, or other barriers). This means it may under or over estimate the energy you have used. Once your retailer finds an error, it may send you a catch up bill.

3. Incorrect meter reading

Check the meter reading used for your bill is correct. Compare meter numbers and readings with your bill. Are the numbers the same? Are the readings similar? If not, talk to your retailer.

Ask your retailer to explain the high bill

Contact your retailer, and ask them to explain why the bill is high. If they can't explain the bill to you straight away, tell them you want to make a complaint. They will then look into it further.

If you are not satisfied with the retailer's explanation or the response to your complaint, you can call us. We can conduct an independent investigation into the accuracy of your bill. If we find a mistake, you will only have to pay for what you used. If we can't find anything wrong, we will explain why we believe the bill is correct.

Keep paying

As our investigation may take some time, you will need to pay the part of the bill that is not in dispute (what you would normally pay). This will mean you don't get into debt and will show your retailer that you are acting in good faith.

Also, retailers can take credit action (including disconnection) for the non-payment of amounts that are not in dispute.

For example, if your bill is usually \$180 and the high bill is \$250, then you should pay \$180 while your complaint is being looked in to.

Ask about payment options and hardship programmes

If you can't afford to pay your bills, ask about all your retailer's payment plans. You could also ask about prepayment meters where you pay for electricity before you use it.

Some companies have options where you pay a regular monthly amount over the course of the year. Talk to your retailer about these options.

Tips for resolving complaints

If you have any problems with your energy company, contact them first and explain your situation. If the matter is not resolved straight away, tell them you want to make a complaint.

Keep copies of letters and e-mails, and notes of calls including names, dates and times.

If the problem is not resolved within 20 working days, contact us by phone, fax, e-mail, letter or visit www.egcomplaints.co.nz to make a complaint.

Tips to save money on your bills

- Check you are on the best pricing plan for your energy use. Talk to your retailer and visit the Powerswitch website www.powerswitch.org.nz
- Check your hot water system is working properly and isn't leaking.
- Switch to 'controlled' hot water rates.

- Choose energy efficient appliances (many new appliances have an energy rating star on them). Contact the Energy Efficiency and Conservation Authority www.eeca.govt.nz or Freephone 0800 358 676
- Avoid buying an appliance just because of its price – some of the cheaper appliances are expensive to run. Check the Consumer website www.consumer.org.nz/reports/appliance-running-costs
- Make sure the thermostats on your appliances are working properly.
- Check the door seals on your fridges and freezers; if they are not sealed properly, the appliance may use more power trying to maintain the set temperature.
- Turn off spare fridges and freezers when you are not using them.
- Install wall and ceiling insulation. This will make your home warmer in winter and if you use heating, will keep heat from "escaping".
- Use curtains to insulate your home and door strips to stop draughts.
- Keep the warm air in by closing doors and windows.
- Turn off lights in rooms when you are not using them.
- Take shorter showers and use efficient shower heads.
- Use the washing machine or dryer only when you have enough for a full load.
- Use energy efficient light bulbs.
- For more information on saving energy, visit www.eeca.govt.nz
www.energywise.org.nz
www.branz.co.nz

The office of the Electricity and Gas Complaints Commissioner

The Electricity and Gas Complaints Commissioner's office provides a fair and independent way of resolving complaints about electricity or gas companies. Our service is free to complainants.

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