

Prepayment meters

A step-by-step guide to using them well

1. Introduction

Prepayment meters (sometimes called key or card meters or 'Pay As You Go') can help people budget their money and stop you getting in to debt. They can cost more than paying by bills or direct debit. This guide explains how to use your prepayment meter to make sure you are not paying too much for your gas and electricity.

Watch our **prepayment video guides** at www.islington.gov.uk/prepaymentmeters.

2. Moving in

When you move into a new property prepayment meters may already be installed. Make sure you are not paying for the last tenant's debt. Call the energy supplier and change the account into your name. They will send you a new key or card and clear any debt off the meter.

DO NOT buy key or cards from anyone selling them door-to-door. Not only is this illegal but it may cause problems with the meter and end up costing you **MORE** money.

3. Standing charges

Be aware that you pay a standing charge every week. This pays for the cost of maintaining the supply to your home.

- The standing charge is normally around £1.80 per fuel per week but can vary so check your meter

- Even if you do not use any gas or electricity this money will still come off your meter (usually on Wednesday)
- Make sure you top up regularly, even in the summer, to stop these charges building up as debt
- If you know you will be away for a while top up the meter before you go to cover these charges

4. Debt

It is quite common to have a prepayment meter installed to pay off debt. The debt is added to the meter and an amount is taken off your credit each week to repay it. This can be set quite high but your supplier can lower it if you are struggling to stay topped up. The lowest weekly amount you can pay is around £3.70 per meter.

5. Emergency credit

Gas and electricity meters offer emergency credit in case you run out when the shops are shut. This is usually around £5 per fuel.

Only use emergency credit when you are unable to get to a shop to top up. If you use emergency credit a lot it can cost you more and can be a difficult cycle to break.

When you are on emergency credit the standing charge and debt repayment (if any) will not come out but will add up on the meter.

Top up often to make sure this does not happen - or your credit may be 'swallowed up' when you do finally top up.



GET A BETTER DEAL. It may be worth looking in to changing companies to find a better deal. Call the Energy Advice Team for more information and help with switching on **0207 527 2121**

6. Spreading the cost

Most people use more energy in the winter than the summer. This means costs will be higher over the winter months, which can be difficult if your income is fixed. To help spread the cost try topping up more than you need in the autumn to build up credit as winter approaches.

7. Knowledge is power!

A lot of information is available on your meter and finding it is easy. Your meter shows:

- how much credit you have left
- the weekly standing charge
- your weekly debt payment
- total debt left on the meter
- the price per unit of energy

To check the screens on your electricity meter press the blue button and watch the screens change. Your supplier can tell you what each screen shows.



Don't pay more than you need to for your gas and electricity. Checking your meters regularly will help you to stay on top of your energy use.

Gas meters can be more tricky to use. If your gas meter looks like the one below hold down button **A** until you hear a beep. Then keep pressing button **A** to change screens.

If you have a different type of meter or have trouble checking the screens call your energy supplier for help. They will also tell you what each screen shows.



Your energy supplier will also send you a statement each year. This tells you how much gas and electricity you have used and how much you have spent. Check these when they come to get an idea of your energy use.

8. The 'Warm Home Discount'

Many low-income households may qualify for the 'Warm Home Discount'. This is a £140 refund on your electricity bill paid in the winter. If you have a prepayment meter, your energy supplier will send you vouchers to top up. Apply directly to your supplier or call the *Energy Advice Team* on **0800 953 1221** or **0207 527 2121** for more information.

9. Take control of your money!

FIT MONEY supports Islington residents to become more confident with money. **FIT Money** offers workshops and one-to-one support to help residents to manage their money better and achieve a healthy bank balance. Call **FIT Money** on **020 7288 7680** to find out more.

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