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8 Smart Ways to Cut Your Energy Bill Costs



Energy use sneaks up on you. One day, you think you're being responsible—flipping off lights, not running the AC excessively, turning the TV off after “Game of Thrones”—and the next day, you're standing slack-jawed by the mailbox, staring at a power bill that must have been racked up by gnomes living in your closet.

Pretty much everyone has accidentally gone overboard on energy use, but there's a lot you can do to keep your expenses in check. These eight easy, expert-approved tips promise to curb your usage and prevent the power-bill blues.

1. Practice routine maintenance

Owning a home means keeping up with the routine maintenance on dozens of appliances (yep, you no longer have the luxury of calling your landlord when your freezer goes kaput).

But it's not just about keeping stuff from breaking. If your appliances are in bad shape, they'll also run up your energy bills.

Frequently forgotten energy-suckers include air filters (change three or four times a year), the HVAC system (twice a year), and dryer vents and refrigerator coils (make sure they're clean and lint-free).

2. Get a smart thermostat

Keeping on top of your in-home temperature can be tedious. That's why we welcome the internet of things—at least when it comes to our thermostat.

Many people agree that Google's Nest is the best programmable thermostat because it learns from you, getting to know which temperatures you prefer and when.

Nest "knows how and when to save energy," says Alex Goldstein, CEO of Eligo Energy.

But if the high cost—about \$250—sends you askance, feel free to try any programmable thermostat to keep your costs down.

3. Look for drafty spots

Remember when your momma told you to close the door because you're "letting the cold air out" (or the warm air, as the case may be)? Like always, she was right—and it's not just the door you need to worry about.

"Drafts from often-overlooked holes waste energy," says Mark Tyrol, president of Battic Door Energy Conservation Products in Mansfield, MA. "They're the largest source of heating and cooling loss in the home."

In addition to old windows and doors, there are four major energy-sucking "holes" in a home, and you should seal them all off:

- Folding attic stairs: Add an insulated stair cover.
- Whole-house fan: Install a fan shutter seal.
- Fireplace: Use a fireplace plug to seal the damper.
- Clothes dryer: A dryer vent seal will reduce drafts.

4. Close the blinds

It might feel good to bask in the sun's rays from the comfort of your living room armchair, but consider the cost of that lounge session.

“Closing the blinds and drapes in hot summer months keeps the sun from beating in and causing excessive heat in your home,” says Elizabeth Dodson, co-founder of HomeZada, a home management app.

That excessive heat makes your air conditioner work overtime, pushing your energy bills sky-high in the warm months.

5. Turn down the water heater

Scalding hot showers feel fantastic. But you know what doesn't feel fantastic? A supercharged energy bill.

Keeping a tank of water at a high temperature requires significant energy, says Jonathan Deesing of Solar Power Authority in Salt Lake City.

If you knock down that temperature gauge by just 10 degrees, you can save 3% to 5% on your bills.

6. Swap in LEDs

Still holding out for the return of incandescent lighting? Don't hold your breath. LED bulbs use 15% less energy than an equivalent incandescent, meaning a whole-house upgrade can save you huge amounts on your energy bill.

“After HVAC, lighting is probably the No. 2 category for energy use for most residential customers,” Goldstein says. While the upfront cost might be high, the long-term savings are enormous.

7. Examine the appliances

You hopefully already have Energy Star–certified appliances, and if you don't, that's an easy fix to lower your expenses.

But even if they're green-certified, some appliances still might be accidentally sucking your wallet dry. Here are the “least green” appliances, and some simple household hacks to make them more efficient, according to Doug Rogers, president of appliance repair company Mr. Appliance:

- The dishwasher: Run an empty cycle with a citric acid-based cleaner to reduce soap and calcium buildup, which makes your dishwasher work harder than it has to.
- The washing machine: Stuff that sucker to the brim whenever possible, because washing machines “use about the same amount of energy for all load sizes.”
- The dryer: Always keep that lint filter clean to increase air circulation. Keep an eye on the outside exhaust—cleaning it will decrease the drying time, another great way to save energy.

- The refrigerator: Don't forget about your condenser coils. Dust, dirt, and food particles cling to these coils over time, reducing your fridge's efficiency. Also, make sure it's set between 36 and 38 degrees Fahrenheit.

8. Keep power strips accessible

You may not realize how much power your electronics draw, even when they're idle. Instead of plugging them directly into a wall or hiding the cords behind your massive entertainment center, Deesing recommends connecting electronics to more easily accessible power strips.

Of course, this trick works only if you remember to turn off the power when not in use. Group things you frequently use together on the same strip, like your TV, DVD player, and video game consoles—that way you won't accidentally shut off something you need.