

Sixteen million people cut back on food and essentials during cost-of-living crisis

Sixteen million people have cut back on food and essentials during the cost-of-living crisis.

The figure is from the latest Opinions And Lifestyle Survey by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and follows dire forecasts from the Bank of England of a 15-month recession ahead.

The ONS survey showed that 89% of adults had seen the cost of living rise over the past month, with the cost of food, energy and fuel being the main factors.

Almost half of adults who pay energy bills said it was very or somewhat difficult to afford them.

And while 13% of people in England said they were using credit more than usual, this rose to 18% among those in the most deprived areas.

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The ONS surveyed almost 5,000 households with a response rate of 49.7%.

It comes just days after forecasts from energy consultancy firm Cornwall Insight that said the energy price cap would remain above £3,500 throughout most of next year.

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This would be after April's 54% increase, and what is forecast to be a further 70% increase in October, as the weather gets colder and people use more heating.

The charity National Energy Action predicted last month that 8.2 million UK households, or one in three, will be in fuel poverty should the average bill reach £3,250 per year.

Meanwhile, inflation is running at 9.4% – a level not seen for 40 years – and the Bank of England hiked rates to 1.75% on Thursday, increasing borrowing costs for millions of people.

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Laura Suter, head of personal finance at AJ Bell, said: “The figures show the difficult decisions people are already having to take, with more than a third of the nation having to cut back on food and essentials in an effort to make ends meet.

“The cost of living crunch means certain groups feel the pinch more than others. Disabled people are more likely to have to cut back on food and essentials, as are people living in deprived areas.

“Those renting are also more likely to have slashed their spending, with many citing rising housing costs as one of the key factors contributing to their rising living costs. However, as more homeowners come off their cheap fixed rate mortgages and roll on to pricier deals we’ll likely see them feel the crunch more too.”

She added: “Anyone who is already struggling with costs needs to be braced for more price rises this winter.

“The best thing anyone who is struggling now can do is to work out whether they can afford the next increase in energy bills or food prices rises and figure out a plan if they can’t.

“Energy companies, mortgage providers and banks are all

prepared for people to struggle with affordability, but it's much better to work out a plan before missing a payment, rather than burying your head in the sand and hoping for the best."

Tom Marsland, policy manager at disability equality charity Scope, said: "These stark findings show millions have already had to cut back, with disabled people hardest hit – even before October's terrifying energy price hikes have come into force.

"Scope has been inundated with calls from disabled people who have been forced to make dire cutbacks on personal care, hygiene, food and energy because of rampaging inflation.

"This is having a devastating impact on disabled people's lives, and the support from government just won't touch the side.

"Life costs more if you're disabled, which is why the government must get more financial support to disabled people now, to stop millions being pushed deeper into destitution."