

Frequently asked questions about energy bills

This information applies to customers who live in Queensland,¹ New South Wales, South Australia, Tasmania² and the Australian Capital Territory.³

How can I save money on energy?

You may be able to save money on energy by either switching to a different plan with the company who you purchase your electricity or gas from (your energy retailer) or by switching to a new retailer.

Information about how to check your energy bill for a message on whether you could be saving money with your retailer is available under the 'Shopping around' section [here](#) on the AER website.

There may also be a better deal available to you with another retailer. You can compare plans for free on the [Energy Made Easy website here](#).

Energy Made Easy

To compare all energy offers available to you, visit the Energy Made Easy website at <https://www.energymadeeasy.gov.au/>

Energy Made Easy is a free, trusted and independent website that can help you access the best energy contract offer for your circumstances.

Unlike some commercial switching websites, Energy Made Easy shows all generally available offers and does not take commissions from retailers.

What is a smart meter and how do I know if I have one?

There are basic meters and smart meters.

A **basic meter** (also called a legacy or accumulation meter) is an older style of meter that usually has an analogue display and requires a person to manually read it to know how much electricity you have used over a period of time. These meters are usually read every 3 months).

¹ This fact sheet applies to customers in Metropolitan Queensland only and does not apply to customers in Regional Queensland which is serviced by Ergon Energy.

² For customers in Tasmania, this fact sheet applies to electricity only and not gas.

³ Customers who live in Victoria should review the Essential Services Commission of Victoria's [website](#).

A **smart meter** is a new type of meter with a digital display that measures your electricity use every 5 minutes. A smart meter sends information about when and how much electricity you have used to the relevant metering party who sends it on to your retailer (the company you purchase energy from) on a frequent basis, usually once a day.

You can find out more information about smart meters [here](#) on the AER website.

There is only one type of meter for gas. These meters are manually read, usually every 3 months.

What are tariffs?

Tariffs are the way you get charged for your energy.

Your usage charges are calculated by your retailer based on how much energy you use and the tariffs that apply to you under your energy plan.

For electricity this is usually calculated and shown on your bill in cents per kWh (kilowatt-hours) or c/kWh.

For gas, this is usually calculated and shown on your bill in cents per MJ (Megajoules) or c/MJ.

What are the different types of tariffs?

The type of tariff you are charged will depend on the type of meter you have and the plan you are on.

The tariffs and charges you pay for should be listed on your bill. They are often found under the 'Understand your bill' section. If you're not sure, you can call your retailer and ask.

We've included information on common types of electricity tariffs in the table below.

Type of tariff	What it means
Flat rate tariff Also sometimes called: single rate, standard rate or anytime rate	You are charged the same price per kWh (kilowatt-hour) regardless of the time of day that you use energy.
Time of use tariff* <i>*Only relevant to customers with a smart meter</i>	<p>You are charged different prices per kWh (kilowatt-hour) for electricity you use at different times of the day.</p> <p>Time of use tariffs generally divide the day into 2 (peak and off-peak) or 3 periods (peak, off-peak and shoulder):</p> <p>1. Peak usage times are when demand from all consumers is generally higher. You are charged a higher price when you use electricity during peak usage times.</p> <p>2. Off-peak usage times are when demand from all consumers is generally lower. You are charged a lower price when you use electricity during off-peak usage times.</p>

Type of tariff	What it means
	<p>3. Shoulder usage times are when demand from all consumers is a little less than during peak usage times, or there may be a high level of solar generation. Shoulder rates usually apply in-between peak and off-peak usage times.</p> <p>Your retailer should list your peak, off-peak and shoulder (if applicable) usage times on your bill. Usage times may vary between retailers, so keep that in mind if you change retailers. You can ask your retailer if you aren't sure.</p>
<p>Demand charge*</p> <p><i>*Only relevant to customers with a smart meter</i></p>	<p>You may also be charged a demand charge on top of your usage charges. This may be added to a flat rate tariff or time of use tariff.</p> <p>Demand charges are based on the maximum amount of electricity you use during a specified demand period or over a specific demand threshold. Demand charges can take different forms, some common types include:</p> <p>1. Anytime demand: The demand charge is determined by the maximum amount of electricity you use in a particular period set by your retailer (this is commonly a 30-minute period or a day) throughout the entire billing period. For example, your retailer may take the largest 30-minute period of demand measured in kilowatts and multiply that by the demand charge rate and the number of days in the billing period.</p> <p>2. Peak demand: The demand charge is determined by the maximum amount of electricity you use during peak periods only. For example, this could be between 5pm and 8pm daily.</p> <p>Demand charges vary between retailers and plans, and should be listed on your bill. You can ask your retailer if you aren't sure.</p>
Solar feed-in tariff (also called solar exports)	<p>This will only apply if you have solar panels. This is the price you receive from your retailer for the solar electricity you generate and don't use or store. This will usually appear as a credit on your bill. You can ask your retailer if you aren't sure.</p>

What do I do if I'm unhappy with how my energy bill is being sent to me?

The AER's [Better Bills Guideline](#) creates binding, enforceable obligations on retailers in respect of their preparation and issuing of energy bills. The guideline requires retailers to include certain information, such as the amount due on the first page of a bill.

However, the Better Bills Guideline does not currently prescribe how retailers provide copies of bills to customers. We understand that some energy contracts (also called energy plans)

can have terms and conditions that bills are sent electronically and that some retailers may charge fees for providing paper bills.

If you would prefer to receive your bill in a particular way you should contact your retailer. If you are unhappy with the outcome of your discussion with your retailer, you may consider making a complaint to your Ombudsman. A list of Ombudsman contacts and further information about complaints is available [here](#) on the AER website.

Why did I receive an energy bill even though I was away from my home?

Most retailers have usage charges (based on your tariffs and the energy you use) and a daily supply fee. Daily supply fees are charged regardless of whether you use any energy or not. So, even if you are away from your home for a period of time, you will still receive an energy bill which charges a daily supply fee for each day captured by the bill.

You may also have appliances which continue to use power while you are away, such as fridges and freezers. Some appliances like televisions, microwaves and computers may also remain on standby and continue to use power unless you turn them off at the switch.

More information about the charges on your energy bill is available under the 'Energy bills' section [here](#) on the AER website.

Why is my latest energy bill more expensive?

There are a number of reasons why your latest bill may be more expensive than your previous bill.

We have included a list of things you can check in our fact sheet which is available under the 'Energy bills' section [here](#) on the AER website.

What do I do if I am having difficulty paying my energy bill?

If you are having difficulty paying your energy bill for any reason, contact your retailer.

Your retailer may be able to offer you a payment extension, payment plan or add you to their hardship program. Your retailer may also be able to waive any late payment or other fees.

Retailers are required to have a hardship policy which list the supports available to customers who are having difficulty paying their energy bills. You should be able to find this on your retailer's website or call them to request a free copy of their policy.

You are considered a **hardship customer** if you are a residential customer (not a business customer) who is identified (either by yourself or your retailer) as experiencing payment difficulties due to hardship.

Hardship can occur for a number of reasons, so if you have difficulty paying your bill for any reason you should contact your retailer as soon as possible.

More information on hardship is available under the 'Hardship and payment difficulties' section [here](#) on the AER website.

Is there support available if I am impacted by family violence?

Your retailer has support available if you are affected by family violence.

Family violence, also referred to as domestic violence or abuse, involves a pattern of behaviour intended to coerce, control or dominate someone in a domestic, intimate, family, or family-like relationship. Family violence may take many forms including physical, emotional, psychological, financial, economic, sexual, social, technological and spiritual abuse.

Retailers are required to have a family violence policy which list the supports available to customers affected by family violence. You should be able to find this on your retailer's website or call them to request a free copy of their policy.

More information on family violence support is available under the 'Family violence' section [here](#) on the AER website.

How do I know if I am part of an embedded network and what does that mean for my bill?

Sometimes apartment blocks, retirement villages and caravan parks (all referred to as 'sites') can be part of what is known as an 'embedded network'.

In embedded networks, the owner of the site sells energy to all of the people that live there. The owner of the site usually buys energy from a retailer and then on-sells the energy to the people that live there.

People who live in an embedded network are generally unable to switch or sign up to a new retailer. This is because of the way the network wiring is usually designed which means an energy retailer may not want to sell to an embedded network customer. Energy retailers are not obliged to supply you energy if you live in an embedded network. You can find more information about how you may be able to buy your energy directly from a retailer under the 'Embedded Networks' section [here](#) on the AER website.

More information on embedded networks is available [here](#) on the AER website.

What do I do if I have a complaint?

Information about who to contact if you have a complaint is available [here](#) on the AER website.

Contact us

Australian Energy Regulator (AER)	
Phone	1300 585 165 or +61 2 6243 1306 (International) Monday to Friday, 10am to 3pm AEST/AEDT
Website	www.aer.gov.au
Email	aer inquiry@ aer.gov.au
Post	GPO Box 3131 Canberra ACT 2601
First Nations Infoline	
Phone	1300 303 143 A dedicated phone service for Indigenous Australians seeking information about their consumer rights and consumer protection
Languages other than English	
Phone	13 14 50 and ask for the AER on 1300 585 165
Website	www.tisnational.gov.au
Hearing and speech assistance	
National Relay Service – TTY Users	
Phone	13 36 77 and ask for the AER on 1300 585 165
National Relay Service – Speak and Listen	
Phone	1300 555 727 and ask for the AER on 1300 585 165
National Relay Service – Internet Relay	
Website	Visit nrschat.nrscall.gov.au/nrs/internetrelay and ask for the AER on 1300 585 165

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