Managing your heating

Understanding and effectively managing the heating system in your accommodation can make a huge difference to you living comfortably and saving money on your energy bills. This guide will help you know what to do with your heating system and how to get it working most efficiently for you and your lifestyle.

Get to know your heating system

It is really important to familiarise yourself with your heating system as soon as you move into a property. There are so many different types and variations within these that it is likely to be different to use from the last place you lived.

The most common heating system in rented properties is central heating, where you have a gas-powered boiler and a thermostat, so this is the system we will focus on. You may also come across electric-powered heating systems, such as night storage heaters, electric boilers, underfloor heating or air source heat pumps.

Your central heating system – things to know:

- Where is the boiler? This is usually found in a kitchen or utility area.
- Where is the thermostat? This is usually found in a downstairs hallway or central living space.
- Do you have the manual for your heating system? If not, try asking your landlord or searching the boiler model online to find it.
- Have a look at how to set the thermostat/boiler, and if it has a timer option.

Be smart with your heat settings

Set the thermostat to between 18-21°C - this means that your boiler will heat up the air to this temperature and no more. The ideal temperature varies per room in the house, but this temperature range is safe for all rooms in the household. Every degree warmer than increase your energy use, and your bills, by 10%!

If you can, set up timers. Programme the heating to fit around your schedule – most people set it so that the heating comes on twice a day, in the morning and the evening. Ideally, you want the

heating to switch off when you are not in the house (e.g., at university or work), or lower when you are asleep.

Don't turn your heating completely off in winter – this is not recommended as it could lead to pipes freezing and becoming damaged. Inside temperatures below 15°C can lead to problems such as damp and condensation, and low temperatures can also negatively affect your health too.

A boiler heats up at a constant speed no matter what the thermostat or temperature is set to, so turning it up will not heat the house any faster. This is why it is really important to ensure that you have your system set to the right settings for your lifestyle.

Check your radiators

Once you have got your heating settings sorted, it is time to have a look at your radiators. Radiators tend to be big hollow metal panels that heat the air when hot water is pumped through them by your central heating system. The air is heated by convection – cold air is drawn up through the radiator gaps, becomes warm and rises, which then pushes more cold air down and back up through the radiator in a continuous cycle.

Adjust the valves

Most radiators will have their own adjustable valve which controls the flow of hot water into the radiator. The higher the number, the more heat can be emitted. Try to adjust the valves in each room according to how often they are used or how warm they are needed. For example, you might have your hallway radiator valve on low, but perhaps the living space high, if this is where most people in your home spend their time.

Check the radiator is working properly

You can do this by placing your hand near the radiator and checking for any cold spots (be careful not to burn yourself, and do not touch the radiator if it ambiently feels too hot). If there are any cold spots or the radiator is not heating up properly, there may be trapped air or another problem. Get in contact with your landlord or agent, and ask them to check the radiators to ensure they don’t need bleeding.

Keep radiators clear

The room will heat up faster if there is space for the air to circulate around the radiator. Avoid blocking radiators with furniture – if it is unavoidable, try to leave a gap between the radiator and the item. It is also advisable not to hang washing or other items directly over the radiator, as this will also block the air flow, and can also be a fire risk.

Reduce heat loss

If the radiator is on an external wall, heat may be being lost to the outside. You can counter this by putting some radiator reflectors between the radiator and the wall – this will reflect the heat back into the room.

Finally, if you get any problems with your heating system, make sure you report it to your landlord or agent to fix as a matter of urgency.

For more help on keeping warm and comfortable in our home, check out our 'Top tips for keeping warm' guide!