

Cut Your Electric Bills Painlessly

A few simple tricks can save you a bundle

When Mom told you to turn out the lights, she was thinking of saving energy dollars, not rolling blackouts and bankrupt utility companies. Rarely have Mom's words of wisdom been as fitting as they are now and not just in California. Electricity rates are going up everywhere.

Besides switching off lights, there are several other painless methods to conserve energy and save money on your electric bills.

Plug ins

- Look for those electronic devices, especially those with digital time and date displays that are infrequently used such as alarm clocks, TVs and VCRs in a guest room and unplug them.
- Unplug devices used to recharge electronics/batteries when they're not being used.
- Transformers consume energy. Consider unplugging devices like calculators that are not in use.

Appliances

- Wait until you can fill up your dishwasher before running it. And if you have a heated-dry option, switch it off. Prop open the door a bit after the cycle to air dry your load.
- If you have an electric cook-top, turn the burners off a few minutes before the allotted cooking time. The heating element will stay hot long enough to finish the cooking without using more electricity.

Refrigerators

- Refrigerators use more power than any other appliance in the home and deserve special attention. Although rushing out to buy a new refrigerator may not be in your budget, it is important to know that new models are more efficient and use as little as half the electricity of older units.
- Full refrigerators run more efficiently than ones that are only partially full. So buy more food and save some energy.
- If you have two refrigerators, or an additional freezer, decide if the extra expense is really worth it. Cram as much as you can into your primary refrigerator or consider disposing of two older refrigerators and replacing them with one larger, newer and more efficient model.
- Make sure the refrigerator door seals are tight. Test them by closing the door over a piece of paper or a dollar bill so it is half in and half out of the refrigerator. If you can pull the paper or bill out easily, the latch may need adjustment or the seal may need replacing.
- Place food and liquids in airtight containers. Uncovered foods release moisture and make the compressor work harder.

- Move the refrigerator away from the wall and vacuum its condenser coils yearly unless you have a no-clean condenser model. Refrigerators will run for shorter periods with clean coils.
- Maintain a consistent temperature in the refrigerator and freezer. Recommended temperatures are 37 to 40F for the fresh food compartment of the refrigerator and 5F for the freezer section. If you have a separate freezer for long-term storage, it should be kept at 0F.

Lighting

- It's obvious, but true: Turn off lights that are not being used. Consider installing timers or photo cells on some lights. And instead of constantly nagging the kids, try occupancy sensors that turn on and off automatically when someone enters or leaves a room.
- Rather than brightly lighting an entire room, focus the light where you need it. For example, use fluorescent under-cabinet lighting for kitchen sinks and countertops
- Consider dimmer switches and three-way lamps. These provide low light levels when bright lights are not necessary.
- Use linear fluorescent and energy-efficient compact fluorescent lamps (CFLs) in fixtures throughout your home to provide high-quality and high-efficiency lighting. Fluorescent lamps are much more efficient than incandescent bulbs and last six to ten times longer. Although fluorescent and compact fluorescent lamps are more expensive than incandescent bulbs, they pay for themselves by saving energy over their lifetime.

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