

Smart meters

New, useful and coming soon

'Smart meters' are modern gas and electricity meters designed to give you more information about your energy use and control over your bills.

Smart meters are useful and could help you to reduce your energy use and save money.

They come in two parts. Firstly, there's the meter itself (the round device pictured below) which records **how much** gas or electricity you use, and **when** you use it, and sends this information to your energy supplier. The second part is the 'home display unit' (pictured right) that gives you information about your energy use.

The benefits

One of the advantages of smart meters is that your energy supplier no longer needs to come to your house to take a meter reading as they'll receive this information automatically. Nor will they request that you take a meter reading yourself, or send you a bill based on an estimate. This (should) mean that you will always be charged the right amount for the gas or electricity you've used.

If you currently pay for your energy by prepayment meter then your supplier can provide you with a pay-as-you-go smart meter. This will have additional ways to make payments although you can still use a card if you prefer.

Home display units

All smart meters come with a display unit. This is a small separate device with a screen which you can put wherever you want in your home (preferably where you can see it).

The display unit will help you keep an eye on your gas and electricity usage, and keep track of what you're spending. It will also show you how much energy you are using or how



Above: a home display unit. Below left: the smart meter itself. With a smart meter, your gas and electricity bills will be based on accurate information rather than estimated readings.



much money you're spending *at any moment*, or have used and/or spent that day, week, month or year, and will display in pounds/pence or kilowatts, whichever you prefer. You will also be able to set daily, weekly and monthly 'energy budgets'. If you have a smart pay-as-you go meter, the display will show how much credit you have left and if there is any outstanding debt.

Some suppliers will provide additional ways of monitoring your use on a website or via smart phone apps.

Some things to be aware of

At the moment not every energy supplier can work with every type of smart meter, which means that if you switch between certain suppliers you may need to change meters. However, even if the new supplier can't support the 'smart' functions they will usually be able to use it in 'dumb' mode (e.g. lacking some of the functionality).

Smart meters will give energy companies large quantities of detailed information about their customers' energy use. If you have any concerns about **data protection**, you can ask to see your supplier's privacy policy or charter which should say how they will process, store and use the data they collect. You can restrict your supplier's access to your data to just reading the meter remotely when a bill is due, but if you do this, any web services or apps won't work for you.



Having a smart meter installed

Under current government legislation, energy suppliers are obliged to offer every household a gas or electricity smart meters by 2020. So if you haven't already been contacted about smart meters by your supplier, they are likely to be in touch soon. There should be no charge for changing from your old meter to a smart one.

The actual fitting should take less than an hour, depending on what kind of house you live in and where your meter is situated. Note that the gas and/or electricity will have to be switched off temporarily while the work is going on.



Your energy company should tell you the date and approximate time that an engineer will visit to fit the new meter. You can also request that the engineer calls you 30

minutes before they expect to arrive. For added security, you could ask your energy supplier for a password which the engineer must repeat when they turn up at your home. If you have any concerns, check the engineer's ID card and, if you're still in doubt, ask them to wait outside while you call your energy supplier.

Smart Energy GB (www.smartenergygb.org) is the national campaign for the smart meter rollout. It's independent of government, not an energy supplier and it doesn't fit smart meters. It's role is to make sure people understand smart meters and how to use them to get their gas and electricity under control. Gaz (right) and Lecky (left) are the public face of the campaign.



On the web: smart-meter pages of the UK's main energy suppliers

British Gas		www.britishgas.co.uk/smarter-living/control-energy/smart-meters.html
EDF		www.edfenergy.com/for-home/energy-efficiency/smart-meters
E.on		www.eonenergy.com/for-your-home/saving-energy/smart-meters
Utilita		www.utilita.co.uk/smart-meters/utilitas-smart-meters
nPower		www.npower.com/home/help-and-support/types-of-meter/smart-meters
Ovo		www.ovoenergy.com/products/smart-meters
Scottish Power		www.scottishpower.co.uk/energy-efficiency/smart-meters
SSE		www.sse.co.uk/HelpAndAdvice/SmartMeters

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