

Keep Warm Keep Well

Help with heating bills

Financial support to help pay for heating

Winter Fuel Payment

This winter the Government will be making payments to households with people aged 60 and over to help with the costs of keeping warm in winter.

The payments are:

- a Winter Fuel Payment of up to £200; and an additional £100 for people aged 80 and over.

The amount of money you get depends on your age and circumstances during the week of 19-25 September 2005.

You should qualify for a Winter Fuel Payment if you are aged 60 or over on or before 25 September 2005 and normally live in the United Kingdom. People aged 80 and over during the week of 19-25 September 2005 who are entitled to a Winter Fuel Payment will also get the extra payment of up to £100 automatically, without the need for a separate claim.

You should get your Winter Fuel Payment automatically, by the end of 2005, if you receive a State Pension or other social security benefit (excluding Housing Benefit, Council Tax Benefit, or Child Benefit) during the week of 19-25 September 2005. You should also be paid automatically if you have received a payment in a previous year and your circumstances have not changed. If you don't fall into these categories and you think you are eligible, then you should make a claim by 30 March 2006.

Winter Fuel Payments are made over a number of weeks from November 2005. So don't worry if you receive your payment at a different time to someone else in your household or other people that live near you.



Winter warmth advice line 8am to 8pm Monday to Friday

FREEPHONE 0800 085 7000

TEXTPHONE 0800 085 7857 Lines open October to March

If you're not sure whether or how to make a claim, or if you want advice, call the **Winter Fuel Payments Helpline 08459 15 15 15** (textphone 0845 601 5613). Have your National Insurance number ready when you call. The line is open Monday to Friday, 8.30am to 4.30pm. Charges are the same as for local calls. Or you can visit the website

www.thepensionservice.gov.uk/winterfuel

In winter 2000/2001, the Government extended Winter Fuel Payments to most people aged 60 and over. This means that people who did not previously get a Winter Fuel Payment may now be able to get a payment for past winters. This applies only for the winters of 1997/98, 1998/99 and 1999/2000. Call the Winter Fuel Payments Helpline or visit the website for more information.

Age-Related Payments 2005

This year, to help people with their Council Tax bills, the Government is making a payment of up to £200 to eligible households with someone who is aged 65 or over, normally lives in the United Kingdom during the week of 19-25 September 2005 and is not in receipt of the guarantee credit element of Pension Credit.

Households with someone aged 70 or over during the week 19-25 September 2005 who is not in receipt of the guarantee credit element of Pension Credit, will receive an Age-Related Payment of £50 to help meet their living expenses.

If you are eligible for either of these payments, in most cases it should be paid automatically with your Winter Fuel Payment.

If you think you are eligible and have not received your payment automatically by the end of 2005, you should call the **Winter Fuel Payments Helpline on 08459 15 15 15** or visit the website **www.thepensionservice.gov.uk/winterfuel**

Cold weather payments

Extra cold weather payments are made during periods of very cold weather to people who receive Income Support or income-based Jobseeker's Allowance which includes:

- a pensioner premium
- or a disability premium
- or who have a child under five
- or are receiving Pension Credit

Payments are made automatically. There is no need to claim. Personal savings are not taken into account when assessing entitlement.

A period of very cold weather is when the average daily temperature at a specified weather station has been recorded as, or is forecast to be, 0°C (32°F) or below over seven consecutive days.

Budget schemes

Most gas, electricity and fuel supply companies operate schemes which may make it easier for people to manage heating payments. These can include:

- weekly, fortnightly or monthly budget schemes
- savings stamps
- flexible payment schemes
- token and key meters

Local companies will be happy to provide information on the options. Payment schemes may enable fuel costs to be spread out evenly over the year. But some other payment methods may involve higher prices for fuel.

Other financial support

Although these benefits are not directly connected with payment for heating bills, they can make an important difference for households with low incomes. If you have been reluctant in the past to claim benefits, check now whether there are any to which you may be entitled.

WINTER WARMTH ADVICE LINE

8am to 8pm Monday to Friday

Pension Credit

Pension Credit is available to everyone aged 60 or over living in Great Britain, with an income of less than £109.45 a week for single people or £167.05 a week for couples. People over 65 who have savings or a second pension are likely to be entitled even if their income is considerably higher – up to about £151 for single people or about £221 for couples.

Some people who:

- need help with personal care because of an illness or disability; or
- are a carer; or
- have certain housing costs

can get Pension Credit even if their income is higher still.

So it's always worth applying.

More information is available in leaflet *PC1L Pension Credit* from your social security or Jobcentre Plus office or access The Pension Service website www.pensions.gov.uk/pensioncredit

To apply for Pension Credit call on **freephone 0800 99 1234** (If you have speech or hearing difficulties and use a textphone call **0800 169 0133**). An adviser will help fill in the application form with you over the phone and post it to you to check and sign.

Jobseeker's Allowance

The main benefit for people who are looking for work. It ceases at state Retirement Pension age.

Social Fund grants and loans

Grants and loans may be awarded from the Social Fund to help people with living costs they find hard to meet from their regular income. These payments are discretionary and are paid from a Fund which has a limited amount of money available. In most instances, they are restricted to people receiving Income Support or income-based Job Seeker's Allowance and who have little or no savings.

In brief, these are

- **Community care grants** to help vulnerable people to continue to live independently in the community, to resettle after leaving institutional or residential care, or ease exceptional pressures on families. Help may include costs of bedding, heaters, installation and reconnection charges.
- **Budgeting loans** to help with other important costs of £30 or over. They are interest-free and repayable.
- **Crisis loans** to help meet costs in an emergency or because of a disaster. These are interest-free and repayable.

Benefit Enquiry Line for people with disabilities

The Benefit Enquiry Line offers a confidential telephone service offering advice on benefits for people with disabilities, and their carers. **Freephone 0800 88 22 00**. Textphone 0800 24 33 55. The information given is advice only. It must not be taken as a decision on the subject of the enquiry.

Non-payment of bills – disconnection

In line with a code of practice among energy companies to protect older customers, all-pensioner householders will not be disconnected between 1 October and 31 March. Where there is any risk of disconnection because of non-payment of bills, it is essential that the gas and electricity companies are informed if the householders are pensioners.

Energy companies will usually be happy to make arrangements to settle outstanding amounts, perhaps by spreading out repayments over a longer period. For further information, contact your local gas or electricity supplier. Advice is also available from local Citizen's Advice Bureau, Age Concern or a Consumer Advice Centre.

Customers can also be included on their fuel supplier's Priority Service Register if they are of

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pensionable age or they have a disability or long-term ill health or are hearing or visually impaired. Inclusion on the register entitles them to a range of services including a free gas safety check, special controls and adapters and a unique password to ensure their security.

energywatch is the independent gas and electricity consumer watchdog. Consumers may contact them for advice and information on a range of energy supply issues, including energy efficiency. They can also offer help in resolving some complaints. For further information call 0845 906 0708 (local call rates apply).

If you are receiving Income Support or income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, it may be possible to clear an unpaid gas or electricity bill by having money taken off your regular benefit. The scheme is known as Fuel Direct; the local Social Security office will have details.

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