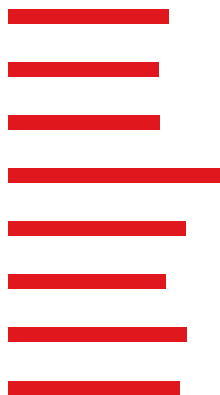




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Powerful savings

When washing clothes, try to use cold water

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Saving requires sacrifice, but sacrifice doesn't always have to be painful.

Even little changes in your routine can add up to significant savings on your home-energy bills. The following suggestions won't require a great deal of expense or effort, but they'll trim your energy use.



Reduce your consumption of natural gas and electricity with these tips. Illustration made June 15, 2008 in Akron, Ohio. (Phil Masturzo/Akron Beacon Journal)

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Here's an idea: Try incorporating just one or two a week into your family's routine, so the changes become habit. You may be surprised how easy it is to save.

- Adjust the thermostat

There's no point in keeping the house at an optimal temperature when no one's home. Adjusting the thermostat 10 to 15 percent for eight hours can cut as much as 10 percent a year off your heating and cooling bills, the Energy Department says. It recommends that when you're away and at night, set the temperature at 62 in winter and 78 in the summer.

Heat pumps are an exception. Unless yours has a programmable heat pump thermostat with adaptive recovery, the pump needs to stay at a constant setting.

You can make saving even easier by installing a programmable thermostat. Most cost less than \$100 — more if you hire someone to install it — and your investment will be paid back in a matter of months.

Want to lower the heat even more? Consider warming your bed with an electric mattress pad. It uses less power than an electric blanket.

- Humidify

Moisture makes air feel warmer, so use a whole-house humidifier, vaporizers or even pans of water set around the house to add humidity to the air in winter.

Don't overdo it, though. If moisture condenses on the windows, turn down the humidifier.

- Unplug

Even when they're turned off, many of the appliances and electronic items in our homes consume energy to power such things as display clocks and remote controls. And chargers for cell phones, power tools, laptop computers and the like continue to draw power, even when the items aren't connected. Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory calculates this phantom power drain accounts for 5 percent of the electricity we use in our homes.

Wherever possible, unplug these items when not in use. Or plug groups of electronics — say, the TV set and the DVD player — into power strips or surge protectors that can be switched off easily. Be sure not to exceed the electrical load the power strip is rated to handle.

- Replace light bulbs

Good compact fluorescent bulbs use 66 percent less energy and can last 10 times longer than incandescent light bulbs, the Ohio Consumers Counsel says. A single CFL bulb can save you \$30 or more over its lifetime.

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Look for the Energy Star label to make sure you're getting a good product.

- Cut hot water use

Heating water takes about 15 percent of your home energy dollars, the Alliance to Save Energy says. The less hot water you use, the less you have to generate.

Take showers instead of baths, and make them shorter. Wash only full loads of clothes or dishes. Launder in cold water whenever you can, and always rinse in cold. Save hot water for when it's needed — for bedding, towels, underwear and greasy stains.

You can also save on water-heating costs by turning down the tank's temperature setting. For most homes, 115 to 120 degrees is adequate. Check the the owner's manual for your dishwasher first, however, to make sure it doesn't require hotter water.

Keep the water heater running efficiently by draining a quart of water from the tank every three months. That removes sediment that can lower the heater's efficiency.

- More laundry tips

Use the fastest spin cycle to remove as much water from your wash load as you can. That way, you'll shorten the drying time.

Clean the lint screen after every dryer load. A clogged filter makes the clothes dryer work harder.

Dry towels and heavier cottons separately from lighter-weight clothes.

Don't overdry clothes. If your dryer has a moisture sensor, use it.

Before you iron, hang clothes in the bathroom while you're bathing or showering to steam out some of the wrinkles and reduce ironing time. Then iron a large load rather than doing the job piecemeal.

- Shop smart

When you're shopping for appliances, factor in two costs: the purchase price and the long-term operating cost. Information about the latter is on the yellow-and-black EnergyGuide label.

The Energy Star label makes it easy to find the most energy-efficient products. More than 50 types of products carry the designation, from windows to water coolers. While you may pay more upfront for an Energy Star product, the energy saved in the

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long run will probably more than make up the difference.

- Save in the kitchen

Instead of using an oven's preheat setting, set the oven to the desired temperature 10 minutes before you intend to use it.

Don't open the oven to peek. Every time you do, the temperature drops, and more gas or electricity is required to return it to the higher temperature. Use the oven window and light instead.

Cover pans and casserole dishes to reduce cooking time, and cut roasts or hams in half.

Match the size of the pan to the heating element on the stove. Less heat will be lost to the air.

Keep range-top reflectors clean so they can do their job, which is reflecting heat.

If you have an electric stove, turn off the burners a few minutes before cooking is completed. The heating element will stay hot long enough to finish the job. When you're baking, turn the oven off five to 10 minutes before baking time is up.

When possible, use crockery cookers, pressure cookers and microwave ovens instead of a full-size oven.

Skip the dishwasher's drying cycle. Let the dishes air dry instead.

Cover or wrap foods stored in the refrigerator. Uncovered foods release moisture, making the compressor work harder.

Clean your refrigerator coils yearly. Clean coils help the compressor cool faster and run less frequently, which reduces energy use and extends the life of your refrigerator.

Don't keep the fridge too cold. Recommended temperatures are 37 to 40 degrees for the refrigerator section and 5 degrees for the freezer section (or 0 degrees for a stand-alone freezer). To take your refrigerator's temperature, place an appliance thermometer in a glass of water and set it in the center of the refrigerated section. In the freezer, place a thermometer between frozen packages. In both cases, check the thermometer after 24 hours.

- Limit fireplace use

Sure, there's nothing like the ambience of a roaring fire, but it'll cost you. In a traditional wood- or gas-burning fireplace with a chimney, the fire feeds on the warm air in your home and exhausts it to the outside, requiring more air to be heated to

take its place. (Direct-vent and vent-free fireplaces operate differently and are more efficient.)

If you do burn a fire, close the glass fireplace doors to cut down on heat loss, and close doors leading to the room if you can. If the fireplace has dampers in the bottom of the firebox, open them, or open the nearest window about an inch to draw in colder outside air to feed the flames.

When the embers are completely cool, be sure to close the chimney damper so heated air doesn't continue to escape. Leaving the damper open is essentially like leaving a window open.

- Other ideas

Change your furnace filter monthly. Or, if it's a reusable filter, clean it. A dirty filter causes a furnace or central air conditioner to work longer to bring the house to the desired temperature. It also lets dirt get into the furnace, increasing wear and shortening the unit's life.

Activate the "sleep" feature on computers and other office equipment to automatically shift them to a low-energy mode after a period of nonuse. It's best to shut down the computer if you'll be gone for an extended period, but at least turn off the monitor.

Make sure furniture, drapes and other objects aren't blocking air flow through vents, baseboard heaters, radiators and cold-air returns. Vacuum those vents and heating elements periodically, because a buildup of dirt impedes air, too.

Lock the windows in winter. It tightens the seal, so less air leaks through.

Turn off exhaust fans when they've finished their work — no more than 20 minutes after you've finished cooking or bathing. Those fans are important for removing moisture, but they also suck heated or cooled air out of the house.

Take advantage of the sun's warmth in winter by opening window coverings on south-facing windows and keeping the glass clean. Close the coverings at night to keep warm air inside.

If you have central air conditioning, set the fan on automatic so it shuts off when the compressor does. Otherwise, as the air moves over the saturated coils, it can pick up water vapor, making the compressor work that much harder when it kicks back on.

Keep lamps and TV sets away from the thermostat. The heat they generate can trick the thermostat into thinking the room is warmer than it is, causing the air conditioner to work harder in summer and leaving your house uncomfortably cold in winter.

Bundle up in layers. A heavy sweater adds about 3.7 degrees of warmth. Two

lightweight sweaters are even better; they add about 5 degrees because the air between them serves as insulation.

Turn off decorative outdoor natural-gas lamps. One lamp burning year-round uses about one-eighth as much gas as it takes to heat an average home for a whole winter, the Energy Department says.

Insulate switches and outlets on exterior walls. These electrical boxes represent gaps in your home's insulation. You can stop the heat loss there by installing flexible foam gaskets behind the switch and outlet covers. Look for those seals with the weatherproofing supplies at home centers and hardware stores.

Get your heating system tuned up every September and your cooling system every April. A well-tuned furnace or air conditioner will operate more efficiently and last longer.

Sources: U.S. Department of Energy, the Alliance to Save Energy and spokesperson Ronnie Kweller, U.S. Department of Energy, Dominion East Ohio, Ohio Consumers Counsel, Mother Earth News, energy auditor Brian Smith of Energy Saving Comfort Systems Inc. and Harvey Sachs of the American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy.

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