

Central heating controls

Making the most of your heating system

Decent **central heating controls** will help you heat your home more efficiently and lead to lower energy bills. It's well worth learning how to use them all.

Timer or programmer

A timer or programmer allows you to control when your heating and hot water comes on and when it goes off. This is handy because it means you can programme your central heating to fit around the way your home is used. If you're not at home or are in bed asleep, then the heating doesn't need to be on.

The trick is to set your heating to come on half an hour before you get home or get up, and set it to switch off half an hour before you no longer need it. This is because

Heating controls jargon-buster ...

What the different settings mean

'Auto' or **'Twice'** means the heating goes on and off during the day at the times it has been programmed to do so.

'24hrs' or **'On'** means the heating stays on all the time.

'Off' means the heating will remain off all the time.

'All day' or **'Once'**, means the heating will switch on at the first **'on'** setting you have programmed and then remain on until the last **'off'** setting of the day.

'Boost' or **'+1hr'** switches the heating on for a one hour 'boost' of heat.

'Advance' moves the programmer to the next **'on'** or **'off'** setting in the daily cycle.



Make good use of your heating controls and you'll stay warm while spending less

an average home takes around 30 mins to heat up when the heating comes on and 30 mins to cool down when it goes off.

Say you get up at 7.30am, leave for work at 8.30am and get home at 6.00pm. It would make sense to set the heating to turn on at 7:00am, off at 8.00am and on again at 5.30pm. In the evenings you should set the heating to turn off half an hour before you go to bed.

Your programmer may also have the option of setting different on/off times at the weekend.

A well-insulated home warms up faster and cools down more slowly - meaning you can set the heating to come on later and turn off sooner, saving energy and money. Play with the timer to see what works best for your home.

Setting the **hot water** timing depends on the type of boiler you have. A combi boiler only heats up water when you turn on a hot tap, so you don't need to programme it.



If you turn your room thermostat down by 1°C, you'll barely notice the difference in temperature, but you could cut your heating bills by around £55 a year.

But if you have a hot water tank, this will probably need to be heated up every now and then during the day depending on how big and how well insulated your hot water tank is, and how much water your household uses. Try an hour in the morning and an hour in the evening - if you don't run out of hot water, that's enough!

Your hot water tank might have its own thermostat. If so, set it to around 60°C: hot enough to kill harmful bacteria like legionella, but not so hot that you're wasting energy. If you find 60°C too hot, mixer taps can help.



Room thermostat

A room thermostat is usually found in a hallway or sitting room. Its job is to monitor the temperature in the house and send a signal to the boiler telling it to switch off when the house is warm enough.

Thermostats are normally set between 18 and 21°C. This is a comfortable temperature for most people. Some people need to keep their home warmer than 21°C due to their age or health problems.

Some modern heating controls now combine the timer and the thermostat, allowing you to set different temperatures for different times of the day.



Photos: left: CSE, right: Highways Agency

Thermostatic radiator valves

Thermostatic Radiator Valves allow you to control the temperature of a room by regulating the flow of water through the radiator. If, for example, during the day you spend most of the time downstairs, you could set the TRVs on the downstairs radiators to medium or high, and leave the upstairs radiators on low.

It's not generally a good idea to turn radiators off completely for weeks or more, because very cold rooms can develop damp and mould. Instead, set the radiators in rooms you're not using to low, and close the doors so that the heat from your warm rooms doesn't travel there.

Smart controls

New apps for smartphones and tablets allow you to turn your heating and hot water on and off, or adjust the temperature, from wherever you are as long as you can connect to the internet.



There are advantages to being able to control your heating while you're out. For example, if your heating is scheduled to come on at 5.30pm and you're stuck on the train, you can use the app on your phone to tell the heating to come on later so you're not heating an empty house.

Some apps go further and use GPS technology to automatically increase the heating as you (or, more accurately, your phone) approach the home or decrease it when you leave. Family members or housemates can be added to your account. Some apps adjust the heating depending on the current weather forecast, so if there's a cold snap coming, your heating setting can be raised.

There are a number of products that offer smart heating controls and work on both iOS and Android, for example Hive (£199), Tado (£249 one-off cost or £6.99 per month), Climote (£299) and Nest Thermostat (£249). The Climote also works on SMS for non-smartphones. Only the Tado has GPS.



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The Centre for Sustainable Energy is a national charity that helps people change the way they think and act on energy.

Our Home Energy Team offers free advice on domestic energy use to householders in Bristol, Somerset, Wiltshire, South Gloucestershire and Dorset.



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