How much does it cost to play? Our fabulous summer is coming to an end and soon we’ll be cooped up inside the house. The electric bill always goes up in the winter at my house. I usually blame it on the heater, but the cost has a healthy contribution from the electricity used on our toys.

Football season is back and my bunch stays glued to the screen on Saturday, Sunday and Monday nights and who knows what other nights. According to Golden Valley Electric Association, the electricity to run a 36-inch LCD television for six hours per day will cost you about $3.57 per month. That’s not too bad, but if you have a 50-inch plasma, the same six hours per day will cost you $11.34. As my family would say, it is cheap at any price. But many of us have larger televisions that burn through more electricity than our examples.

The least efficient TVs are the new high-definition TVs, followed by plasma sets and the old cathode ray televisions. The Natural Resource Defense Council recently did a study and found that a 40-inch HDTV uses more electricity than even a 22.5-cubic foot refrigerator. LCDs are the most efficient type of TV.

Those wonderful video games also come at a price. PlayStation for one hour per day will cost you 53 cents per month, but the Wii only figures in at 11 cents per month. So even the type of game console you have makes a difference. Remember, you must add in the cost of running the television or monitor to actually play the games.

How about the computer? A nice day surfing the net can’t cost much, can it? Running your laptop at four hours per day will cost you $1.26 in electricity. But a desktop with a larger monitor will cost you $22.68 a month. For energy efficiency, you might consider buying a newer laptop computer.

We often hear about the amount of electricity that is used when the computer is not even in use. A substantial amount of energy can be consumed just waiting for you to use it. Though there is a small surge in energy when the computer powers up, it is still far less
than leaving the computer running for long periods of time. The rule of thumb is that if your computer is not going to be used for more than 20 minutes shut off the monitor. If it isn’t going to be used in the next two hours, turn off the computer and the monitor. Sleep modes and power saver features that come on computers can greatly reduce energy consumption, so make sure these features are properly installed and enabled.

Televisions, computers, DVDs and cable boxes all draw power even when they are shut off, so it is a good idea to put all your electronics on a power strip or surge protector. When you aren’t using it, it is easy to flip the switch to keep electronics from pulling power.

Maybe it is time to crack out a book and read this winter. It’s good for the brain and the pocketbook. Oh yeah, that overhead light for an additional eight hours a day will cost you $3.07 per month.

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